



Has work replaced home as a haven? Re-examining Arlie Hochschild's *Time Bind* proposition with objective stress data



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ABSTRACT

Using innovative data with objective and subjective measures of stress collected from 122 employed men and women, this paper tests the thesis of the *Time Bind* by asking whether people report lower stress levels at work than at home. The study finds consistent support for the *Time Bind* hypothesis when examining objective stress data: when participants were at work they had lower values of the stress hormone cortisol than when they were at home. Two variables moderated this association – income and children at home – such that the work as haven effect was stronger for those with lower incomes and no children living at home. Participants also, however, consistently reported higher subjective stress levels on work days than on non-work days, which is in direct contrast to the *Time Bind* hypothesis. Although our overall findings support Hochschild's hypothesis that stress levels are lower at work, it appears that combining work and home increases people's subjective experience of daily stress.

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1. Introduction

In 1997's *The Time Bind*, Arlie Hochschild wrote that home life had become so stressful that people were going to work to escape the strains of home. She wrote, "Home had become work and work had become home." (Hochschild, 1997: 38). A study published around that time seemed, at least partially, to support this conclusion; this was particularly so for women, finding that women reported greater positive affect while at work whereas men reported more positive emotional states at home (Larson et al., 1994). Furthermore, both studies suggested that this reversal had occurred across socio-economic status (Hochschild, 1997; Larson et al., 1994). In contrast, although not directly testing the perception of stress, more recent research has suggested that neither men nor women are voluntarily increasing their work hours to escape the burdens of home (Maume and Bellas, 2001), that both men and women have higher satisfaction levels at home than at work (Kiecolt, 2003), that those more satisfied with work or less satisfied

with home do not work more hours or desire to do so (Brown and Booth, 2002), and that people's experience of the "time bind" are closely tied to their social class and occupational status (Jacobs and Gerson, 2004).

Yet, there has been, to our knowledge, no attempts to empirically test Hochschild's *Time Bind* proposition that work may be less stressful than home, "the work as haven" hypothesis. Testing the work as haven hypothesis is a within-person question that is optimally tested with data assessing (within the same individuals over time) whether stress levels differ as individuals go from home to work and back home again. Yet, between-person data is often employed to test the hypothesis; such data are usually assessed at a single time point and therefore address a different question (e.g., do people who work the most hours have, on average, the lowest levels of stress). In other words, the between-person data does not examine the dynamic process that is proposed to occur within individuals in the *Time Bind*, but rather compares averages across people.

Although work-life conflict has been a much researched area in recent years and can be a source of chronic stress (see Bass et al., 2009; Bellavia and Frone, 2005), there has been relatively little research comparing stress levels at work to stress levels at home. For example, Larson et al. (1994) looked at mood at home and at work, but did not include measures of stress. As the majority of families with children no longer have a stay-at-home mother taking care of the domestic sphere (Bianchi et al., 2006), home life may

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be an additional source of stress and continued work. In contrast, work provides important health benefits, particularly to women, and provides additional stimulation outside of the home (Frech and Damaske, 2012; Lewis, 2003; Ross and Mirowsky, 1995). Given that work-family conflict is experienced differently across socioeconomic status (SES), gender, marital status, and presence of children in the home (Frone et al., 1992; Jacobs and Gerson, 2004; Marshall and Barnett, 1992; Sarkisian and Gerstel, 2006; Schnittker, 2007), there may be significant variation in the experience of stress at home and at work across these groups.

This paper expands on prior literature and tests the work as haven hypothesis by asking whether people experience and report lower stress levels at work than at home. Moreover, it expands on Hochschild's research by testing the proposition that the within-person relationship between location (work versus home) and stress is moderated by between-person workplace characteristics (i.e., SES/occupational status and job satisfaction) and home life demographics (i.e., gender, marital status, and the presence of children at home). In the present study, stress was measured both subjectively (using self-reports) and objectively (using the stress hormone cortisol) six times each day over a period of three days, allowing us to capture stress patterns as a function of location (work vs home). Our objective measure of stress, salivary cortisol, becomes elevated as part of the biological stress response; thus, high cortisol levels are an objective indicative of greater stress (Smyth et al., 1998). Finally, in addition to stress, we report on subjective assessments of one's positive affect as these effects may be distinct from stress (cf. Larson et al., 1994). The use of both subjective and objective measures of stress repeatedly assessed while individuals are at home and at work allows for a more complete testing of the work as haven hypothesis.

2. Theoretical perspectives on work-life stress

Researchers have noted that there is a "career mystique mismatch" in which work organizations' policies, practices, and norms rarely accommodate workers' responsibilities and relationships outside of work (Moen et al., 2013: 82). The demanded devotion to paid work may crowd out time for other tasks, place strain on workers, and create work-life conflict (Moen et al., 2013). Conflict between work and family is a "chronic stressor" that is associated with negative physical and emotional health outcomes (Schieman et al., 2006: 243; Schieman et al., 2009; Bellavia and Frone, 2005). Researchers have examined the direction of the strain, demonstrating that work can negatively spill over into home and home can negatively spill over into work, although spillover from work to home appears more common and deleterious (Bellavia and Frone, 2005; Grzywacz and Marks, 2000). Despite the significant interest in the ways that work and family may conflict, there has been relatively little research that has compared stress levels at work to stress levels at home, particularly within the same individuals over time. This study aims to fill this gap using ecologically valid measurement approaches. Moreover, according to the stress process model, stressors do not exist in a social vacuum, but instead stem from social roles (such as worker or caregiver), which are linked in the social structure to different groups, according to characteristics such as gender, class, and race (Pearlin et al., 1981; Pearlin, 1999; Carr and Umberson, 2013). Therefore, in our consideration of stressors at work and at home, we also consider how these stressors may vary across the population.

2.1. Stress at work

Paid employment is often associated with better health and well-being (Ross and Mirowsky, 1995; Frech and Damaske, 2012;

Tausig, 1999), but there are a number of factors that may create stress at work, including the demands of the job, level of job control, long work hours, and variable job hours (Heaney et al., 1994; Schieman et al., 2009; Dewa et al., 2010; Schieman and Reid, 2009). A growing body of work-family research has focused on "the stress of higher status," in which those with high status jobs (often indicated by higher occupation levels, higher educations, and higher incomes) experience greater stress in both their work and family spheres (Schieman et al., 2009; Moen et al., 2013). In this paper, we focus on occupational status, education level, income, and job satisfaction as potential moderators of the stress experienced at work.

Occupational status, education level, and income may all provide clues about the level of stress on the job (see Frone et al., 1992; Marshall and Barnett, 1992), as they are all associated with higher-status positions. Importantly, these characteristics are tied to known moderators, such as the likelihood to overwork and job authority (see Bass et al., 2009). High status jobs may bring higher levels of strain (Schieman et al., 2009). Long hours often cause strain or stress on workers and, in a reverse of most common stressors, long hours and overwork are more frequently associated with professional or managerial workers (Schieman et al., 2009; Jacobs and Gerson, 2004). Increased job authority (found in jobs with higher occupational status) is associated with higher psychological stress, anger and some poorer physical health outcomes (Schieman and Reid, 2009).

Job satisfaction may also play an important role in the level of stress at work, as many factors that might impact job satisfaction (such as pressure at work, variable work hours, and schedule fit) may moderate stress at work. Both mothers and fathers reported greater stress when they faced more pressure at work (Crouter et al., 1999). Variable hours and unexpected overwork are related to higher stress (Dewa et al., 2010). Moreover, research suggests there are important differences between "good" and "bad" jobs that have implications for people's ability to maintain employment, to have job satisfaction, and to receive health benefits from work (Damaske, 2011; Frech and Damaske, 2012). In sum, there is substantial evidence that although work brings with it some very important and measurable gains for health, it can also be a source of stress and strain for workers.

2.2. Stress at home

As with the workplace, many factors also influence the degree to which the home environment is stressful. Although time at home is often associated with "leisure," both work and family have been deemed "greedy" institutions that are demanding of time (Coser, 1974). Time spent on household tasks may be a source of stress as housework is often perceived to be unenjoyable, monotonous, and unrewarding (Strasser, 2000). Part of the strain at home may come from changing gender norms; the majority of both parents now work in dual-parent households, but organizations continue to operate as if workers do not have family obligations, suggesting both men and women may struggle to fulfill household tasks (or even to agree upon whose responsibility tasks are) (Hochschild, 1997; Jacobs and Gerson, 2004). In this paper, we examine gender, marital status, and the presence of children as potential moderators.

There is a gendered dimension to time at home as obligations to perform household work and childrearing typically differ by gender (Jacobs and Gerson, 2004). Although men have increased their participation in household and childcare chores, women continue to spend many more hours on both (Bianchi et al., 2006). Moreover, women (and mothers in particular) are more likely to attend to the emotional needs of family members, a process by which home

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