Final Progress Report

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The overarching aim of the project is to examine the effects of interpersonal relationships in the workplace on health. Data were collected from 1,800 working adults in the United States in 2005; approximately 20 months later, all of these individuals were sought for a second interview. Successful interviews were achieved with approximately 71 percent of the sample. We applied the stress process framework as a guiding theoretical model for the project. It posits that exposure to stressful role conditions can harm emotional and physical functioning. This model helped organize our aims to 1) identify the structural sources and extent of interpersonal conflict in the workplace, 2) specify the origins of conflict in relation to social statuses, occupational status, and job conditions, 3) document the consequences of conflict for emotions and health, and 4) determine the mediating and moderating functions of the sense of mastery and supportive bonds in the workplace.

Although interpersonal relationships in general can be a source of positive and negative emotions, the inquiry focuses on those in the workplace because of the salience of work and its instrumental importance to other roles and well-being. The study centers on the types of conflict involving actions that are particularly evocative of anger such as violations of self, perceived injustice or inequity, goal impediments, and experienced aggression. Potential sources of conflict are proposed to emerge at three levels: social statuses, occupational status and conditions, and the structure of relations in different role-set domains. We focus on the worker's relationships with superordinates (managers or supervisors), subordinates (people managed or supervised), customers or clients (the recipients of service), and other peers (coworkers). By employing a wide lens to assess the entire role-set, we can investigate the potentially different sources and effects of conflict while accounting for the complexity of organizational and authority structures.

In addition to the central focus on interpersonal conflict, this project provides previously undocumented evidence about workplace stressors, the work-family interface, and their influence on health. These insights inform key guideposts for improving health and well-being of workers in diverse occupations and job sectors.

Highlights/Significant Findings.

(1) **"Job Authority and Interpersonal Conflict in the Workplace."** We examine the association between job authority and the exposure to interpersonal conflict in the workplace and potential gender and age contingencies in that association. We observe a positive association between authority and conflict, but that association is more positive among men and younger workers. Moreover, we rule out occupation, job sector, role-set multiplicity, and work conditions as alternative explanations for these associations. Our observations have implications for theoretical views about social status variations in job authority and its link to interpersonal stress in the workplace.

(2) "**Job Authority and Health: Unraveling the Competing Suppression and Explanatory Influences."** We examine the association between job authority and three health outcomes: physical symptoms, psychological distress, and anger. We also seek to explicate the intervening conditions that suppress and/or contribute to those associations. We observe that higher levels of interpersonal conflict in the workplace and work-to-home interference among those with more job authority suppress the negative association between authority and each health outcome. By contrast, the greater earnings and nonroutine work among those with higher job authority explain their lower levels of physical symptoms, distress, and anger. These observations elaborate on and refine the "stress of higher status" theoretical perspective and illuminate the paradox of the overall null association between job authority and health. Moreover, they draw much-needed attention to the ways that suppression effects can broaden our understanding of workplace inequality, stress processes, and multiple health outcomes.

(3) "**Relational Demography in the Workplace and Health: An Analysis of Gender and the Subordinate-Superordinate Role-Set."** We examine the effects of the gender composition of the superordinate–subordinate role-set on mental and physical health measures. Subordinates' and superordinates' genders are important determinants. Men who work in gender-mixed superordinate contexts (i.e., with one male and one female superior) report lower levels of distress and physical symptoms than men who work with one male superior. Women who work with one male superior report less distress and fewer physical symptoms compared to women who work with one female superior or in gender-mixed superordinate contexts. With a few exceptions, these observations generally hold net of occupation, job sector, and an array of work-related conditions. We discuss the implications of these findings in light of predictions derived from the similarity-attraction and role congruity theories. We also outline ways that theoretical development in relational demography can be refined by a more specific focus on the demographic characteristics—especially gender—of the superordinate–subordinate role-set.

(4) **"Interpersonal Context at Work and the Frequency, Appraisal, and Consequences of Boundary-Spanning Demands."** We examine the impact of workplace social support and interpersonal conflict on work-family conflict and

exposure to boundary-spanning demands—as indexed by the frequency that workers receive work-related contact outside of normal work hours. Social support in the workplace is associated negatively with work-to-family conflict, while interpersonal conflict at work is associated with higher levels of work-to-family conflict. Both supportive and conflictive work contexts are associated with more frequent exposure to boundary-spanning demands. However, workers in supportive contexts are more likely to *appraise* these demands as beneficial for accomplishing work tasks, and less likely to appraise them as disruptive to family roles. By contrast, workers in conflictive contexts are more likely to appraise demands as disruptive to family roles, and are less likely to appraise them as beneficial for paid work. Consequently, our findings underscore the resource and demands aspects of interpersonal work contexts and their implications for the work-family interface.

(5) **"When Work Interferes with Life: Work-Nonwork Interference and the Influence of Work-Related Demands and Resources."** We find that a high percentage of employed men and women report that work interferes with nonwork life. This research offers three main contributions: (1) we document the social distribution of work-nonwork interference across social statuses and dimensions of stratification; (2) we develop a conceptual framework that specifies the influence of a comprehensive set of work resources and demands on interference and their contributions to its social distribution; and (3) we advance a "stress of higher status" perspective to understand the paradoxical influence of some work conditions on work-nonwork interference. Findings generally support both the demands hypothesis and the stress of higher status hypothesis, with patterns from both factors contributing substantially to the social distribution of work-nonwork interference. These findings refine and elaborate the job demands-resources model with insights from border theory.

(6) **"Is there a Downside to Schedule Control for the Work-Family Interface?"** We examine the implications of schedule control for work-family role blurring and work-to-family conflict. Four main findings indicate that: (1) schedule control is associated with more frequent working at home and work-family multitasking activities; (2) the positive association between schedule control and multitasking *suppresses* the negative association between schedule control and work-to-family conflict; (3) the positive association between working at home and multitasking is weaker among individuals with greater schedule control; and (4) the positive association between work-family multitasking and work-to-family conflict is weaker among individuals with greater schedule control. Our findings reveal previously undocumented mediating, suppression, and moderating patterns in the ways that schedule control contributes to work-family role blurring and work-to-family conflict. We discuss the implications of these finding for views of schedule control as a "resource" and theories about the borders in the work-family interface.

(7) **"The Demands of Creative Work: Implications for the Stress in the Work-Family Interface."** 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.

(8) **"Boundary-Spanning Work Demands and their Consequences for Guilt and Psychological Distress."** We examine the associations between boundary-spanning work demands and self-reported feelings of guilt and distress. In doing so, we reveal gender differences in the emotional and mental health consequences of boundary-spanning work demands—as indexed by the frequency of receiving work-related contact outside of normal work hours. We observe that these demands are associated with more feelings of guilt and distress among women only. Additional analyses reveal that self-reported guilt accounts for the positive association between boundary-spanning work demands and distress among women. Controlling for guilt reduces the positive association between boundary-spanning work demands and distress to non-significance. Our findings underscore the importance of further research on emotions in work-family interface processes and psychological health.

(9) **"How Knowledge is Power: Explaining the Association between Education and the Sense of Control."** We show that education is associated positively with a sense of personal control. The well-educated have higher status occupations which include higher levels of schedule control, challenging, interesting and enriching work, greater economic rewards and security, and a higher level of trust. Collectively, these patterns contribute substantially to the association between education and sense of control. We also observe that demanding work has a negative effect on sense of control, but this emerges only after adjusting for other higher status work conditions that correspond with demands. Our observations inform the integration of theoretical perspectives to describe education's benefits for personal and social functioning.

(10) This grant award and the productivity that it has yielded has led to several additional achievements that will help to expand its discoveries. Recently, the PI received a major award to replicate and extend the CDC award. It is from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). *Demands and Resources in Work and Family Life and their Implications for Stress and Health among Canadians*, 2010 – 2014; $800,240 (Scott Schieman, PI). The PI has also received an Ontario Mental

Translation of Findings/Outcomes-Relevance-Impact

Overall, the findings from these research investigations provide more of a "consciousness raising" about specific dynamics and processes in the workplace. They are not meant to provide *specific* policy recommendations, although they do generally provide guidance about key stressors and their health consequences. Collectively, the findings offer novel insights about some of the most common and consequential stressors faced by American workers.

(1) Individuals who have greater job authority tend to encounter higher levels of interpersonal conflict in the workplace. This conflict is a common and powerful predictor of psychological distress and poorer health. The findings from the present study demonstrate the importance of recognizing and attempting to attenuate the link between higher status positions in the workplace and stressors. Ultimately, as commonplace "job hazards," these interpersonal problems detract from what would otherwise be the health benefits of higher status work conditions. Given what is known about the consequences of supervisors' functioning on subordinates' well-being, it is essential to address these problems directly in order to improve the overall well-being of workers and organizational functioning.

(2) Men in power positions tend to encounter more interpersonal conflict than similarly situated women. Likewise, younger supervisors experience more problems with other people in the workplace. These are two critical social statuses that should help employers and employees more effectively target prevention strategies to diminish the impact of this workplace hazard. Our findings underscore that it is critical to recognize that interpersonal conflict is not randomly distributed in the workplace irrespective of gender and age. For those workers with more power, they are patterned in important ways by these social statuses.

(3) Education is a key social status that contributes to personal resources, especially the sense of control. This is an essential personal resource that helps people avoid and/or minimize the effects of stressors. Importantly, our research has discovered that the well-educated tend to achieve higher status occupations which include higher levels of schedule control, challenging, interesting and enriching work, greater economic rewards and security, and a higher level of trust. Collectively, these patterns contribute substantially to the association between education and sense of control. The basic message and impact of these observations is straightforward: Education has clear, well-documented benefits for personal resources. Much of these benefits can be see in their link to higher quality work environments.

(4) Many employers wish to help their workers balance work and family. Some think that providing schedule control—that is, control over the start and end times of work—may help in that effort. We find some surprising patterns that go against that particular expectation. First, individuals with more schedule control tend to engage in more frequent work at home and work-family multitasking activities. That is, schedule control blurs the borders between work and family more often. This detracts from the otherwise flexible benefits that schedule control provides to help people minimize work-to-family conflict. Our findings reveal previously undocumented patterns in the ways that schedule control contributes to work-family role blurring and work-to-family conflict. These findings might be used to encourage a more open discussion between employers and employees about the meanings of flexibility and control in the workplace, especially in the context of competing family-related demands. Ultimately, they raise consciousness about the ways that we typically think about resources in the work-family interface. If these resources are contributing to the blurring of work and family life, their overall benefits might be undermined.

(5) Women feel more guilt when they bring work home or allow work-related matters to interfere with their family lives. Guilt is a core predictor of distress and anger—factors that can erode functioning in both work and family roles. Our findings provide insights about the ways that experiences in the work-family interface may generate negative emotions, especially those that involve moral standards about "they way things should be." Guilt is a classic emotion in this regard. The fact that women and men experience the impact of work-related demands differently in terms of guilt suggest that much more research and awareness is needed about gender norms of work-family balance, the borders that separate these domains, and the conditions that influence them.

(6) Collectively, our research has provided new insights about a theoretical perspective that we have developed: the stress of higher status. This simply involves the notion that not all stressors are experienced at the lower end of the occupational ladder; many higher status jobs—and higher status workplace conditions across all jobs—contain conditions that may function as stressors. One key example of this involves the higher levels of work-to-family conflict that we observe among the well-educated, professionals, and those with more income, authority, and decision-making latitude. In fact, many of the conditions in the workplace that most people would identify as resources seem to increase the frequency of exposure to inter-role strife. And, preliminary evidence suggests that these same "resources" do not uniformly buffer against the distress associated with higher demands. Taken together, these insights suggest that more research is needed to understand the ways that the stress of higher status might actually conceal health disparities. Were it not for higher levels of some stressors among those with more resources, the gap in health and well-being might be even greater.

Overview of Procedures

The data derive from telephone interviews with 1,800 adults in the 50 United States in 2005. Eligible participants are 18 years of age or older and participating in the paid labor force. Interviews were conducted in English, so participants had to be sufficiently fluent in order to complete the interview. We were able to successfully interview 71 percent of all respondents deemed eligible. The age range is 18 to 94, with a mean of 43; 59 percent are women; 72 percent are white. Roughly two years later we re-interviewed approximately 71 percent of the original sample and completed telephone interviews. Many of the same survey questions were repeated.

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. List-assisted RDD is widely accepted now by most social survey research organizations as a cost-effective alternative to the pure RDD methods. List-assisted RDD increases the probability of residential numbers while minimizing the biases often associated with non-traditional RDD techniques. The final sample was based on: 1) telephone numbers for residential households; 2) households agreeing to answer screening questions; 3) successfully screened households with one or more employed adults; and 4) eligible households with a subsampled adult who agreed to participate.

Inclusion of gender and minority study subjects. The sample comprised of roughly an equal number of men and women, and was fairly representative of the population in terms of minority subjects. Our aim was to obtain a representative sample of American workers aged 18 and older. Therefore, our procedures provided a sample that was broadly inclusive and representative.

Inclusion of Children. The sample contained adults aged 18 and older.

Publications

Book Chapters

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Mirowsky, John and Scott Schieman. 2008. "Gender, Age, and the Trajectories and Trends of Anxiety and Anger." Pp. 45–74 in *Advances in Life Course Research: Stress*

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*Schieman, Scott and Marisa Young. Forthcoming. "Economic Hardship and Family-to-Work Conflict: The Importance of Gender and Work Conditions." *Journal of Family and Economic Issues.*

*Glavin, Paul, Scott Schieman, and Sarah Reid. Forthcoming. "The Impact of Boundary-Spanning Work Demands on Negative Emotions and Psychological Well-Being." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior.*

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Schieman, Scott and Sarah Reid. 2008. "Job Authority and Interpersonal Conflict in the Workplace." *Work and Occupations* 35:296–326.

Manuscripts in "Revise and Resubmit" or "Under Review" Status
Glavin, Paul and Scott Schieman. "When Work Calls: The Antecedents, Appraisals, and Consequences of Receiving Work-Related Contact outside of Regular Work Hours." Revise and resubmission at *Work and Occupations*.

Schieman, Scott and Paul Glavin. "Education and Work-Family Conflict: Explanations, Contingencies, and Mental Health Consequences." Revise and resubmission at *Social Forces*.

Young, Marisa and Scott Schieman. "When Hard Times Take a Toll: The Influence of Economic Hardship and Family-to-Work Conflict on Health." Under review.