Unbinding Time: Alternate Work Schedules and Work-Life Balance

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ABSTRACT: We examine the possibility that alternate work schedules affect perceived work-life imbalance—the "time bind." The results show that alternate schedules per se do not "unbind" time. However, perceived control of work schedules increases work-life balance net of family and work characteristics. The most consistent family characteristic predicting imbalance is being a parent. The most consistent work characteristic predicting imbalance is hours worked. Once we control for hours worked, women and part-timers are shown to perceive more imbalance. Younger and better educated persons also perceive more work-life imbalance. However, they also report higher levels of schedule control and since schedule control improves work-life balance, it may be more important for unbinding time than schedule alternatives.

KEY WORDS: work-life balance; work schedules; control.

In this paper we examine the effects of alternate work schedules on perceived imbalance between the demands of work and the demands of family or personal life—the "time bind" (Hochschild, 1997). The time bind represents a complex phenomenon reflected in the simultaneous time and energy demands of family life and the workplace, both considered to be "greedy institutions" (Coser & Coser, 1974; Glass & Camarigg, 1992; Hochschild, 1997). A 'time bind" occurs

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when work and family/personal obligations are perceived to be out of balance due to lack of time to meet both. There is a subjective feeling that work and family/personal demands each make legitimate claims on an individual's time, but the individual cannot control the balance between them (Jacobs & Gerson, 1998).

There is evidence that workers are attempting to achieve work-life balance (i.e., unbinding time) by working nonstandard, "alternate" (non-Monday–Friday or non-day) shifts, and/or flexible job schedules or part-time (Becker & Moen, 1999; Staines & Pleck, 1986). Such alternate scheduling has increased dramatically, so that by the early 1990s only one out of three employed Americans age eighteen and above worked the "standard shift" (daytime, 35–40 hours a week, five days a week, Mondays through Fridays) (Presser, 1995). Although much of the increase in alternate schedules is due to the growth of part-time employment (Presser, 1986), even among full-time workers there is a substantial minority working alternate shifts—roughly two out of every five (Presser, 1995). Of these full-time workers, about 17 percent work nonstandard hours (e.g., evenings, nights, rotating shifts) while 34 percent work nonstandard days (e.g., weekends). These categories also overlap, so about 11 percent of full-time workers work both nonstandard hours and days. Beyond these numbers, but also overlapping with them, are the more than one in four full-time workers who work "flexible" schedules which allow for some choice as to the times they begin and end work (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1998). Moreover, a substantial number of those working nonstandard schedules—half of women and one-third of men—cite family-related reasons, such as child care, for doing so (Presser, 1995).

However, before singing the praises of alternate scheduling as "the" strategy for "unbinding" work-life time conflicts, it should be pointed out that most individuals working alternate schedules—half of women and two-thirds of men—do so because such a schedule is a requirement of their employer or the work itself (Presser, 1995). Also, research on the consequences of alternate work schedules for family life often find that working nonstandard shifts have significant negative effects on family life. In particular, Staines and Pleck (1983) found that working nonstandard shifts (i.e., nights, weekends, rotating) was associated with difficulties in scheduling family activities and with less time spent in family roles. They also found that working nonstandard shifts increased the level of family-work conflict and reduced the level of marital satisfaction, marital happiness and fam-

ily satisfaction. These results have been supported in much of the subsequent research literature (Kingston & Nock, 1985; Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998; White & Keith, 1990). Although part-time work may represent one way to "scale back" work commitment (Becker & Moen, 1999), the strategy is not without potential financial costs that, in turn, may have negative effects on balance (Glass & Camarigg, 1992).

On the other hand, before dismissing alternate scheduling as just another source of the "time bind," it must be pointed out that much of this same research has found that when workers have some control or choice over their schedules—"flexibility"—the effects on family or personal life are positive (Negrey, 1984). Staines and Pleck (1986) found that the ability to change their work schedules ('schedule flexibility") not only reduced, but often reversed, the negative effects of working nonstandard shifts on measures of quality of family life among married couples and single parents. Fast and Frederick (1996) found that "flextime" (workers' ability to choose when they started and ended their work day) reduced perceived "time stress" (whether time demands at work interfered with time spent with family and friends).

Taken altogether, these research results would seem to suggest that whether working alternate job schedules increases the time bind or unbinds time depends to some extent on the voluntary or involuntary nature of such scheduling. When alternate scheduling is voluntary, when the worker has some choice or control over the hours or days worked, such scheduling may be used to avoid or reduce work-life time imbalance. But when the scheduling is involuntary, and the worker has no choice as to time or days worked, working outside the standard shift may add to the imbalance of work-life demands.

The Time Bind and Work-Life Balance

The term "time bind" was coined by Hochschild (1997) to describe a number of situations in which workers prefer dividing their time between work and family or personal life in a manner different from the way it is currently divided but are unable or find it difficult to do so. Persons might desire either more (or less) work time, or more (or less) family and personal time but they are prevented from doing so by concurrent work and family/personal commitments and expectations.

We suggest that this time bind can be understood as a perceived imbalance between work and family/personal life. This conceptualiza-

tion allows for the possibility that individuals might prefer more or less work time and/or more or less family or personal time and all would perceive work-life imbalance. It also allows for the possibility that alternate work schedules might affect perceptions of work-life balance because they could be used to accommodate time preferences—to unbind time. The opposite of a time bind is a sense of work-life balance. And, although work-life imbalance probably entails more than mere time imbalance and the difficulty of achieving balance, in this study we will index the time bind as perceptions of imbalance between work and family or personal life and the perceived degree of conflict in achieving that balance. Our primary interest is to examine how work schedule variations affect this imbalance.

Evaluation of the consequences of alternate schedules and schedule control on work-life balance has been limited by several factors. Many of the prior studies of the effects of alternate schedules do not assess work-life balance per se, and even the ones that do are limited by a reliance on case studies or samples of workers in specific occupations where nonstandard schedules are common (e.g., nursing) or of types of workers who are thought to be most affected by nonstandard shifts (e.g., females, parents). Thus, results are not based on representative samples of the overall labor force, raising serious questions concerning their generalizability to all workers. Also, because of the narrow design of many of these studies, they do not control for other characteristics of jobs, workers or family conditions that could contribute to perceptions of work-life imbalance.

In this paper we address these issues by analyzing simultaneously the effects that times (hours, days) of work schedules and the degree to which workers control their schedules have on their perception of work-life balance. We do so by assessing whether these aspects of job schedules add to workers perceptions of the time bind above and beyond individual and family characteristics (e.g., gender, marital and parental status) and other work characteristics (occupation, industry) thought to be predictive of such perceptions. By using data from the 1992 National Study of the Changing Workforce we will be able to present results that are generally applicable to the overall U.S. labor force.

Data and Measures

Our analysis uses the 1992 survey from the *National Study of the Changing Workforce* conducted by the Families and Work Institute

(Galinsky, Bond, & Friedman, 1993). The data consist of responses to telephone interviews with a national probability sample of 3381 employed men and women ages 18 through 64. The data are weighted to reflect the characteristics of the U.S. labor force as estimated by the March 1992 Current Population Survey. Only data for wage and salaried employees are analyzed in this study. Self-employed individuals were eliminated from the analysis because they work significantly longer hours but also believe they have significantly more control over their work schedules. This suggests that processes leading to work-life imbalance among self-employed workers are likely to be considerably different than among wage and salaried workers. The resulting sample consists of responses from 2958 individuals.

Dependent Variable: Perceived Work-Life Balance

To assess *work-life balance*, we use two items: the extent to which workers feel successful in balancing work and personal or family life, and the amount of conflict they face in balancing work and family or personal life. The first item, perceived success balancing work and personal or family life, has five response categories ranging from (1) Not at all Successful to (5) Very Successful. The second item, how much conflict is faced in balancing work and family life, has five responses ranging from none at all (1) to quite a lot (5). The responses in the second item were reversed and the two items were summed to represent work-life balance. This composite operationalizes one sense of the "time bind" construct by assessing the extent to which the respondent feels unsuccessful balancing work and home or personal demands and reports conflict related to the attempt. Low scores on this measure suggest that respondents experience a time bind. Note that as a measure of work-life balance, the construct applies to all workers regardless of their marital or parental status. It is thus, broader than an indicator of work-*family* balance.

Independent Variables: Work Schedules

Five dummy variables were created to categorize work-shift schedules. *M–F, Day shift* (standard day shift) indicates workers who reported full-time regular Monday to Friday daytime work hours. All of our comparisons by shift are to the "standard" Monday to Friday, full day shift. This dummy variable is the omitted comparison category in regression analysis. *Non-Day shift* distinguishes workers reporting full-time regular evening or night shift schedules from those report-

ing any other form of work schedule. *Non-Monday–Friday shift* (Non-M–F) distinguishes workers who report working any full-time schedule that is other than Monday through Friday from respondents reporting any other form of work schedule. *Rotating shift* distinguishes workers who work any form of full-time rotating shift from those reporting any other work schedule. *Part-time* distinguishes workers reporting that their jobs are part-time from those who report having full-time jobs.[1] Note that actual work hours will also be measured as described below.

Schedule Control

We measured worker *schedule control* in two ways. First, we assessed *perceived* schedule control with an item that asks workers to evaluate, on a 5-point scale, their perceived level of schedule control: "Overall, how much control would you say you have in scheduling your work hours: none, very little, some, a lot, or complete flexibility?" We also measured the *availability of flexible schedule options* in the workplace. The indicator of flexible schedule options consists of four items that ask respondents whether specific flextime benefits are available to them. These benefits are: being able to choose starting and quitting times that you stick to every day; being able to take an extended lunch hour and then work later that day to make up the time; working additional hours on some days and taking the time off on other days; and doing some of your work at home on a regular basis. These four items were each scored (0) if the benefit was not available or (1) if the benefit was available and then the items were summed to create the flexible schedule options variable. The alpha reliability coefficient for this composite is 0.64.

Personal and Family Characteristics

The impact of work schedules on work-life balance may be affected by personal and family-related characteristics. The time bind is not simply a function of actual hours of work and family or personal time. A number of authors (Gutek, Searle & Klepa, 1991; Milkie & Peltola, 1999; Voydanoff, 1988) argue that men and women have different notions of the appropriate amounts of time to spend at work and for personal time and some researchers find that age, career stage and family structure all affect preferred hours for work and family/personal activities (Becker & Moen, 1999; Voydanoff, 1988). We measure respondent's *gender* (male = 0, female = 1), *race* (white = 0, non-

white = 1), *education* (in categories from less than high school to post BA), *current school attendance* (no = 0, yes = 1) and *age* (in years). Respondents' family status is measured as a combination of parental status, marital status and, where meaningful, spousal work status. We computed six dummy variables: *Single, No Children* (omitted category); *Married, No Children, Spouse Not Working; Married, No Children, Spouse Works; Single Parent; Married, Children, Spouse Not Working* and *Married, Children, Spouse Works*. These dummy variables permit estimation of the effect of each marital, parental and spouse employment combination on balance.

Work-Related Characteristics

While alternate work schedules are becoming more frequent, they are still more likely to occur in some industries and occupations than others. In addition, characteristics of each respondent's actual job are expected to affect the perception of work-life balance independently of work schedule. Workers were divided into five occupational categories each of which was dummy-coded; *Professional* indicates professional employment in legal, medical, teaching, engineering and like occupations (this is the omitted category in regression analyses); *Manager* occupations consist of managers/administrators, while *Tech/Sales/Clerical includes* technical positions, sales and clerical positions; *Blue Collar* occupations include craft, operator, skilled and manual labor and farm work and; *Service* work includes all service occupations. In addition to occupational categories, we also measure the industrial sector of employment. The industrial sector in which respondents work is measured by three dummy variables: *core* (manufacturing, transportation, finance, business and professional services, health services and construction); *state* (educational services, public administration); and *periphery* (retail trade, non-durable consumer manufacturing—e.g., food, tobacco, textiles, etc.—domestic and retail services and extractive industries) (omitted category). These categories reflect general degrees of labor and capital concentration and the presence or absence of internal labor markets across industries (Hodson, 1978). As such, industrial sector of employment may have effects on the presence of both scheduling alternatives and schedule control. We also measure the actual number of *hours worked* (per week) in the workers main job,[2] the *size* of the workplace (natural log of the number of employees at the workplace), and whether the employee is a labor *union member*.

The effects of work schedules on work-life balance are largely un-

known among the general population of workers. Prior studies have not used representative samples of workers or they have not measured both work and family characteristics. The existing literature suggests, however, that alternate schedules may both contribute to the experience of a time bind and to the unbinding of competing time demands. The analysis is designed to resolve these issues.

Analysis

Table 1 shows mean values and standard deviations in the first two columns for all measured variables. The means for work schedule categories show that only 57% of wage and salaried workers have a standard Monday to Friday, daytime shift. Thus, if alternate work schedules do have effects on work-life balance many workers are at risk for these effects. Ten percent of workers are on non-day schedules, 33% non-Monday to Friday schedules, 7% rotating schedules and 14% work part-time (the schedule variations do not add to 100% because a worker's schedule may contain more than one type of non-standard schedule feature). The mean number of flexible schedule options reported by workers is 1.42 and the mean for perceived schedule control is 2.7 on a 5-point scale.

Twenty-eight percent of all workers are unmarried, non-parents. Eight percent of working families consist of a married couple without children and a non-working spouse while 20% of working families consist of a married couple, without children but with a working spouse. Seven percent of workers are single parents. Finally, 7% of working families consist of a married couple, with children and a spouse who does not work and 27% of working families consist of a married couple, with children in which the spouse also works.

The mean for work-life balance is 6.79 on a scale of (2) low balance to (9) high balance. Although this suggests relatively high overall balance among respondents, the distributions of responses on the two components that make up the balance indicator are not perfectly correlated. While 90% report being "somewhat" or "very successful" at achieving balance, 50% report conflict in achieving this balance. This indicates that balance is often reached with a struggle—the essence of the time bind.

Table 1 also contains zero-order correlations between measured variables and the degree of successful work-life balance. For a substantial number of workers, the standard work schedule is related to

TABLE 1

Variable Means and Zero-Order Correlations with Work-Life Balance

Variable	Mean (N = 2958)	s.d.	r (work-life balance)
Work Schedules			
Regular M–F, day schedule	.57	.50	.068***
Non-Day schedule	.10	.30	.009
Non-Monday to Friday Schedule	.33	.47	−.065***
Rotating Schedule	.07	.25	−.029
Part-Time	.14	.35	−.004
Work Schedule Control			
Flexible Schedule Options	1.42	1.30	−.005
Perceived Control over Schedule	2.73	1.44	.031
Personal and Family Characteristics			
Age	38.40	11.09	.118***
Race (1 = Nonwhite)	.23	.42	.032
Sex (1 = Female)	.49	.50	.008
Less than High School	.09	.28	.047*
High School Graduate	.31	.46	.073***
Some College	.32	.47	−.014
BA	.16	.36	−.057**
Post BA	.13	.33	−.057**
Currently Attending School	.13	.34	−.075***
Single, No Children	.28	.45	.002
Married, No Children, Spouse Does Not Work	.08	.27	.030
Married, No Children, Spouse Works	.20	.40	.162***
Single Parent	.07	.26	−.058**
Married, Children, Spouse Does Not Work	.07	.26	−.045*
Married, Children, Spouse Works	.27	.44	−.104***
Work-related Characteristics			
Core Sector	.56	.50	−.030
State Sector	.18	.39	.034
Peripheral Sector	.23	.42	−.009
Hours of Work/Week	41.78	11.18	−.129***
Professional Occupation	.16	.36	−.048*
Managers	.15	.36	−.028
Tech/Sales/Clerical	.34	.48	.015
Services	.12	.33	.007
Blue Collar	.21	.41	.040*
Size of Organization	4.43	1.86	−.027
Member of a Labor Union	.17	.38	.056**
Work-Life Balance			
Work-Life Balance	6.79	1.44	

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

greater work-life balance ($r = .068$, $p < .001$). Non-Monday to Friday schedules are related to less balance ($r = -.065$, $p < .001$). Part-time work is not related to work-life balance. Overall, this pattern suggests that alternate schedules, per se, do not "unbind" time for workers. If anything, non-Monday to Friday schedules upset work-life balance. At the zero-order, neither the availability of flexible schedule options nor perceived control over work schedules are related to work-life balance ($r = -.005$, n.s., and $r = .031$, n.s., respectively).

Among the personal and family characteristics assessed, work-life balance increases with age, and is greater among those with less than a high school education and high school degrees, while it is lower among those with a B.A. or advanced college degree and those currently attending school. It is notable and somewhat surprising that gender is not correlated with work-life balance. Married, working couples without children report greater balance, while the presence of children—married or not—is significantly related to lower balance.

Among work characteristics, only four have significant bivariate correlations with balance. Blue Collar workers report greater balance, while professionals report less. Not surprisingly, the degree of balance declines sharply with increasing hours worked per week. Membership in a labor union is also associated with greater balance.

Altogether, these bivariate associations suggest the greater importance of personal and family characteristics in accounting for variations in the degrees of work-life balance. However, the heart of our analysis is simultaneously testing the effects of alternate schedules, family and work characteristics on work family balance. To do so we turn to multivariate analysis. Table 2 contains a set of OLS regression analyses that will allow us to assess the separate and combined effects of individual, family, work, work schedule and schedule control variables on work-life balance. Although our central concern is to understand the effects of work schedules and schedule control on work-life balance as a measure of the time bind, we will discuss results for individual, family and other work-related variables because these relationships are poorly understood. Table 2, thus, contains three *independent* equations. Equation 1 models individual and family effects and schedule on work-life balance. Equation 2 models work-related effects and schedule on balance. Equation 3 models individual, family and work effects and schedule on balance. All variables in each equation were entered simultaneously.

TABLE 2

Perceived Work-Life Balance Regressed on Personal, Family, Work, and Work Schedule Variables (standard errors in parenthesis)

Variables	Equation 1 (n = 2459)		Equation 2 (n = 2585)		Equation 3 (n = 2305)	
Individual and Family						
Age	.014***	(.003)			.013***	(.003)
Sex (1 = Female)	−.020	(.060)			−.155*	(.066)
Race (1 = Nonwhite)	.090	(.070)			.032	(.073)
HS Grad	.008	(.110)			−.166	(.116)
Some College	−.273*	(.111)			−.348**	(.120)
BA	−.466***	(.124)			−.492**	(.138)
Post BA	−.502***	(.128)			−.587**	(.147)
Currently in School	−.185*	(.086)			−.207*	.087)
Married, No Children, Spouse Does Not Work	.061	(.117)			.061	(.118)
Married, No Children, Spouse Works	.388***	(.086)			.319***	(.087)
Single Parent	−.377**	(.120)			−.360**	(.124)
Married, Children, Spouse Does Not Work	−.221	(.117)			−.238*	(.118)
Married, Children, Spouse Works	−.231**	(.078)			−.285***	(.080)
Work-Related						
Core			−.081	(.071)	−.044	(.076)
State			.122	(.095)	.202*	(.101)
Managers			.154	(.101)	.050	(.104)
Tech/Sales/Clerical			.177*	(.089)	.052	(.097)
Service			.135	(.113)	−.046	(.123)
Blue Collar			.302**	(.100)	.019	(.116)
Hours/Week			−.024***	(.003)	−.025***	(.003)
Size of Work Place			−.014	(.016)	−.019	(.016)
Union Member			.214**	(.077)	.159*	(.079)
Work Schedule						
Non-Day	.100	(.105)	.042	(.104)	.068	(.112)
Non-Monday–Friday	−.236***	(.067)	−.190**	(.067)	−.176*	(.070)
Rotating	−.065	(.125)	−.132	(.118)	−.088	(.134)
Part-Time	.103	(.097)	−.499***	(.107)	−.347**	(.117)
Perceived Schedule Control	.058*	(.023)	.075**	(.023)	.074**	(.024)
Flexible Schedule Options	−.024	(.026)	−.011	(.026)	−.010	(.027)
R^2 Work-Life Balance	.075		.043		.109	

Omitted Categories: Education = Less Than High School Graduation, Family Structure = Single Without Children, Economic Sector = Periphery, Occupation = Professional, Schedule = Standard, Monday-Friday Day Time. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

Individual and Family Effects

One argument about the origin of work-life imbalance centers on the importance of individual and family-related variables and work schedules as predictors of work-life balance. This perspective emphasizes the potential conflict between family obligations and the simple fact of time away from the family. The greedy institution of the family creates the time bind, and some family structures are thought to be greedier than others: dual earners and single working parents, for example. Equation 1 in Table 2 depicts an analysis of individual, family, and work schedule characteristics on work-life balance. Together, these variables explain 7.5 percent of the variation in perceived work-life balance. Specific regression coefficients for personal and family characteristics in Equation 1 are generally consistent with the bivariate correlations reported in Table 1. Older workers report greater balance between work and personal/family life, while balance declines with each level of schooling beyond high school (some college, BA and post BA degrees). Those currently attending school also report less balance. The presence or absence of children in the family continues to make significant differences in the degree of balance. Dual earner couples with no children report greater work-life balance, while both single and married parents report significantly lower balance scores compared to single, non-parents. Also as in the bivariate analysis, those working non-Monday-Friday work schedules report lower balance.

This regression also uncovers a "suppressor effect" (Cohen & Cohen, 1983), revealing that greater perceived schedule control is related to more balance. The absence (suppression) of a bivariate correlation between perceived control and balance can be accounted for by the fact that perceived control is greater among younger and more educated workers, groups that report lower balance (analysis not shown, available on request). Once we control for these relationships in multivariate analysis, a significant relationship between control and balance is revealed. Perceived control does not, however, mediate nor interact with any of the family and work schedule variables (analysis not shown; available on request). Thus, perceived control does not appear to be of greater importance to any particular configuration of family (e.g., dual earner parents) nor to any particular schedule. Rather, it appears to be important for all workers in increasing balance. In contrast to perceptions of control, actual flexible schedule options provided by employers do not affect balance.

Work-Related Effects

An alternate argument about the origins of work-life imbalance centers on work-related characteristics as the primary determinants of perceived imbalance. This perspective emphasizes the impact of labor market and occupational conditions as they create work-related time demands that force workers to sacrifice personal and family time. The greedy institution of work creates the time bind.

Equation 2 in Table 2 depicts the effects of work-related variables and work schedule patterns on perceived work-life balance. The equation explains 4.3 percent of the variation in perceived work-life balance. In this equation both blue collar and tech/sales/clerical workers report greater work-life balance than professionals (the omitted category). Union members also report greater balance, while working longer hours is related to less work-life balance. Those working non-Monday–Friday shifts again have less balance, as do those working part-time shifts. Perceived schedule control again increases work-life balance independently of schedule type while flexible schedule options again have no effect.

The significance of part-time jobs and perceived schedule control again indicates the presence of statistical suppression in their bivariate correlations with balance due to their relationships with other independent variables. In the case of perceived control, suppression is due to its negative correlation with blue collar work, a category with high balance; in the case of part-time jobs, suppression is due to its negative correlation with hours worked. In bivariate analysis, part and full-time workers report no difference in their perceived balance, but this is due to the significantly fewer hours worked by part-timers (26 to 44 hours for full-time) (analysis available on request). Once we control for differences in hours worked, part-time jobs are associated with less perceived balance.

Individual, Family, and Work-Related Effects

In Equation 3 we report the simultaneous effects of all personal, family, and work-related variables on work-life balance. This perspective suggests that work-life imbalance can best be understood in the context of both the family and work conditions. If both work and family are greedy institutions, then imbalance would be a function of competing demands that should be modeled using measured variables from both spheres of activity.

This equation explains 10.9 percent of the variance in work-life balance. The regression coefficients clearly point to the importance of personal and family characteristics in accounting for variance in perceived balance. As in equation 1, balance is greater among dual career couples without children and increases with age, while it is lower for all categories of parents (especially dual career), among those with some college, B.A. or higher degrees, and among those currently in school.

The one notable difference is that in equation 3 women report significantly less balance than men. While this result is consistent with literature on the time bind, it was absent from both equation 1 and the bivariate analysis; in those analyses men and women reported equal levels of balance. However, once again this can be explained by the suppression of a gender-balance relationship due to the strong correlations between both of these variables and hours worked. As in the case of part-time workers discussed above, the lack of overall (bivariate) gender differences in balance is largely due to the significantly fewer hours worked, on average, by women (39) than men (45). Only when we control for gender differences in hours worked do we reveal the lower levels of work-life balance among women.

Among work-related variables, employment in the state sector and union membership increase balance, while balance declines with the number of hours worked. This effect is substantial- the regression coefficient being more than eight times its standard error.

The pattern and size of work schedule effects remain nearly identical to those in equation 2. Working non-Monday-Friday schedules and part-time work continue to be associated with less balance. Likewise, the positive effect of perceived schedule control continues.

Discussion

The notion of a perceived time bind between work and family/personal life (an implied imbalance between them) stems from the changing nature of work and families—e.g., longer work hours, the proliferation of non-standard work schedules, flexible schedules, part-time work, increased participation of women in the labor force and the increasing number of "non-traditional" families. If work and family represent competing greedy institutions, then these changes might be expected to affect the competition. However, it is not yet clear whether these changes in work conditions and the labor force are en-

tirely responsible for the growing perceptions of Americans that their lives are rushed and time-stressed (Robinson & Godbey, 1999). In fact, there is reason to believe that some of these alternatives might be useful for managing the competing demands of work and family (Becker & Moen, 1999).

The purpose of this paper is to examine one particular aspect of this competition: the relationships between alternate work schedules and the perception of work-life imbalance. The availability of alternate work schedules suggests the possibility that the demands of work and home might be managed. Rather than competition, the idea that adults might manage their role commitments by explicitly structuring time devoted to each sphere of social activity implies one method to unbind time. The increasing prevalence of alternate work schedules creates the possibility that workers might select a work schedule that balances their work and personal obligations. If this is so, then we ought to observe a reduction in perceived work-life imbalance when alternate work schedules are voluntarily chosen by workers. If alternate schedules are set by employers, however, they don't necessarily help workers maintain balance. The availability of the National Study of the Changing Workforce allows us to investigate these questions using a representative sample of workers unlike many previous studies that have focused on specific workers (i.e., women, parents) or on particular work conditions (i.e., flextime). These data also allow us to consider work, individual, and family variables simultaneously, and to address several questions raised in the literature about their relationships to the time bind.

First, do alternate schedules unbind time? The answer is no. In comparison to standard Monday to Friday, daytime schedules, persons working non-day or rotating shifts report no effects of these shifts on their sense of work-life balance, while those working non-Monday–Friday shifts report less, not more, balance. Likewise, those working part-time also report greater work-life imbalance once we control for the differences in hours worked between full and part-time employees. This result raises questions about a widely held assumption that part-time work is a strategy for scaling back work time in order to create more family and personal time (Becker & Moen, 1999). While many workers may act on this assumption, the results appear to lead to less, not more balance. It may be that in attempting to balance one side of the work-life equation, part-time work leads to greater imbalance on the other side. Glass and Camarigg (1992), for example, have suggested that, while part-time work means less time

away from home, it also carries financial and career costs that might offset this advantage.

This also appears to be the case for women. Women are more likely than men to have part-time jobs and assume the major burden of household and family work. Overall (bivariate correlation), women report equal levels of balance to men, but this "equality" is achieved only by working significantly fewer hours. As with part-time workers, work-life balance for women has economic costs in the form of forgone wages and career advancement (e.g., the "mommy track"). But increasing hours to obtain wages and advancement would reduce balance. This is the essence of the time bind.

Does control over one's work schedule increase perceived work-life balance? No and yes. The availability of flexible schedule options—flexible hours, extended lunch breaks, etc.—has no effect on balance. Rather, what increases perceived balance is the perception of schedule control. What accounts for this disparity between what is available and what is perceived? On the one hand, not all workers having flextime benefits take advantage of them, so availability would not enhance their control, nor ultimately their perceived balance. On the other hand, many workers on inflexible, but regular, schedules may achieve balance through the regularity of these schedules—especially if that schedule is the standard Monday–Friday daytime one. Schedule regularity allows for planning as well as helping differentiate work from personal and family time. For example, this would account for the high levels of balance among state sector workers, who typically work this standard shift. It is also likely that there is some reverse causation going on in the relationship between perceived schedule control and perceived work-family balance in that by balancing work and family/personal demands one perceives greater control over their schedules. This would be similar to the relationship between overall personal well-being and overall personal control, or efficacy. Greater personal control leads to enhanced well-being, but individuals who have high levels of well-being perceive that they have greater control over their environment (Mirowsky & Ross, 1989; Ross & Sastry, 1999).

Beyond the effects of schedules, what do our results say about the relative effects of work and family on the time bind? Which of the "greedy institutions" is the greedier? Although individual and family characteristics explain more variance in work-life balance, the results do not mean that the family is greedier, just that there are greater variations in balance attributable to individual characteristics (age,

education, and gender) and family types. However, one family characteristic does consistently reduce balance: children. This is true for "traditional" single-earner parents, dual-career parents, and single parents.

In contrast, level of reported balance is only weakly related to differences in the kinds of work respondents do, but is strongly related to how many hours they spend doing it. This should be the least surprising of our results, and the most intuitively obvious; after all, time spent at work is time not spent with family.

Finally, what can these results say about the future of the time bind? Without longitudinal analysis we cannot be definitive, but these results are suggestive in that perceived work-life balance is lower among growing segments of the labor force. These include more educated, female and part-time workers, along with dual-career and single parents. Perceived balance is also lower among younger workers, but age in itself is not predictive of future trends, since this may be the effect of life-cycle and career stages—e.g., young children and low seniority—rather than indicative of generational changes. Again, only longitudinal analysis would enable us to disentangle the effects of age. On the other hand, many of these groups—younger, college educated, part-time—also report higher levels of perceived schedule control (data not shown, available on request). Since perceived control increases perceived balance, whatever enhances these perceptions will become increasingly important as a means of mitigating the time bind.

Notes

1. Part-time employment measured in hours varies considerably. In these data, hours for workers with part-time jobs vary between 10 and 80 hours with a mean value of 25 hours. While measuring part-time status may be related to the actual number of hours worked, the regression analysis controls for actual hours worked so that the effects of this schedule alternative can be evaluated apart from actual hours. Some analysts (Presser, 1986) consider part-time employment to be a form of alternate schedule, and some research suggests that part-time employment may be actively chosen as a strategy for reducing work-life imbalance (Becker & Moen, 1999). However, other studies suggest that part-time employment is not always voluntary (Tilly, 1996) and, hence may affect perceptions of work-life imbalance. For these reasons we characterize part-time employment as a form of alternate schedule.
2. We measure number of hours in the worker's main job even if the worker has additional jobs. This was done because consideration of total work

hours in multiple jobs would also entail computing alternate work schedule variables for additional jobs, combinations of work schedule variables with main and other jobs, job-specific industry and occupational variables, etc. While a fuller understanding of the effects of multiple jobs (and additional hours) is desirable, the complexity of actually conducting the required analysis is beyond the scope of this paper.

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