

Work-Life Boundary Management for Working Women: An Examination of Age and Motherhood

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Mobile technology has irrevocably altered the barrier between work and personal time. Instead of thinking of the work-life boundary along one segment-integrate continuum, this research shows it is comprised of three dimensions: flexibility, home-boundary permeability, and work-boundary permeability. The purpose of this paper is to examine how professional women maintain boundaries between work and personal life, and whether those boundaries vary based upon age, motherhood, or age of youngest child. This paper uses responses from 189 women who were working full-time to examine flexibility and the permeability of the work and home boundary. Of the examined boundary types examined, women with no flexibility and a permeable home boundary reported the most work-family conflict. Furthermore, findings indicate that working mothers had a more permeable home boundary than non-parents. This research expands the traditional segmentation/integration boundary definition to consider three dimensions (flexibility, home permeability, and work permeability) to define how working women enact a work-life boundary and how those decisions influence work-family conflict, work satisfaction, and life satisfaction.

Keywords: boundary permeability, boundary spanning, role conflict, work-home boundary, work-family conflict, work-life boundary

INTRODUCTION

Individuals create physical, temporal (time), behavioral, and communicative barriers between their work and personal life (Kreiner *et al.*, 2009). These barriers aid individuals in organizing their environment (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000, Nippert-Eng, 1996). Prior to the internet-age, the boundary between work and personal time was clear for knowledge workers. The office setting and business hours was defined by the workplace and little spillover existed from one domain to the other (Roy, 2016). However, now these boundaries are frequently blurred. Individuals are physically in one domain, but behaviorally and/or psychologically in another domain (Kim and Hollensbe, 2018, Ashforth *et al.*, 2000, Nippert-Eng, 1996, Bhattacharyya *et al.*, 2018), as a result of mobile computing which has influenced the permeability of an individual's work and personal life (Roy, 2016, Hunter *et al.*, 2019). Personal communication and tasks, such as shopping, are commonly done during work (Adams *et al.*, 2005, Wajcman *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, it is easier for employees to work during personal time because of technology. Employees report using mobile devices to work from home, at social gatherings, in church, at restaurants, and while commuting

(Adisa *et al.*, 2017). Thus, the work-family interface has become an increase interest to scholars (Allen *et al.*, 2020, Ollier-Malaterre and Foucreault, 2017, Allen and Martin, 2017).

The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated these blurring boundaries with about 43% of the U.S. labor force working from home full-time (Wong, 2020, Crowne, 2020). It had a greater impact on women, where in more than half of the U.S. households, women spent more than 15 hours a week than men on domestic duties (Agovino, 2020). Moreover, early in the pandemic 11 million women's jobs disappeared (Chabeli, 2020, Crowne, 2020).

To understand these boundaries and their effect, one needs to examine some key constructs related to work-family issues. While not the focus of our study, one relevant construct in the nomological network of work-family issues, is work-life balance (WLB) which has recently been acknowledged as a unique construct related to work-family conflict (WFC) (Allen and Martin, 2017). It refers to the ability of the worker to meet commitments of both work and family simultaneously (Talukder, 2019, Hill *et al.*, 2001); thus, it addresses the compatibility of one's work and family roles (Allen and Martin, 2017). WFC focus on personal and work roles that are mutually incompatible or conflict (Hill *et al.*, 2010, Byron, 2005). To expand on WFC, it is often operationalized directionally with work interference with family (WIF), where the opposite direction is considered the family interference with work (FIW) (Allen and Martin, 2017, Byron, 2005).

Within the network of work-family issues, understanding how boundary management affects these variables is critical for professional women. Many women experience higher WFC (Rubino *et al.*, 2013) and women tend to be less satisfied with their work-life balance than men (Ezra and Deckman, 1996, Glavin *et al.*, 2011). While several studies have compared work-life conflict (Eagle *et al.*, 1998, Rubino *et al.*, 2013) and boundary management (Ferreira and Esteves, 2016, Lott, 2020, Schieman and Glavin, 2008, Tremblay and Genin, 2008) between men and women, here a deeper investigation of boundary is taken by focusing on professional women's boundary management and the resulting impact on three dimensions of WFC, work satisfaction, and life satisfaction. Since boundaries are likely to change over the course of a career, this study examines which boundaries and outcomes vary by age and parental responsibility.

BOUNDARY CHARACTERISTICS

Boundary Theory defines the separation of work and personal time as a continuum from segmented to integrated (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000, Kirchmeyer, 1995); where segmentation is firm separation between work and non-work domains and integration where boundaries are less strong (Wepfer *et al.*, 2018). Segmentors demarcate between work and family roles and integrators allow overlap of these roles. The findings on the outcomes of maintaining an integrated or separated boundary in previous studies were mixed (Bulger *et al.*, 2007, Kirchmeyer, 1995, Kossek *et al.*, 2012, Tremblay and Genin, 2008). McCloskey (2016) suggests mixed results occurred because the work-life boundary is more nuanced than the one-dimensional definition previously used; therefore, a more complex understanding of boundaries is warranted. Here, in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of work and family boundaries, boundary flexibility and permeability are addressed as separate constructs. Other researchers have studied these constructs as distinct, but related aspects of boundaries (Matthews and Barnes-Farrell, 2010); thus, this article adds to the literature by looking specifically at professional women and at the permeability bi-directionally.

Flexibility is the amount of control one has over when and where work is completed; thus, the ability to expand or contract a given domain boundary (Matthews and Barnes-Farrell, 2010, Clark, 2002, Hall and Richter, 1988). Flextime can be a formal program or an informal ability to change work hours when needed. Many working women, particularly those with young children, have used work flexibility (McCloskey *et al.*, 1998). Flexibility has been shown to be negatively related to various forms of WFC (Kattenbach *et al.*, 2010, Porter and Ayman, 2010), particularly for women (Carlson *et al.*, 2010). Additionally, it positively impacts work-life balance (Adisa *et al.*, 2017), is related to higher job satisfaction (McCloskey, 2016), was found to be related to a lower intention to quit (Porter and Ayman, 2010), and reduced depression (Kossek *et al.*, 2006).

Boundary permeability is the extent to which the obligations of one role are integrated into another role (Kim and Hollensbe, 2018, Ashforth *et al.*, 2000, Nippert-Eng, 1996, Bhattacharyya *et al.*, 2018). It allows one to be physically located in one domain while being active in another (Olson-Buchanan and Boswell, 2006). High permeability occurs when one integrates aspects of one domain into another (Kim and Hollensbe, 2018). Thus, the work boundary is permeable if personal tasks are allowed to intrude during work. Conversely, a home boundary is permeable if work tasks are allowed during personal time. Employees can enact different levels of permeability for the work and home boundary (McCloskey, 2016). There has been an increased permeability of the work-life boundary due to advances in communicate technology. Therefore, necessitating the need for permeability to be examined directionally because it can vary for the work and home boundary (Eagle *et al.*, 1998, Kasper *et al.*, 2005, Kossek and Lautsch, 2012).

While flexibility has generally been found to result in less WFC and stress (McCloskey, 2018), this result is not the case for permeability. Researchers have found negative outcomes when examining the permeability of both the work and home boundary. Higher WIF conflict was found when individuals allowed for home boundary permeability, meaning work tasks to be done during personal time (McCloskey, 2016, Adisa *et al.*, 2017, Kossek *et al.*, 2012, Olson-Buchanan and Boswell, 2006, Schieman and Glavin, 2008, Wepfer *et al.*, 2018). While less WIF and FIW conflict was found with individuals who had strong home and work boundaries (Hecht and Allen, 2009). Scholars also found a permeable work boundary contributed to higher FIW conflict (Bulger *et al.*, 2007, Hecht and Allen, 2009, Kim and Hollensbe, 2017, Kossek *et al.*, 2012). Understanding the effect of boundary management on WFC is critical because it contributes to lower organizational commitment, emotional exhaustion, and increased turnover intentions (Boles *et al.*, 1997, Grandey and Cropanzano, 1999, Houle *et al.*, 2012, Rasheed *et al.*, 2018, Rubino *et al.*, 2013).

Boundary Management and Age

Younger workers, who grew up with mobile technology, have a higher expectation for boundary flexibility (Beutell and Wittig-Berman, 2008). They may also be more receptive to permeability. In a 2018 survey on work-life balance, employees ages 18-25 reported the highest (37%) rates of working on their vacation to keep up with their bosses' expectations (Montañez, 2018). A less permeable work boundary has been found with older employees (Kim and Hollensbe, 2017) who view work-life interference as bothersome (Van Hooff *et al.*, 2006, Boswell and Olson-Buchanan, 2007). The first research question therefore considers the impact of age.

***Research Question 1.:** To what extent does age impact work-life boundary dimensions, WFC, work satisfaction, and life satisfaction of professional women?*

Boundary Management and Motherhood

Parenthood can change how employees maintain a work-life boundary. Parental responsibilities contribute to increased WFC (Higgins *et al.*, 1994) and the attrition of working women (McIntosh *et al.*, 2012, Shanmugam and Agarwal, 2019). A positive relationship was found between greater home demands, operationalized as number of children, and the permeability of the work boundary (Kim and Hollensbe, 2017). Employees with children were found to have higher time FIW conflict (Eagle *et al.*, 1998) and WIF conflict (Schieman and Glavin, 2008). Others found that women with young children were more likely to be work-home boundary separators (Araujo *et al.*, 2015, Tremblay and Genin, 2008). A comprehensive review of qualitative work-family research supports the increased demands and challenges faced by working mothers (Beigi and Shirmohammadi, 2017). While prior WFC research suggested that children's age is a significant variable to be considered (Eagle *et al.*, 1998, Netemeyer *et al.*, 1996, Tremblay and Genin, 2008), little research has examined its impact on work-life boundary issues. Therefore:

***Research Question 2a.:** To what extent to do enacted boundaries, WFC, work satisfaction, and life satisfaction differ for mothers verses non-mothers?*

Research Question 2b.: *Among mothers, to what extent does the age of the youngest child impact enacted boundaries, WFC, work satisfaction, and life satisfaction?*

Multi-Dimensional Boundary Configuration

Building on previous research by McCloskey’s (2016) that boundaries are defined by a combination of flexibility, home boundary permeability, and work boundary permeability, there are eight possible boundary combinations summarized in Table 1, which offer a more nuanced definition than the original integration/separation continuum. While prior research has shown professionals do employ all of these combinations and that they result in different outcomes (McCloskey, 2018), it has not been explored specifically for work professional women. Thus:

Research Question 3.: *Does WFC, work satisfaction, and life satisfaction vary based upon the enacted work-life boundary for professional women?*

**TABLE 1
COMBINATION OF WORK-LIFE BOUNDARY DIMENSIONS**

	Flexible	Home Permeable	Work Permeable	
A	Yes	Yes	Yes	This combination offers the most work-life integration. The timing of work can shift. For both work and home, demands from one role are allowed to intrude when in the other role.
B	Yes	Yes	No	The time when work is done may shift but the work boundary is firm. While work tasks may be done during personal time, personal tasks are not done during work time.
C	Yes	No	Yes	The time when work is done may shift but the home boundary is firm and work is not done during personal time. The work boundary is permeable so personal tasks may be done at work.
D	Yes	No	No	Although time may shift, work and personal roles are compartmentalized
E	No	Yes	Yes	Work and non-work times are set and rarely altered. Permeable boundaries for both work and home means that work activities are sometimes done at home and personal activities are sometimes done at work.
F	No	Yes	No	Work occurs during scheduled time. Work-life is protected with a firm border. While work may intrude on personal time, the opposite does not happen.
G	No	No	Yes	Work and non-work times are set and rarely altered. Home life is considered sacrosanct. While personal needs may be addressed during work time, work is not done during personal time.
H	No	No	No	At the far extreme, work and personal life are segmented and work and personal times are set. Work is not done during personal time and personal demands are not met during work time

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire was developed to assess boundary characteristics, WFC, job and life satisfaction, and demographic characteristics. Through LinkedIn, Facebook, and a time management blog, respondents were asked to complete the online questionnaire. Data collection occurred in 2018. Below is information on how each variable in the survey was assessed.

Measures

Boundary Flexibility

A five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) was used to assess boundary flexibility. The measure included five statements to measure an individual's control over whether work could be completed at different times or days. Some sample statements included 'Generally, I can change the hours I work' and 'I have flexibility regarding when I complete my work.' Higher value represents more boundary flexibility.

Boundary Permeability

Sixteen statements measured boundary permeability on a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). These statements assessed how strongly the individual separates work and personal life. The items were based on Hecht and Allen's (2009) (Hecht and Allen, 2009) work-nonwork boundary strength scales along with additional work-life balancing strategies literature (Cousins and Robey, 2015, Friedman and Westring, 2015, Golden and Geisler, 2007, Zheng *et al.*, 2015). Eight items focused on the boundary that protects personal life from work interference. Sample items include 'I often deal with work related issues during my non-work time' and 'I rarely turn off my mobile device so I can be available during work.' The remaining eight items addressed the boundary that protects work from personal/home life. Sample statements include 'My friends and family contact me when I am working' and 'I rarely deal with personal matters when I am working.' Higher scores represent a more permeable boundary.

Work-Family Conflict

Three types of WFC: time WFC, strain WIF conflict, and strain FIW conflict were measured and were developed by Kopelman, Greenhaus and Connolly (1983) (Kopelman *et al.*, 1983) using a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). When there are simultaneous, pressing demands from both work and family that must be addressed this is time-based WFC. Five items measured this dimension. Sample items included 'My work keeps me from spending the amount of time I would like to on family related activities' and 'My home life interferes with my work responsibilities, for example starting work on time or traveling.' When one is physically present in one role, yet distracted or consumed with needs of another then one is experiencing strain-based component of WFC. This dimension was examined with five items that addressed WIF conflict and seven items that addressed FIW conflict. Sample items included 'I am often preoccupied with my job when I am not working' and 'My family life is so demanding that I find myself thinking about family matters while working.'

Job Satisfaction

A three-item scale developed by Hackman and Oldham (1975) was used to measure job satisfaction (Hackman and Oldham, 1975). A five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) was used for each item then the items were averaged into a composite score. Higher scores indicate greater job satisfaction.

Life Satisfaction

Consistent with past research (Carlson *et al.*, 2010), job satisfaction items were used as the basis for the life satisfaction measures. Life satisfaction was assessed by a three-item scale on a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). Again, the items were averaged into a composite score. Higher scores indicate greater life satisfaction.

Sample

The sample of female professional knowledge workers was collected using an online survey and it is presumed that responses were from women residing in North America, predominantly in the U.S. Useable responses were received from 189 full-time working women. Table 2 summarizes their demographic characteristics. Most of the respondents are married (77%) with a spouse who also works full-time and were parents (68%).

TABLE 2
SUMMARY OF DEMOGRAPHICS

	Total Sample (n=189)
Age	
20-29 years old	27 (14%)
30-39 years old	61 (32%)
40-49 years old	57 (30%)
50-59 years old	34 (18%)
60-69+ years old	9 (5%)
Not reported	1 (1%)
Job Tenure	5.39 years (5.72 std dev)
Organizational Tenure	9.37 years (7.55 std dev)
Marital Status	
Married / domestic partner	146 (77%)
Not married/domestic partner	43 (23%)
Spouse Work Status (of 146)	
Not employed	15 (10%)
Part time <20 hours/week	3 (2%)
Part time >20 hours/week	6 (4%)
Full time	121 (83%)
Not reported	1 (1%)
Salary as a % of family income	
0-19%	2 (1%)
20-39%	21 (11%)
40-59%	68 (36%)
60-79%	35 (19%)
80-100%	63 (33%)
Parent	
Yes	128 (68%)
No	62 (32%)
Age of Youngest Child (or 128)	
Baby / Toddler / preschool	46 (36%)
Elementary school age	30 (24%)
Middle / High school age	23 (18%)
College age	13 (10%)
Grown / Independent	15 (12%)

RESULTS

The correlation table, presented in Table 3, shows interesting relationships among the study variables. Home boundary permeability positive correlation with strain WIF conflict. There are strong, negative correlations between both time WFC and strain WIF conflict and life satisfaction.

**TABLE 3
CORRELATIONS**

	Age	Mother	AYC	Flex	HBP	WBP	Time WFC	Strain FIWC	Strain WIFC	Life Sat	Work Sat
Age	1.00										
Mother	<u>0.26</u>	1.00									
AYC	<u>0.63</u>	<u>0.69</u>	1.00								
Flex	0.10	0.08	0.03	1.00							
HBP	0.07	<u>0.15</u>	0.11	<u>0.31</u>	1.00						
WBP	<u>-0.30</u>	-0.12	<u>-0.30</u>	0.01	0.10	1.00					
Time WFC	0.00	0.13	0.08	-0.09	<u>0.31</u>	<u>-0.20</u>	1.00				
Strain FIWC	-0.04	<u>0.25</u>	0.04	0.03	0.14	<u>0.17</u>	<u>0.31</u>	1.00			
Strain WIFC	0.01	0.14	0.04	0.10	<u>0.49</u>	<u>-0.15</u>	<u>0.67</u>	<u>0.33</u>	1.00		
Life Sat	-0.06	-0.08	-0.09	<u>0.15</u>	<u>0.25</u>	0.06	<u>-0.55</u>	<u>-0.18</u>	<u>-0.57</u>	1.00	
Work Sat	-0.02	0.04	-0.08	<u>0.31</u>	0.12	-0.03	<u>-0.31</u>	-0.03	-0.14	0.40	1.00

Correlation coefficients **significant < .001 are bold and underlined**; significant < .05 are underlined

AYC = Age of Youngest Child, HBP = Home Boundary Permeability, WBP = Work Boundary Permeability, Life Sat = Life Satisfaction, Work Sat = Work Satisfaction

Respondents were categorized as having boundary flexibility, home permeability, and work permeability based on whether their composite score was above or below the median response for each category. Two levels for three boundary characteristics results in eight possible work-life boundary combinations (Table 4).

**TABLE 4
DISTRIBUTION OF WOMEN BY WORK-LIFE BOUNDARY DIMENSIONS**

	Flexible	Home Permeable	Work Permeable	Number and Percentage of Sample (n=189)
A	Yes	Yes	Yes	28 (15%)
B	Yes	Yes	No	31 (16%)
C	Yes	No	Yes	26 (14%)
D	Yes	No	No	20 (11%)
E	No	Yes	Yes	23 (12%)
F	No	Yes	No	13 (7%)
G	No	No	Yes	30 (16%)
H	No	No	No	18 (10%)

ANOVA was used to examine whether there was a significant difference in the boundary characteristics, WFC, and satisfaction based on respondent's age bracket, parenthood, age of youngest child, and boundary configuration. When a significant difference was identified, the Tukey Range Test was used to perform multiple pair-wise combinations to identify statistically significant differences.

The first ANOVA (Table 5) examined whether the work-life boundaries and outcomes by age. Differences in the eight boundary management, conflict, and outcome variables were examined by five age

groups: 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59 and 60-69+. There were no differences by age group in most of the examined variables. The only two significant differences that occurred were work boundary permeability. Those ages 20-29 reporting significantly more than those 40-49 and 50-59 years old, and flexibility, with ages 40-49 reporting more than ages 20-29. Younger, presumably, less experienced professionals, indicated less flexibility than older, likely mid-career employees. Perhaps, consequently, experience more personal task interference while in the work role. Surprisingly, there was not a significant difference in home permeability nor the other variables. While prior research found levels of WFC diminish with age (Schieman and Glavin, 2008), this result was not evident here with professional women.

TABLE 5
COMPARISON OF BOUNDARY MEASURES AND OUTCOMES BY AGE

	1	2	3	4	5
	20-29 yo (n=27)	30-39 yo (n=61)	40-49 yo (n=57)	50-59 yo (n=34)	60-69+ yo (n=9)
Flexibility	3.00*** Significantly different than 3	3.40	3.53	3.22	3.51
HBP	2.91	3.17	3.18	3.22	3.01
WBP	3.70*** Significantly different than 3 & 4	3.45	3.22	3.02	3.26
2& 4 also sig different					
Time WFC	2.46	2.61	2.63	2.65	2.20
Strain FIWC	2.53	1.92	1.98	1.87	1.92
Strain WIFC	2.53	2.82	2.91	2.71	2.46
Work Sat	3.48	3.85	3.72	3.43	3.89
Life Sat	3.89	3.68	3.78	3.59	3.79

* <=.10 **<=.05 ***<=.01

The second ANOVA (Table 6) examined whether there are differences in boundary management and outcomes for parents and non-parents. While flexibility did not vary between working mothers and non-mothers, mothers did report maintaining a significantly more permeable home boundary and significantly less permeable work boundary. This finding is contrary to prior research which found a more permeable work boundary when greater home demands existed (Furtado *et al.*, 2016). The responding mothers were more likely than non-mothers to allow work to intrude during personal time, but less likely than non-mothers to let personal tasks intrude during work-time. This boundary configuration nevertheless did not negate the work-life balance challenge. Not surprisingly, and aligned with prior research (Kinnunen and Mauno, 1998, Schieman and Glavin, 2008), working mothers reported higher WFC along all three measured dimensions than non-parents. Mothers had a more permeable home boundary and the highest variant of WFC was strain WIF conflict. Non-parents report less strain WIF, but the difference is barely statistically significant. The most significant difference between parents and non-parents is strain FIW conflict. However, it did not manifest into lower work or life satisfaction.

**TABLE 6
COMPARISON OF BOUNDARY MEASURES AND OUTCOMES BY PARENTHOOD**

	p-value	Not a Parent (n=60)	Parent (n=128)
Flexibility	.298	3.27	3.39
Home Boundary Permeability	.043**	2.97	3.22
Work Boundary Permeability	.099*	3.44	3.27
Time WFC	.076*	2.44	2.65
Strain FIW Conflict	.001***	1.74	2.04
Strain WIF Conflict	.052*	2.62	2.84
Work Satisfaction	.605	3.64	3.71
Life Satisfaction	.258	3.83	3.69

* <=.10 **<=.05 ***<=.01

A mother's experience with a 2-year-old is very different than one with a 20-year-old. Thus, we looked for differences based on youngest child's age and divided this variable into 5 brackets while also comparing these groups to non-parents (See Table 7). There was no difference in flexibility or home boundary permeability. There are, however, differences in work boundary permeability. Women with grown children reported the lowest level of work boundary permeability.

**TABLE 7
COMPARISON OF BOUNDARY MEASURES AND OUTCOMES BY AGE OF YOUNGEST CHILD**

	0 No children (n=62)	1 Baby/Toddler /Preschool age (n=46)	2 Elementary school age (n=30)	3 MS/HS age (n=23)	4 College age (n=13)	5 Grown/Indep (n=15)
Flexibility	3.27	3.42	3.54	3.25	2.98	3.61
HPB	2.99	3.14	3.38	3.23	3.31	3.08
WPB	3.45	3.46	3.45	3.13	3.01	2.76*** Sign. Diff. from 0, 1 & 2
Time WFC	2.43	2.59	2.83	2.70	2.60	2.49
Strain FIWC	1.75*** Sign. Diff. from 1 & 2	2.16	2.20	1.84	1.77	1.91
Strain WIFC	2.63	2.75	3.11*** Sign. Differ. from 0 & 5	2.89	2.87	2.45
Work Sat	3.66	3.85	3.79	3.58	3.38	3.53
Life Sat	3.83	3.71	3.72	3.59	3.53	3.76

* <=.10 **<=.05 ***<=.01

Parental demands are expected to affect WFC. While there are no significant differences in the time dimension of WFC, both strain dimensions (FIW and WIF) conflict showed significant differences based on age of youngest child. While it might be expected that parents with young children and the associated

higher hands-on parenting demands to experience more FIW conflict than those with older children, this result was not found. There is not a significant difference in this dimension for parents, regardless of the age of the youngest child. A significant difference did occur for women who are not parents and those with younger children (baby through elementary school age). Non-parents reported significantly less FIW conflict. Also, significant difference existed in strain WIF dimension. Women raising children of elementary school age report more strain WIF conflict than women who do not have children and those with grown children.

Having identified that employees can have flexible boundaries without having permeable boundaries, and vice versa, it raises the question as to whether there are differences in the WFC and work and life satisfaction based on composite boundary type. The study variables were examined based on the eight work-life boundary configurations originally presented (Table 1). The results of this analysis are presented in Table 8 and summarized in Table 9.

TABLE 8
COMPARISON OF BOUNDARY MEASURES AND OUTCOMES BY BOUNDARY TYPE

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Flexibility	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Home Permeable	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Work Permeable	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Time WFC	2.59	2.74	2.22** Sig different from E & F	2.50	2.86	3.05	2.40	2.58
Strain FIW Conflict	1.99	1.96	1.96	1.81	2.27** Sig different than H	1.78	1.97	1.67
Strain WIF Conflict	2.91	2.86	2.57	2.61	3.04	3.52*** Sig different from C, D, G & H	2.47	2.48
Work Satisfaction	3.82	3.81	3.93	3.72	3.83	3.41	3.17	3.81
Life Satisfaction	3.57	3.77	3.93	3.90	3.51	3.26	3.83	3.88

* <=.10 **<=.05 ***<=.01

TABLE 9
SUMMARY OF DIFFERENCES BASED ON WORK-LIFE BOUNDARY DIMENSIONS

	Flexible	Home Permeable	Work Permeable	Significant Differences in Examined Variables
A	Yes	Yes	Yes	None
B	Yes	Yes	No	None
C	Yes	No	Yes	Low Time WFC Low Strain WIF Conflict
D	Yes	No	No	Low Strain WIF Conflict
E	No	Yes	Yes	High Time WFC High Strain FIW Conflict
F	No	Yes	No	High Time WFC High Strain WIF Conflict
G	No	No	Yes	Low Strain WIF Conflict
H	No	No	No	Low Strain FIW Conflict Low Strain WIF Conflict

The benefits of schedule flexibility are not as evident as expected. Prior research has found schedule flexibility to have a negative impact on WFC (Carlson *et al.*, 2010, McCloskey, 2018, Shanmugam and Agarwal, 2019), but those benefits are not reflected in this study. The only boundary configuration which resulted in reduced WFC was boundary configuration C, women who had flexibility, a non-permeable home boundary and a permeable work boundary. Through schedule flexibility and allowing personal responsibilities to be met while working, these women experienced significantly less time-based WFC than women with other boundary configurations.

Boundary types E and F report higher levels of WFC with both reporting high time-based WFC. Both of these boundary types have a permeable home boundary, resulting in significantly higher strain FIW (group E) and strain WIF (group F). This outcome is consistent with prior research (Desrochers *et al.*, 2005, Olson-Buchanan and Boswell, 2006) and underscores the importance of enacting boundaries to protect personal time from work interference.

Despite evidence that WFC results in negative work and life outcomes (Carlson *et al.*, 2010, Diaz *et al.*, 2012), there are no significant differences reported by boundary configuration on work or life satisfaction.

DISCUSSION

This research is timely because protecting the home boundary from work interference has been a popular sentiment in both research and the media. Here, three dimensions of the work-life boundary (flexibility, home boundary permeability, and work boundary permeability) for working women based on age of respondent, motherhood, and age of youngest child were examined. Eight possible boundary configurations result with these three dimensions. This research explored whether these boundary configurations resulted in different levels of WFC and satisfaction with work or life.

In response to RQ1, the findings indicate there are differences in work-life boundary configuration. There was no significant differences in WFC, work satisfaction, or life satisfaction. This finding about conflict was contrary to prior research which has found levels of WFC diminish with age (Schieman and Glavin, 2008). This contrary finding may be a result of better conflict management strategies or possibly more support mechanisms in place. Differences did exist among age groups for flexibility and work boundary permeability. Working women age 40-49 were the only age group with significantly more flexibility. Home boundary permeability did not vary by age; however, it is an important boundary characteristic for future research.

In response to the questions related to parenthood, RQ2a and RQ2b, there were no differences in boundary flexibility and level of flexibility did not vary based on motherhood or age of youngest child. Differences were found related to permeability. Mothers did report maintaining a significantly more permeable home boundary and significantly less permeable work boundary contrary to prior research (Furtado *et al.*, 2016). It is possible that working mothers have accepted a need for working more during home/personal time to maintain their work status. A recent study examining one's control over work schedule found that men, full-time working women without children, and part-time working mothers, were able to increase unpaid overtime work, while full-time working mothers could not, which created a divide between mothers and these other groups (Chung and van der Horst, 2020). It is possible that full-time working mothers feel more pressure to conduct work during family time.

Although parenthood appears to result in a more permeable home boundary, there was no significant difference in home permeability based on age of youngest child nor age of respondent. Given that a permeable home boundary was the common denominator in the boundary configuration with the highest strain WIF and FIW conflict, it should be examined further.

With a permeable work boundary, personal activities can interfere with work productivity. Non-parents and the younger age group (ages 20-29) reported having a more permeable work boundary, supporting conventional wisdom that this generation sees their time as being more interconnected. However, they do not maintain a permeable home boundary. Work permeability did not appear to cause concerns in WFC, work satisfaction or life satisfaction.

Women raising elementary school age children reported the highest levels of WFC and significantly more strain WIF conflict than women who do not have children and those with grown children. This pinnacle of WIF conflict could be a result of the burgeoning interests and independence of this age group. At this age, after school activities increase, as well as coordinating and driving responsibilities. Many children finish their school day substantially earlier than parents finish their workday and yet are too young to be home unattended. This time is when professional and parenting roles overlap. Prior to entering school, working parents either relied on spousal support, hired in-home care, or daycare/preschool for child care where the children's schedule can mimic the parents work schedule. This situation is not the case in the public-school system where the time of the school day is defined with no deference to working parents' schedules. Working mothers with elementary aged children were not maintaining a firm boundary during personal time and appear to pay the price with greater strain WIF conflict. Interestingly, despite these differences, there were not significant differences in the job or life satisfaction.

In response to RQ3, the findings here indicate that differences do not exist for work and life satisfaction, but do exist in some areas of WFC. Having a flexible, non-permeable home, and permeable work boundary (group C) resulted in significantly less time WFC, presumably because demands are either balanced with work demands or addressed during work time. While non-flexible and home boundary permeability, regardless of work permeability, resulted in more strain WFC. Those with a permeable work boundary (groups E) reported higher FIW conflict and a non-permeable work boundary (group F) reported significantly more WIF conflict. While boundaries seem to affect the level of WFC, none of the eight boundary configurations resulted in significantly different work or life satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

Technological advances allow professionals to work anytime and anywhere which creates work flexibility. However, technology has also weakened the barrier between work and personal life. This research explored whether women at different life stages maintained different work-life boundaries and impact on their WFC, life satisfaction, and work satisfaction.

Implications for Practice

This research did not indicate a no clear winner or loser in the work-life boundary configuration. While non-flexible and home boundary permeability (groups E and F) resulted in significantly more strain WFC, it did not result in significant differences in work or life satisfaction. Nonetheless, individuals and organizations need to be more conscious of the multidimensional ways work-life boundaries are enacted. Through telework initiatives, many employers have policies and guidelines concerning flexible work. Yet, boundary permeability has been given less attention. This issue should be addressed via individual initiatives and organizational and national policy (McCloskey, 2020).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This research is based on a sample of North American, predominantly United States, professional women. While related WFC research in other cultures (Kinnunen and Mauno, 1998, Powell and Craig, 2015, Rasheed *et al.*, 2018, Schieman and Glavin, 2008, Shanmugam and Agarwal, 2019) has been consistent with U.S.-based studies, it cannot be assumed. Additionally, while the focus here is on women, these areas could be studied with other categorizations of workers. A recent study found that that German fathers of young children and high work demands wanted less work hours over fathers who could balance the work-family interface with supervisor support (Abendroth and Pausch, 2018). Future research should examine the boundary configurations of professionals with a more diverse sample.

Furthermore, this research examined the type of boundary maintained at one point in time. While this method allowed for comparison among groups, it does not allow analysis for how boundary management changes over time. While we found older women (40-49 years old) had significantly more schedule flexibility than younger women (20-29 years old) and women with grown children had significantly less work boundary permeability than those with younger children, these results should not be interpreted as causality. Researchers should consider a longitudinal design to address this limitation.

While this research quantifies three dimensions of the enacted work-life boundary, it does not capture whether these are the desired boundaries. A woman may desire a different boundary configuration, but industry demands or organizational policies make that infeasible. When individuals experience congruence between their segmentation preference and their schedule, research indicates they experience less WFC (Chen *et al.*, 2009) and greater satisfaction (Rothbard *et al.*, 2005). Future research should address this limitation and examine boundary preferences and the extent of fit between preference and practice.

Moreover, this data was collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. While society has generally reopened, future research should examine enacted boundary configurations and the associated relationships post-pandemic to see if boundaries for professional women have changed.

While there are limitations to this study, it addresses an important area of inquiry because employees and organizations need to consider the impact to the blurring of work and personal boundaries created by technological advancements. Therefore, the configurations of flexibility and work/home permeability identified here should help direct future research.

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