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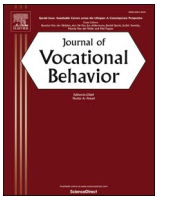

Boundary management preferences from a gender and cross-cultural perspective

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ABSTRACT

Although work is increasingly globalized and mediated by technology, little research has accumulated on the role of culture in shaping individuals' preferences regarding the segmentation or integration of their work and family roles. This study examines the relationships between gender egalitarianism (the extent a culture has a fluid understanding of gender roles and promotes gender equality), gender, and boundary management preferences across 27 countries/territories. Based on a sample of 9362 employees, we found that the pattern of the relationship between gender egalitarianism and boundary management depends on the direction of segmentation preferences. Individuals from more gender egalitarian societies reported lower preferences to segment family-from-work (i.e., protect the work role from the family role); however, gender egalitarianism was not directly associated with preferences to segment work-from-family. Moreover, gender was associated with both boundary management directions such that women preferred to segment family-from-work and work-from-family more so than did men. As theorized, we found gender egalitarianism moderated the relationship between gender and segmentation preferences such that women's desire to protect family from work was stronger in lower (vs. higher) gender egalitarianism cultures. Contrary to expectations, women reported a greater preference to protect work from family than men regardless of gender egalitarianism. Implications for boundary management theory and the cross-national work-family literature are discussed.

1. Introduction

Work-family scholarship has grown rapidly over the past several decades across the globe (Ollier-Malaterre & Foucreault, 2017; Poelmans et al., 2013; Shockley et al., 2017a). The globalization of work, coupled with technology, has contributed to a "round-the-clock" work culture in which workers are expected to be available 24/7, blurring the boundaries between work and family (Miller, 2015). In this context, guided by boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000; Kreiner, 2006; Nippert-Eng, 1996), understanding how individuals navigate the boundaries between their work and family roles has become a critical and growing focal topic within the work-family literature (Allen et al., 2014; Allen et al., 2021; Kossek et al., 2021; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2019).

One key tenet of boundary theory is that individuals vary in the degree that they prefer to segment or integrate their work and family roles. That is, some individuals prefer to keep their work and family roles distinct and separate from one another while others prefer to blend or merge the two roles. These preferences are thought to reside on opposite ends of a single continuum. In addition, preferences may be asymmetrical in that the extent that individuals prefer to segment the work role from the family role may differ from the extent that individuals prefer to segment the family role from the work role (Methot & LePine, 2016; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). Thus, researchers have begun to examine both directions of boundary management preferences.

Although work and family boundary management preferences are thought to be a product of one's social and cultural environment (Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996; Rothbard & Ollier-Malaterre, 2016), tests of boundary theory have thus far primarily focused on the outcomes associated with preferences such as work-family conflict rather than on what predicts preferences (Allen et al., 2015). Moreover, boundary management preferences research has been conducted within a narrow range of Western cultural contexts (Ollier-Malaterre & Foucreault, 2017). This narrow focus has hampered the development of boundary management theory. For boundary management theory to continue to advance and yield new insights into multiple role management, tests of theoretical predictors across a wide variety of contexts are needed.

In the current research we advance boundary theory through an investigation of theoretical predictors of boundary management preferences via a cross-cultural approach. In doing so, we widen the lens through which boundary management preferences are typically examined. Boundary theory has served as a broad guide for prior cross-national work investigating work-family outcomes such as conflict (e.g., Allen, French, et al., 2020; Ollo-López & Goñi-Legaz, 2017), but its tenets such as boundary management role preferences have yet to be directly tested cross-culturally despite calls for doing so (Allen, 2013; Bulger & Hoffman, 2018). Examination of boundary management preferences from a cross-cultural perspective provides a contextually rich vehicle for understanding variation in preferences and for identifying factors that contribute to that variation. As stated by Ashforth et al. (2000), cultural backgrounds serve as important source of self-concept and role dynamics.

Our research has three key objectives and contributes to the literature in several ways. First, we investigate the relationship between gender egalitarianism and boundary management preferences. Gender egalitarianism (GE) refers to societal beliefs about prescribed versus fluid roles for men and women and the extent the societal culture promotes gender equality (Emrich et al., 2004). We focus on GE as our cultural variable of interest because the meanings associated with work and family roles, and how they are expected to connect to one another, are derived from societal norms about gender (for instance, the traditional male breadwinner and female homemaker model; Kanter, 1977; Kossek et al., 2021). By examining the relationship between GE and boundary management preferences, we shed light on the complex interplay between work and family roles and the ways in which societal culture may contribute

to preferences that individuals develop about those roles. Given differences across countries with regard to the extent that they establish and reinforce rigid gender roles (Hofstede et al., 2010; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998), an investigation of GE in relation to boundary management preferences will further advance theory as well as the cross-national comparative work-family literature.

Second, we examine the role of gender as a predictor of boundary management preferences. Gender is an important focal variable because it is deeply intertwined with work-family roles and with GE (Shockley et al., 2017b). Men and women may feel pressure to conform to gender-prescribed roles that assign work to men and assign family and home responsibility to women (Gutek et al., 1991). That is, women may feel that they have to protect their family role while men may feel they have to protect their work role (Nippert-Eng, 1996; Wright et al., 2015). Indeed, women are thought to construct stronger boundaries around their family role while men construct stronger boundaries around their work role (Shockley et al., 2017b). Yet research to date has yielded inconclusive findings. Because the existing literature is based primarily on participants from Western contexts, a more heterogeneous data set that spans a wide array of socio-cultural contexts is needed to provide a robust test of gender differences. Moreover, by investigating both directions of boundary management preferences, we provide a more theoretically sound test of gender differences.

Third, we examine the interaction between GE and gender, theorizing that GE acts as a moderator. While societal values and gender may both predict boundary management preferences, it is also important to understand if the two interact with one another. Because men and women may respond differently in higher versus lower GE cultures, we investigate if gender-related preferences to segment roles are most likely to emerge in lower GE cultures relative to higher GE cultures where gender role expectations are more fluid. By examining the interplay between societal norms and gender as an individual difference, we can better understand what factors help shape boundary management preferences, helping to advance boundary management theory.

In sum, we advance work-family cross-cultural research by investigating boundary management preferences, an aspect of the work-family interface that is especially relevant in today's 24/7 global economy and in the era of increased remote work (Allen et al., 2014; Allen et al., 2021; Kossek et al., 2021; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2019). We do so based on data from over 9000 participants across 27 countries/territories. We assess GE directly from participants rather than rely on pre-existing country scores. This is important as it cannot be assumed that cultural scores are homogenous within countries nor that they are stable across time (Taris et al., 2011). Moreover, country level scores of GE such as those in the GLOBE study have been based on middle managers and thus may not generalize to other types of employees (House et al., 2004). In addition, our direct assessment of GE enables the evaluation of measurement invariance, providing greater confidence that our comparative findings are meaningful (Davidov et al., 2018).

1.1. Boundary management theory and preferences overview

Boundary management refers to the ways in which individuals create, maintain, or change boundaries in an effort to navigate the world around them, including their work and family roles (Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996). Role boundaries can vary on a continuum from highly segmented (e.g., roles are kept distinct with separate locations and times of enactment) to highly integrated (e.g., multiple roles occur within the same location and time) (Ashforth et al., 2000). Both individuals' boundary preferences and factors in their environment (e.g., boundary supplies; degree of control; interactions with role partners, Kreiner, 2006; Mellner et al., 2021; Trefalt, 2013; Wepfer et al., 2018) are key predictors of role boundaries. Specifically, boundary theory posits that individuals are more likely to attain positive work-family outcomes when there is alignment between what their environment provides and their preferences (Chen et al., 2009; Cho, 2020).

1.2. Boundary management preferences

To date, within the work-family literature, boundary management preferences have been typically examined as a predictor (e.g., Chen et al., 2009; Kreiner, 2006; Shockley & Allen, 2010) or as a moderator (e.g., Delanoeije et al., 2019) of outcomes such as work-family conflict. Research focusing on boundary management preferences as a predictor shows little consistent evidence that either segmentation or integration is better or worse for work-family conflict (Allen et al., 2014). Most studies report no relationship between preferences and work-family conflict (Derks et al., 2016; Kreiner, 2006; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010; Shockley & Allen, 2010). When a significant relationship is found, segmentation is associated with less work-family conflict (Park & Jex, 2011; Yang et al., 2019) and with greater work-nonwork balance (Allen et al., 2021).

Only a handful of studies have examined boundary management preferences as an outcome. Findings to date suggest that boundary management preferences are derived from the salience of work and family roles (Capitano et al., 2017; Capitano & Greenhaus, 2018; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). For example, Powell and Greenhaus (2010) reported that stronger family role salience was positively associated with a greater preference to segment work and family. In addition, Capitano and Greenhaus (2018) reported that polychronicity (a preference for engaging in multiple tasks simultaneously, Bluedorn et al., 1999) positively related to the preference to integrate roles. Thus, there is some evidence that individual differences are associated with differences in boundary management preferences.

1.3. Directionality of boundary management preferences

Historically, scholars focused on the preference to protect the home domain from intrusions from the work domain (Kreiner, 2006). Methot and LePine (2016) suggest that this focus is likely due to an interest in understanding the effects of organizational policies such as flexible work and employee recovery from work stressors. That is, organizational scholars are typically interested in how work

influences family, thus work as the originating domain is studied. This is similar to the evolution of work-family conflict research, which originally was more highly focused on work conflicting with family and then progressed into also examining family conflicting with work (Allen, Herst, et al., 2000). However, for quite some time scholars have suggested that preferences regarding the segmentation of work and family roles function directionally and asymmetrically (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). That is, some individuals can have a high preference to protect the work domain from family intrusions while also having a low preference to protect the family domain from work intrusions and vice-versa. To that end, Methot and LePine (2016) used the measure developed by Kreiner (2006) that assessed work-from-family segmentation and developed and validated a parallel measure of family-from-work segmentation.

Further supporting the distinction, existing research shows that the two directions of preferences have differential relationships with other variables of interest. For example, Methot and LePine (2016) found that preference to protect the home domain was negatively associated with job satisfaction while preference to protect the work domain was positively associated with job satisfaction. As another example, Reinke and Gerlach (2022) examined both directions of boundary management preferences and behaviors and reported correlations higher in magnitude between preferences and behaviors from the same direction.

1.4. Gender egalitarianism and boundary management preferences

There is a need to conduct cross-cultural research on predictors of boundary management preferences. Indeed, the literature acknowledges that cultural norms and values play a role in shaping the work-family interface (Bader et al., 2018; Powell et al., 2009). Nippert-Eng (1996) stated explicitly that boundary management preferences are derived from socialization processes and the social context in which individuals are embedded. Moreover, work and family role boundaries are embedded in social domains and local contexts, including culture. Cultural backgrounds shape the self-concept through socialization processes and these processes can impact role dynamics, including boundary management preferences. Indeed, Nippert-Eng (1996) suggested that the development of preferences for integration-segmentation emerges in childhood as individuals make sense of the cultural concepts of “home” and of “work.”

In their development of boundary theory, Ashforth et al. (2000) also suggested culture may influence individuals' preferences regarding role segmentation. They noted that feminine (i.e., more egalitarian) cultures reduce distinctions between stereotypic gender roles and emphasize integration of work and nonwork roles while more masculine (i.e., less egalitarian) cultures maintain a more rigid distinction between gender roles. Accordingly, in the current study, we focus on the cultural dimension of gender egalitarianism (GE) (which is similar to Hofstede et al., 2010's concept of feminine/masculine) as we consider the importance of gender in shaping work and family roles and preferences (Kanter, 1977; Kossek et al., 2021).

GE refers to societies' beliefs about prescribed social roles for men and women (Emrich et al., 2004). Lower GE societies prescribe different roles for men and women such that there is a division of labor between genders. Men are socialized to take on breadwinning roles and pursue careers whereas women are primarily socialized to tend to the home and care for dependents (e.g., Eagly & Wood, 2012). Higher GE cultures, however, consider gender roles as less rigid, tend to minimize gender differences, and promote gender equality. In such societies, men and women are viewed as equal in ability and social roles are less prescribed. That is, men and women are afforded the behavioral flexibility that allows them to perform roles they prefer and that are required by a given situation (Emrich et al., 2004).

Higher GE cultures reduce the distinctiveness of gender roles and emphasize the integration of work and family roles while lower GE cultures emphasize the distinction between gender roles, producing a more segmented view of work and family. Essentially, compartmentalizing gender roles lends itself to a more segmented way of reasoning (Ollier-Malaterre, 2016). When men and women occupy distinct roles, there is less opportunity for work and family roles to integrate. That is, the culture supplies an environment for segmentation preferences to develop. Accordingly, as suggested by boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996), we expect segmentation preferences are developed to meet the demands of the cultural context and thus segmentation preferences are more likely to be prevalent in cultural contexts that prescribe and model separate gender roles. Thus, we predict a cross-level direct effect such that GE is negatively associated with segmentation preferences.

Hypothesis 1a. Higher GE is associated with less preference for segmenting work-from-family than is lower GE.

Hypothesis 1b. Higher GE is associated with less preference for segmenting family-from-work than is lower GE.

1.5. Gender and boundary management preferences

It has long been suggested that men and women form asymmetrical boundaries around their work and family roles (Pleck, 1977). In his work-family role system theory, Pleck (1977) notes that the work-family role system is asymmetrically permeable with regard to boundaries between work and family roles for men and for women. For women, the family role is permitted to intrude on the work role while the opposite is true for men who are expected to keep the family role from intruding on the work role. In her theory on boundary management, Nippert-Eng (1996) similarly notes that gender socialization greatly influences boundary work. Women are expected to construct stronger, less permeable boundaries to protect the family domain while men construct stronger, less permeable boundaries to protect the work domain. This reflects traditional gender role prescriptions that assign work to men and family and home responsibility to women (Gutek et al., 1991).

However, there is also the point of view that women prefer integration overall and that in general they perceive the boundary between work and family as more permeable than do men (Rothbard, 2001). Shockley et al. (2017b) refer to this second perspective as

the male segmentation perspective. In their meta-analysis they reported that neither the symmetrical boundary nor the male segmentation perspective was fully supported. Specifically, they found that women created stronger boundaries around both family and work. It should be noted however that their analysis focused on boundary strength (i.e., behavior) rather than on preferences, though boundary strength/behavior is thought to result from boundary preferences.

Other studies that examined gender and segmentation preferences found women prefer to segment work from family (i.e., protect the family domain) (Chen et al., 2009; Park et al., 2011; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010; Shockley & Allen, 2010) or have found no gender differences (Capitano et al., 2017; Capitano & Greenhaus, 2018; Kreiner, 2006; Palm et al., 2020). Emblematic of variation in findings, across four different studies Methot and LePine (2016) found no gender differences in either direction of segmentation preferences (Study 1), women preferred segmentation in both directions (Study 2a), women preferred segmenting work from family (i.e., protect the family domain) but there were no gender differences with regard to preferences for segmenting family from work (Study 2b), and no significant differences but a pattern of findings indicating women preferred segmenting work from family (i.e., protect the family domain) while men preferred segmenting family from work (i.e., protecting the work domain) (Study 3).

Notably, the existing literature is primarily based on participants from the U.S. or other Western contexts, thus constraining heterogeneity in preferences (i.e., Austria-Germany; Palm et al., 2020). Moreover, most studies to date have been limited to sole examination of preference for segmentation of work-from-family. A more heterogeneous dataset that spans a variety of socio-cultural contexts and includes both directions of preference is needed to provide a stronger test of gender differences. Based on previous theory concerning gender roles and boundary asymmetry (Nippert-Eng, 1996; Pleck, 1977) as well as the ongoing salience of traditional gender roles (Best & Puzio, 2019), we predict an asymmetrical individual-level direct relationship between gender and boundary management preferences, with women preferring segmentation of work-from-family more so than men, to protect the family role, and men preferring segmentation of family-from-work more so than women, to protect the work role.

Hypothesis 2a. Women have a stronger preference to segment work-from-family than do men.

Hypothesis 2b. Men have a stronger preference to segment family-from-work than do women.

1.6. Gender by GE interaction

We hypothesized GE and gender each have a direct relationship with boundary management preferences. As we previously suggested, individuals' segmentation preferences develop within their cultural context. Moreover, gender egalitarianism is inextricably tied to gender (Powell et al., 2009). Thus, we further suggest that GE may moderate the strength of the relationship between gender and preferences.

Nippert-Eng (1996) notes that one's position along the integration-segmentation continuum is dependent on the unique

Table 1
Sample sociodemographic information.

Countries/Territories	N	Age (mean)	Females (%)	Supervisors (%)	Whours (mean)	GE (mean)
Australia	363	40.2	47.7	38.0	38.3	3.26
Austria	333	42.6	73.0	27.3	34.5	3.51
Brazil	237	41.1	49.8	44.3	47.0	3.45
Canada	507	43.2	56.8	31.8	39.8	3.79
Chile	340	38.6	50.3	25.9	45.5	3.58
China	300	34.1	62.3	35.3	47.9	2.71
Ecuador	300	42.3	43.7	54.7	45.9	3.21
Finland	310	43.3	69.0	17.1	38.8	3.37
France	564	42.6	62.9	27.7	39.3	3.43
Germany	386	39.9	70.2	26.4	36.5	3.69
India	338	33.8	47.3	35.8	49.4	2.69
Indonesia	301	39.8	59.1	40.9	42.9	2.76
Israel	483	40.7	50.9	34.8	42.1	3.61
Italy	422	43.1	43.1	48.6	44.4	2.44
Netherlands	376	43.0	54.8	34.3	36.9	3.55
Nigeria	297	38.5	41.1	47.5	46.6	2.95
Norway	294	45.4	44.2	43.2	37.9	3.56
Poland	376	36.3	59.6	22.6	43.1	2.74
Portugal	298	43.8	52.7	25.2	43.3	3.53
Singapore	305	48.0	54.8	52.8	46.5	3.38
South Africa	362	39.4	59.4	22.4	44.0	3.35
South Korea	309	38.6	46.3	38.8	45.7	2.86
Switzerland	318	40.6	70.4	30.2	31.7	3.77
Taiwan	301	47.2	62.1	37.2	44.7	2.98
Tunisia	322	40.6	49.4	30.7	40.6	3.08
UK	314	38.9	62.1	30.6	36.1	3.49
US	306	38.3	50.3	53.9	41.0	3.15
Total	9362	40.9	55.5	34.9	41.6	3.27

Note. Whours = actual working hours; GE = gender egalitarianism (scale 1–5).

combination of social-cultural constraints that emanate from the work and family domains. This includes meeting the expectations of those in the social environment. Because lower GE societies reinforce distinctive gender roles, it can be expected that gender-related preferences to segment roles may be stronger in lower GE cultures, compared with higher GE cultures where gender role expectations are more fluid. That is, to achieve congruence with the environment, individuals likely feel more pressure to conform to prescribed gender roles in contexts in which GE is lower than when it is higher (Emrich et al., 2004; Lyness & Judiesch, 2014). For example, in lower GE societies in which gender roles are more prescribed, tradition would dictate that men prioritize work over family while women prioritize family over work. This line of thought is also consistent with Nippert-Eng (1996) who notes that the work-home boundary varies in accordance with expectations associated with gender along with cultural norms about the meaning of work and family roles. We expect the preference for segmentation to be stronger where there is consistency between cultural expectations and gender. Thus, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 3a. GE moderates the relationship between gender and segmentation preferences such that women have a stronger preference to segment work-from-family than do men and that relationship is stronger in lower GE cultures than in higher GE cultures.

Hypothesis 3b. GE moderates the relationship between gender and segmentation preferences such that men have a stronger preference to segment family-from-work than do women and that relationship is stronger in lower GE cultures than in higher GE cultures.

2. Method

2.1. Sample and procedure

Our data are part of the International Study of Work and Family (ISWAF), a research effort that included the collection of quantitative survey data in 30 countries/territories across five continents. The current paper is based on a sub-sample of 27 countries/territories, resulting in a total sample size of $N = 9362$ employees. Due to poor reliability scores of the GE measure, three countries (Bulgaria alpha = −0.08, Ethiopia alpha = 0.51, and Vietnam alpha = 0.51) were excluded from data analysis. The sample composition with respect to age, gender, supervisor status, working hours and GE are shown in Table 1. A total of 59.4 % of the study participants had a university degree. Average organization tenure was 9.1 years. Study participants worked in a broad range of industries: 16.3 % manufacturing; 35.9 % services; 13.7 % education; 10.9 % medical and social services; 9.5 % public administration/government; 5.3 % hospitality and entertainment; 2.4 % security/protection/military; 6 % other.

Data collection took place from 2018 to 2020 with the aim of generating a culturally diverse sample, including countries/territories within regions that were underrepresented in previous cross-cultural work-family studies such as Africa, the Middle East, and Southern Asia. Local collaborators with emic expertise in each country/territory culture and knowledgable in work-family and cross-cultural research were invited by the central research team to participate in the study. A questionnaire and a common set of data collection guidelines (including a data collection checklist and a predefined format for data submission) developed by the central research team guided data collection in each territory. Each local collaborator determined the best method for data collection in their region within the standardized set of guidelines (e.g., use of a paper and pencil survey or online survey). Compensation for participation in the study was not standardized across territories, to meet the requirements of each local context.

The back-translation method was applied to translate the questionnaire into local languages. Local scholars translated the survey items, another bi-lingual person back-translated the items. A final check was conducted by the central research team. If there was disagreement on a translation, the translation was modified by the local collaborator. In total, the survey was translated into 19 languages. Questionnaires were pilot-tested in each region prior to data collection and the local data sets were screened for missing and/or unreliable data by the central research team after submission by the local collaborator.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Work-family boundary management preferences

Three items of Kreiner's (2006) workplace segmentation scale were used to assess participants' preferences for segmenting work-from-family (i.e., protecting the home domain) (e.g., “I prefer to keep work life at work”). Three identically worded items designed by Methot and LePine (2016) assessed employees' preferences for segmenting family-from-work (i.e., protecting the work domain) (e.g., “I prefer to keep my personal life at home”). Responses were made on a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree, $\alpha = 0.83$ and $\alpha = 0.84$. Higher scores indicate a stronger segmentation preference.

2.2.2. Gender egalitarianism

Gender egalitarian values were assessed with five items from the World Values Survey Wave 6 (Inglehart et al., 2014). The items were: “In this society, when jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women”; “In this society, if a woman earns more money than her husband, it's almost certain to cause problems”; “In this society, having a job is the best way for a woman to be an independent person” (reversed); “In this society, on the whole, men make better political leaders than women do”; “In this society, on the whole, men make better business executives than women do.” Responses were made on a 5-point scale that ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Due to poor reliability scores in several countries, we deleted the reversed item. Cronbach alpha for the 4-item measure is $\alpha = 78$. For further analysis, scores were reverse-coded, and items aggregated to the country/territory-level. Higher scores indicate more gender egalitarian values. As shown in Table 1, we had a wide range of GE scores (2.44–3.79).

2.2.3. Gender

Gender was dummy-coded 0 = male and 1 = female.

2.2.4. Controls

We controlled for several factors common in work-family research (e.g., Kossek et al., 2006; Lyness & Judiesch, 2014; Wepfer et al., 2018). The following control variables were included in all multi-level models: Age, marital status (dummy-coded 0 = single/separated and 1 = married/cohabiting), educational level, supervisor status (dummy-coded; 0 = yes and 1 = no), and number of children living at home.

2.3. Measurement invariance

To ensure that the items of the measures used in this study were interpreted and responded to similarly by respondents of the different countries/territories, establishing measurement invariance across samples is necessary (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). We assessed measurement invariance using multigroup confirmatory factor analysis (MG CFA) at three levels: configural (equivalent latent structure across groups), metric (equivalent factor loadings of items across groups), and scalar invariance (equivalent item intercepts across groups) (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2014; Milfont & Fischer, 2010; Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). We ran MG CFA in Mplus for all measures with more than three items. Two indicators were used to assess invariance: CFI and RMSEA. Both indicators have been used in past cross-cultural research and are considered as more rigorous than $\chi 2$, which is likely to be significant in large samples (Rutkowski & Svetina, 2014). Because these indicators also tend to increase with the number of groups, Rutkowski and Svetina (2014) suggest more liberal cutoff criteria for CFI and RMSEA as well as for changes in both indicators when testing for measurement invariance in samples that include many countries/territories. Following these suggestions, we consider a CFI $\geq$ 0.95 and a RMSEA $\leq$0.15 as evidence of configural invariance. When comparing model fit, ΔCFI $\leq$0.030 and ΔRMSEA $\leq$0.030 serve as cutoff criteria in evaluating metric invariance, and ΔCFI $\leq$0.010 and ΔRMSEA $\leq$0.015 for evaluating scalar invariance (Jang et al., 2017; Rutkowski & Svetina, 2014). Table 2 summarizes measurement invariance results.

Evidence for configural and metric invariance was found for the work-family boundary management preference scales. The GE measure meets the fit criteria for configural invariance but only partially satisfies the change in fit criteria for metric invariance (ΔRMSEA = 0.022 was fine but not ΔCFI = 0.04). When releasing the factor loading of item 2, the change in fit criteria for metric invariance was satisfied (ΔRMSEA = 0.023 and ΔCFI = 0.02). Further model comparison tests showed that the data did not meet the threshold for scalar invariance of both measures. Given that the purpose of the study is to investigate structural relationships, satisfying the metric invariance criteria across cultures is sufficient to proceed to our main statistical analyses (Jang et al., 2017).

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive and correlational analysis

Table 3 presents means, standard deviations, and correlations for individual-level measures and GE (country/territory level).

3.2. Multilevel analysis

To account for the nested structure of our data, hierarchical linear modeling was applied in subsequent data analyses (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Intraclass correlation coefficients (ICCs) for our two dependent variables were 0.06 for work-from-family segmentation preferences and 0.10 for family-from-work segmentation preferences. The ICC for GE was 0.14.

Individual-level predictors (Level 1) were group mean centered, and country/territory-level predictors (Level 2) were grand mean centered in all models. Tables 4 and 5 display the results of random intercept models predicting work-from-family and family-from-work segmentation preferences. Model 1 includes level 1 variables. Model 2 adds the level 2 variable of GE. The cross-level interaction term gender $\times$ GE is added in Model 3.

3.2.1. Work-from-family segmentation

Hypotheses 1a, 2a, and 3a concerned work-from-family segmentation (see Table 4). Hypothesis 1a proposed that preferences to segment work-from-family are less in more gender egalitarian societies. Model 2 reveals a nonsignificant relationship between GE and work-from-family segmentation preferences. Thus, Hypothesis 1a is not supported. In line with Hypothesis 2a, Model 1 yields a

Table 2
Measurement invariance tests results.

Measures	Configural MI			Configural → Metric MI		Metric → Scalar MI	
	χ^2	RMSEA	CFI	ΔRMSEA	ΔCFI	ΔRMSEA	ΔCFI
WFSP	496.75	0.061	0.98	0.001	0.01	0.019	0.04
GE	473.03	0.149	0.95	0.022	0.04	0.048	0.18

Note. N = 27 countries/territories; MI = measurement invariance; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation. WFSP = work-family segmentation preferences; GE = gender egalitarianism.

Table 3
Means, SD, and correlations among measures.

Measures	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	40.93	8.21	–								
2. Marital status	0.88	0.33	−0.02	–							
3. Education	4.46	1.54	0.00	0.08**	–						
4. Supervisor	0.65	0.48	−0.11**	−0.04**	−0.15**	–					
5. No of children	1.84	0.89	0.17**	0.07**	−0.04**	−0.03**	–				
6. Gender	0.56	0.50	−0.10**	−0.09**	0.01	0.16**	−0.04**	–			
7. WF-SP	3.87	0.86	−0.07**	−0.02	−0.07**	0.10**	−0.04**	0.06**	(0.83)		
8. FW-SP	3.58	0.86	−0.02*	−0.05**	−0.07**	0.01	−0.05**	0.02	0.40**	(0.84)	
9. GE	3.27	0.38	0.15**	−0.08**	−0.08**	0.07**	0.14**	0.07**	−0.01	−0.11**	(0.78)

Note. $N = 9362$ (27 countries/territories); Gender is coded 0 = male, 1 = female; WF-SP = work-from-family segmentation preferences; FW-SP = family-from-work segmentation preferences; GE = gender egalitarianism.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

Table 4
Results of multilevel analyses for work-from-family segmentation preferences.

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Intercept	3.86**	(0.04)	3.86**	(0.04)	3.86**	(0.04)
Level 1						
Age	−0.01*	(0.00)	−0.01**	(0.00)	−0.01**	(0.00)
Marital status	0.02	(0.03)	0.02	(0.03)	0.01	(0.03)
Education	−0.02**	(0.01)	−0.01**	(0.01)	−0.02**	(0.01)
Supervisor	−0.13**	(0.02)	−0.13**	(0.02)	−0.13**	(0.02)
No children	−0.02**	(0.01)	−0.02*	(0.01)	−0.02**	(0.01)
Gender	0.07**	(0.02)	0.07**	(0.02)	0.07**	(0.02)
Level 2						
GE			−0.04	(0.12)	−0.04	(0.12)
Cross-level interactions						
GE × gender					−0.10*	(0.05)
Deviance	23,250.48		23,252.79		23,252.46	
ICC	0.06		0.06		0.06	
Var (within)	0.70**	(0.01)	0.70**	(0.01)	0.70**	(0.01)
Var (between)	0.05**	(0.01)	0.05**	(0.01)	0.05**	(0.01)
ΔMVP explained variance[a]	0.013		0.014		0.014	

Note. $N = 9362$ (27 countries). Gender is coded 0 = male, 1 = female; GE = gender egalitarianism.
[a] Explained variances were computed using the formula, $var(\hat{Y}_{ij}) / (var(\hat{Y}_{ij}) + \tau_{00} + \sigma^2)$ LaHuis et al. (2019).
** $p < .01$.
* $p < .05$.

significant and positive relationship between gender and work-from-family segmentation ($b = 0.07$, $p < .01$), indicating that women have a stronger preference than men to protect family from the work domain. Hypotheses 3a suggested a cross-level interaction with women having a stronger preference to segment work-from-family in less gender egalitarian societies. Model 3 yields a significant interaction term ($b = -0.10$, $p < .05$). To investigate the nature of the interaction we plotted the interaction using advanced simple slope analysis procedures outlined in Finsaas and Goldstein (2021). In line with our prediction, women indeed have a stronger preference to segment work-from-family and thus protect the family domain than do men in lower gender egalitarian societies. In higher gender egalitarian societies, no gender differences in work-from-family segmentation preferences are observed. More specifically, as shown in Fig. 1, the gender effect is highly significant at lower GE and decreases with greater GE. At a GE of 3.5 it becomes nonsignificant. For the minimum GE value, the simple slope for gender is 0.155 (CI = 0.067, 0.242) and decreases to 0.02 (CI = −0.042, 0.082) at the maximum GE. Consequently, Hypothesis 3a is supported.

3.2.2. *Family-from-work segmentation*

Hypotheses 1b, 2b, and 3b concerned family-from-work segmentation (see Table 5). Hypothesis 1b predicted a negative relationship between GE and family-from-work segmentation preferences. In line with our theorizing, Model 2 in Table 5 reveals a significant negative association between GE and family-from-work segmentation preferences ($b = -0.10$, $p < .05$), indicating that individuals in more gender egalitarian societies report lower preferences to segment family-from-work domain. Hypothesis 2b proposed a negative relationship between gender and family-from-work segmentation preferences, predicting that men have a stronger preference to protect work from family than do women. Although our analysis yields a significant gender effect (Model 1), it is in the opposite direction such that women have a stronger preference than do men to protect work from family ($b = 0.06$, $p < .01$).

Table 5
Results of multilevel analyses for family-from-work segmentation preferences.

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Intercept	3.59**	(0.05)	3.58**	(0.05)	3.58**	(0.05)
Level 1						
Age	0.00	(0.00)	0.00	(0.00)	0.00	(0.00)
Marital status	−0.08**	(0.03)	−0.08**	(0.03)	−0.08**	(0.03)
Education	−0.02**	(0.01)	−0.02**	(0.01)	−0.02**	(0.01)
Supervisor	−0.02	(0.02)	−0.02	(0.02)	−0.02	(0.02)
No children	−0.02*	(0.01)	−0.02*	(0.01)	−0.02*	(0.01)
Gender	0.06**	(0.02)	0.06**	(0.02)	0.06**	(0.02)
Level 2						
GE			−0.28*	(0.14)	−0.28*	(0.14)
Cross-level interactions						
GE × gender					0.00	(0.05)
Deviance	22,811.96		22,809.98		22,814.30	
ICC	0.10		0.09		0.11	
Var (within)	0.66**	(0.01)	0.66**	(0.01)	0.66**	(0.01)
Var (between)	0.07**	(0.02)	0.06**	(0.02)	0.06**	(0.02)
ΔMVP explained variance[a]	0.004		0.020		0.020	

Note. $N = 9362$ (27 countries). Gender is coded 0 = male, 1 = female; GE = gender egalitarianism.

[a] Explained variances were computed using the formula, $var(\widehat{Y}_{ij})/(var(\widehat{Y}_{ij}) + \tau_{00} + \sigma^2)$ LaHuis et al. (2019).

** $p < .01$.

* $p < .05$.

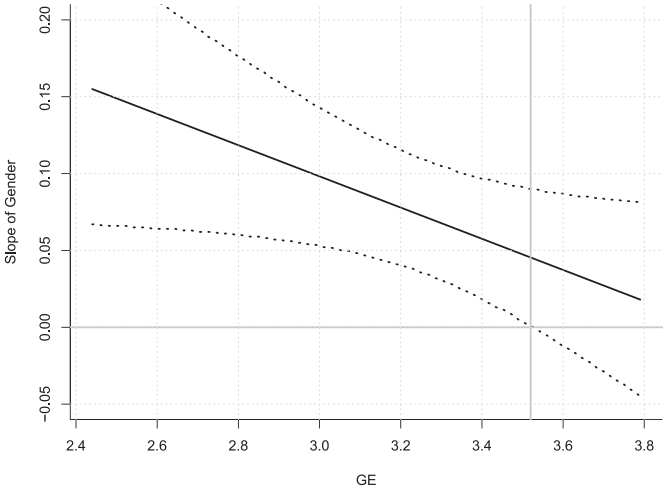

Fig. 1. Region of significance plot for gender egalitarianism × gender predicting work-from-family segmentation preferences. The bold decreasing line represents slope coefficients across values of the moderator. The vertical line represents the point at which the slope becomes nonsignificant. At a GE of 3.5 the slope becomes nonsignificant.

Consequently, Hypothesis 2b was not supported. We did not find a significant cross-level interaction effect for gender × GE on family-from-work segmentation preferences. Thus, Hypothesis 3b was not supported by our data.

3.3. Supplemental analyses

As a robustness check, we estimated our models using the GE values ("should be") score from the GLOBE project (House et al., 2004). Of the 27 countries/territories included in our data, 24 were included in the GLOBE study (Chile, Norway and Tunisia were not included in the GLOBE study). Our measure of GE was significantly correlated with GLOBE GE value scores ($r = 0.54$, $p < .01$). Table 6 summarizes the results. We observed minor changes in the models. The interaction term associated with work-from-family segmentation changed from −0.10 to −0.09 (Model 3). The main effect for GE associated with family-from-work segmentation changed from −0.28 to −0.23 (Models 5 & 6). Results are similar but the significant effects with GE change in *p*-value ($p < .10$), which may be due to the different country composition in the sample. Overall, pattern of findings remains the same, lending support for the robustness of the findings.

Table 6
Robustness check using GLOBE gender egalitarian value scores.

Variables	Work-from-family segmentation						Family-from-work segmentation					
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	SE	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Intercept	3.85**	(0.04)	3.85**	(0.04)	3.85**	(0.05)	3.57**	(0.06)	3.56**	(0.06)	3.56**	(0.06)
Level 1												
Age	−0.01*	(0.00)	−0.01**	(0.00)	−0.01**	(0.00)	0.00	(0.00)	0.00	(0.00)	0.00	(0.00)
Marital status	0.02	(0.03)	0.02	(0.03)	0.02	(0.03)	−0.08**	(0.03)	−0.08**	(0.03)	−0.08**	(0.03)
Education	−0.02**	(0.01)	−0.02**	(0.01)	−0.02**	(0.01)	−0.02**	(0.01)	−0.02**	(0.01)	−0.02**	(0.01)
Supervisor	−0.14**	(0.02)	−0.14**	(0.02)	−0.14**	(0.02)	−0.02	(0.02)	−0.02	(0.02)	−0.02	(0.02)
No children	−0.02*	(0.01)	−0.02*	(0.01)	−0.02*	(0.01)	−0.02	(0.01)	−0.02	(0.01)	−0.02	(0.01)
Gender	0.07**	(0.02)	0.07**	(0.02)	0.07**	(0.02)	0.06**	(0.02)	0.06**	(0.02)	0.06**	(0.02)
Level 2												
GE_GLOBE			−0.06	(0.11)	−0.06	(0.11)			−0.23†	(0.13)	−0.23†	(0.13)
Cross-level interactions												
GE_GLOBE × gender					−0.09†	(0.05)					−0.02	
Deviance	20,908.32		20,910.56		20,911.22		20,370.48		20,369.69		20,373.89	
ICC	0.06		0.06		0.06		0.11		0.10		0.10	
Var (within)	0.70**	(0.01)	0.70**	(0.01)	0.70**	(0.01)	0.65**	(0.01)	0.65**	(0.01)	0.65**	(0.01)
Var (between)	0.05**	(0.01)	0.05**	(0.01)	0.05**	(0.01)	0.08**	(0.02)	0.07**	(0.02)	0.07**	(0.02)
ΔMVP explained variance[a]	0.014		0.014		0.016		0.004		0.016		0.016	

Note. $N = 8406$ (24 countries). Gender is coded 0 = male, 1 = female; GE_GLOBE = gender egalitarianism values GLOBE Project.

[a] Explained variances were computed using the formular, $var(\widehat{Y}_{ij})/(var(\widehat{Y}_{ij}) + \tau_{00} + \sigma^2)$ LaHuis et al. (2019).

** $p < .01$.

* $p < .05$.

† $p < .10$

4. Discussion

We examined boundary management preferences across 27 diverse countries/territories. With the advent of larger numbers of remote workers and an increasingly global society, an understanding of boundary management preferences across cultures is timely. We provide an initial test of the relationship between culture and boundary management preferences. Our findings indicate that culture relates to boundary management preferences, but the pattern of relations differs depending on the direction of segmentation preferences (i.e., work-from-family versus family-from-work segmentation).

With regard to the relationship between GE and boundary management preferences, we found that GE was associated with family-from-work segmentation preferences. As predicted, those from more gender egalitarian societies reported lower preferences to segment family-from-work. This is consistent with our theorization that greater gender equality is associated with a preference toward the integration of work and family roles. Societies that value both genders equally may be more welcoming of family entering the work domain, which enables individuals to relax the desire to protect work from the family role. Contrary to expectations we did not find a relationship between GE and work-from-family segmentation preferences. GE was not directly associated with the desire to protect the family from the work role, but it did interact with gender. We describe the interaction finding further below.

While we expected to find that women would prefer to segment work from family more so than men and that men would prefer to segment family from work more so than women, we found that women preferred to segment both family-from-work and work-from-family. Thus, women preferred to keep work and family roles separate overall more so than did men. Our sample was comprised of individuals with work and family responsibilities. It may be that multiple role responsibilities in general veer women toward the need to segment more so than men. Moreover, women may face additional pressure to prove their commitment to work by challenging assumptions about the unreliability of working mothers and thus develop the preference to segment roles in both directions (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). Our findings on boundary management preferences are also consistent with Shockley et al. (2017b) who found that women created a stronger boundary around both work and family, thus suggesting that women both prefer and enact stronger work and family role boundaries than do men.

The relation between gender and preference for segmentation of work-from-family was conditioned by GE. Specifically, as theorized, we found as GE increases, women have a lower preference for segmentation of work-from-family. That is, women's desire to protect the family role from the work role becomes more relaxed in higher GE cultures relative to lower GE cultures. This suggests that women become more open to the integration of work into the family role in contexts with greater gender equality. This notion is consistent with Lyness and Judiesch (2014) who found women self-reported lower work-life balance than did men in lower gender egalitarian cultures, but there were no gender differences in higher gender egalitarian cultures.

Our findings suggest that women become more similar to men with regard to segmentation of work-from-family preferences when GE reaches a moderate to high score (i.e., 3.5).

Contrary to expectations, we did not find a moderation effect with regard to segmentation of family-from-work. On the one hand, women report a greater preference to protect the work role from the family role more so than men regardless of the extent the culture promotes gender equality. On the other hand, individuals in higher GE countries expressed less preference for segmentation of family-from-work. This may indicate that ideal worker norms that expect workers to prioritize work (e.g., Reid, 2015) play a strong role in maintaining the expectation that both men and women will protect the work role from family encroachment. Overall, the findings suggest that the preference to protect the work role appears to be driven by gender and by GE independently, but not interactively.

4.1. Theoretical contributions

Our findings make two important contributions to boundary management theory. Work and family boundaries have long been thought of as products of one's social and cultural environment (Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996). By examining how GE relates to boundary management preferences, we address the calls to test the role that culture plays in connection to boundary management preferences and practices as well as calls to test boundary theory tenets cross-culturally (Allen, 2013; Bulger & Hoffman, 2018). Next, our research expands the nomological network of boundary management preferences, by shifting the focus from outcomes of boundary management preferences (e.g., work-family experiences) to its theoretical antecedents. Also, the distinctive patterns of relationships between GE and gender in relation to a preference to protect the family domain versus a preference to protect the work domain lend further weight to advancing theory that recognizes the dimensionality of segmentation preferences (Methot & LePine, 2016). Thus, the directionality of boundary management preferences should be an important consideration in future research and theory development.

We also add to the limited body of work-family research that has examined GE across cultures. The small number of existing cross-cultural studies that have included GE have focused primarily on work-family conflict as an outcome (see Ollier-Malaterre & Foucreault, 2017; Shockley et al., 2017a for reviews). We demonstrate that GE is not only a relevant cultural dimension for understanding work-family conflict, but also an important theoretical consideration for other aspects of work-family. Moreover, our findings advance theory in that they demonstrate that boundary management preferences may be shaped by the congruence between gender and cultural context. These findings underscore the importance of systematic theoretical development and examination of GE in relation to gender.

4.2. Practical implications

Work-family issues are a major human resource concern to organizations. Multinational companies have an interest in the extent

that programs and policies designed to help individuals manage work and family roles generalize across countries (Massman et al., 2016), yet they also need to pay attention to the fit between their programs and employees' preferences. Our findings help address this need and have practical implications for multinational companies and individuals who adjust to living in foreign cultures, such as expatriates and digital nomads. These individuals may be vulnerable to work-family boundary challenges as moving from one culture to another often requires acclimating to the local culture, which may vary in terms of expected role boundaries around work and nonwork roles (Bader et al., 2018; Urs & Schmidt, 2018). For example, employees who prefer to segment their work and family role have been found to be less satisfied and less committed to their organization when it provides work-family programs such as childcare centers that they view as integrating work and family (Rothbard et al., 2005). Human resource professionals and leaders who are aware that individuals from less gender egalitarian societies (e.g., Japan) may have greater preferences to segment family-from-work may be better able to adapt their programs and practices to better fit these individuals' preferences; in our example, they would either not provide childcare centers and other integrating programs or emphasize that these are optional. This is also important in that as shown by Mandeville et al. (2016), (mis)interpretation of group norms about the use of family-supportive benefits and its (mis)alignment with employee preference can impact whether or not employees use offered benefits (and in turn work-family conflict). Similar processes may need to be considered within multicultural teams.

Moreover, our finding that women preferred to segment family-from-work and work-from-family more so than did men implies that employers should ensure they respect female employees' boundaries in a context where telework and hybrid work has eroded them (Ollier-Malaterre, 2023). Allowing female employees to disconnect after hours (Pellerin et al., 2023) will be all the more essential in lower (vs. higher) GE cultures where women's desire to protect family from work is stronger. In sum, organizational awareness of how culture relates to boundary management preferences and interacts with gender may be particularly useful in developing policies and practices on remote work and on international mobility in multinationals.

4.3. Limitations

We acknowledge several limitations associated with the current research. While we postulate that GE and gender are predictive of boundary management preferences, our conclusions must be tempered based on our cross-sectional research design. Although it seems unlikely that gender or GE are caused by boundary management preferences, care is needed in terms of causal inferences. We also note that we assessed gender as a binary variable. In future studies examining the role of gender, research is needed that is more inclusive of gender fluid/non-binary identities. The breadth of our data collection can be considered a strength of the research, but we cannot be certain that our samples are fully representative of the cultures we examined. Finally, we acknowledge that the observed effect sizes are small. Because there have been few studies examining predictors of segmentation preferences, we have little data against which to compare our effect sizes. Thus, we cannot be certain the extent our findings are of practical significance. The results do suggest that there are other variables that meaningfully predict preferences that should be examined in future research. We provide specific suggestions below.

4.4. Future research

The findings of the current study point toward several avenues for future research. While gender has been a primary lens of analysis in relation to boundary management preferences, and is a central variable when examining GE, intersectional analyses of gender combined with other social identities such as social class would yield a finer understanding of the predictors of boundary management preferences and of the interactions between these predictors and GE (Jaga et al., in press). For example, social class would be important to examine as work and family devotion schemas differ across social classes, with the family devotion schema being more salient in lower than in higher social classes (Williams et al., 2013). Due to these differing social norms, it is possible that men and women of different social classes differ in the extent they prefer to protect family from work.

Furthermore, potential changes in boundary management preferences over time should be investigated, as cultural categories such as home and work are informed by personal experience and likely to develop across the lifespan (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Building on the life course perspective (e.g., Moen et al., 2008), Bulger and Hoffman (2018) suggest preferences may change within individuals as they accrue various life experiences. For example, becoming a parent may result in a stronger preference to segment roles. Working remotely may result in a stronger desire to segment roles as a way to cope with co-location of the work and nonwork roles (Allen et al., 2021). Boundary management preferences may also change as individuals move to different cultural contexts and live as transnational families (Cho & Allen, 2019). Longitudinal research that tracks boundary management preferences along with changes in work and family situations is needed to better understand how preferences may evolve and vary across time.

While we have focused on boundary preferences, there is also a need for cross-cultural research that examines boundary role tactics (e.g., temporal tactics; communication tactics) (Kreiner et al., 2009). It seems likely that the effectiveness of various tactics differs across cultural contexts. For example, communication strategies such as setting expectations with work role partners (e.g., supervisors) may not be acceptable or effective within high power distance cultures (House et al., 2004). Likewise, it may not be acceptable to ignore family demands during the workday in highly collectivist cultures where relationships within groups of affiliation are highly valued (House et al., 2004). Gender may also interact with GE in predicting the effectiveness and feasibility of different boundary tactics. For example, in some cultures where women are expected to be the primary homemakers whether or not they work outside of the home (e.g., Ethiopia), it may not be possible for them to segment family-from-work (Gudeta & Van Engen, 2018).

4.5. Conclusion

The primary objective of the current study was to investigate the linkage between culture, specifically GE, with boundary management preferences. We found that GE is associated with the preference to segment family from work. Moreover, based on our cross-national heterogeneous sample, we found that women prefer to segment their work and family roles more so than do men. GE and gender interacted, such that women's preference for segmentation of work-from-family was greater in lower GE countries. A better understanding of boundary management preferences is key for developing strategies individuals and organizations can use for navigating an increasingly boundaryless work context. Continued research is needed to further understand what contributes to boundary management preferences.

Declaration statements

We describe our sampling plan, data inclusion criteria, and all measures in the study. Relevant data and code can be made available upon request. Data were analyzed using Mplus 7.1 and SPSS Statistics 27. The study's design and analyses were not preregistered. Ethical approval for the study protocol and informed consent from all individual participants were obtained.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Tammy Allen: conceptualization, methodology, investigation, resources, writing – original draft, writing – revising and editing, project administration. Barbara Beham: conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, data curation, resources, investigation, data curation, writing – original draft, writing – revising and editing, project administration. Ariane Ollier-Malaterre: conceptualization, methodology, investigation, resources, writing – original draft, writing – revising and editing, project administration. Andreas Baierl: formal analysis. All remaining authors: resources, investigation, data curation, writing-review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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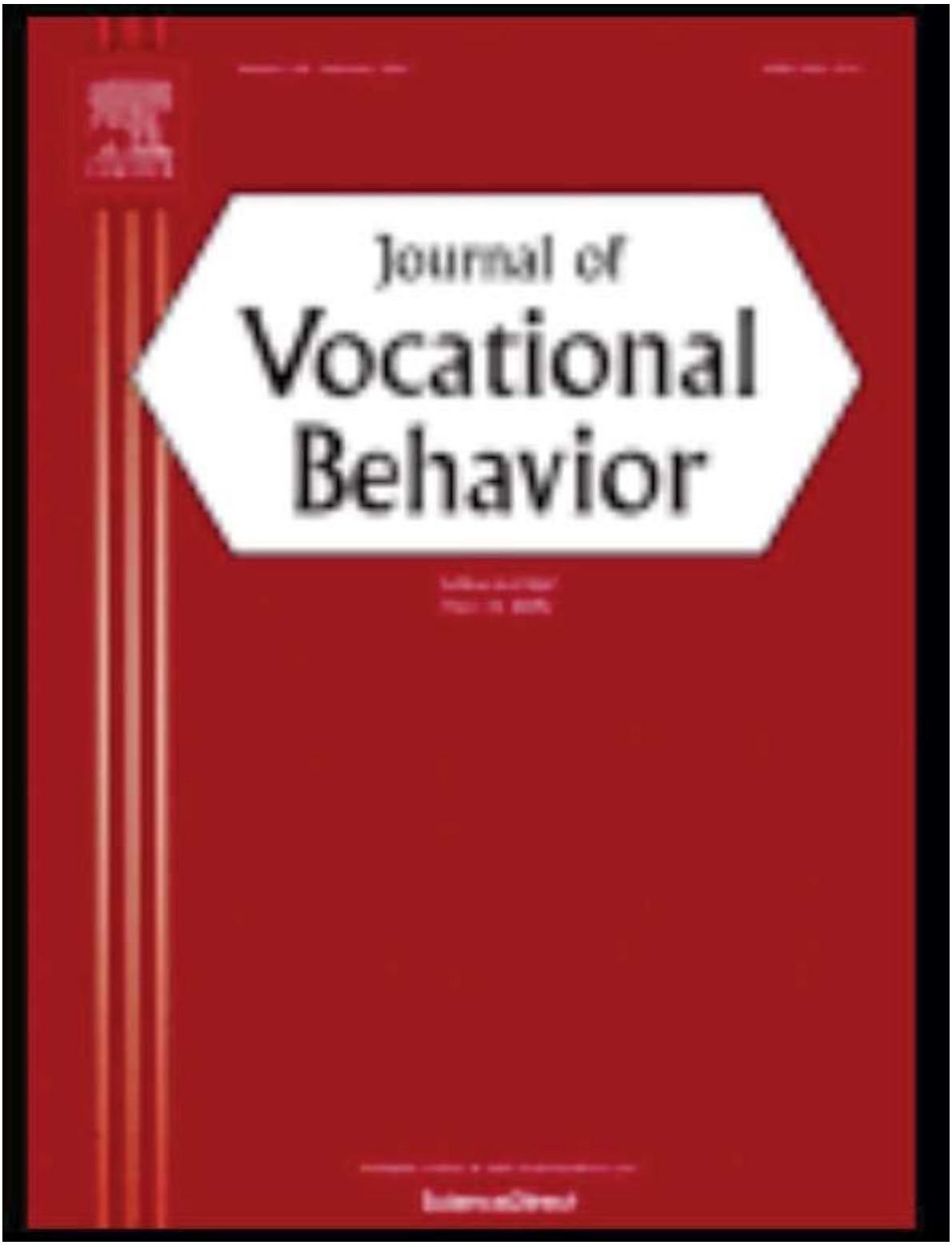
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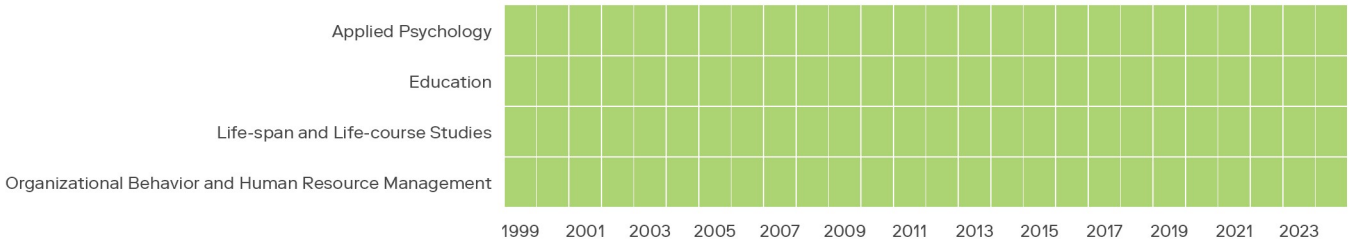

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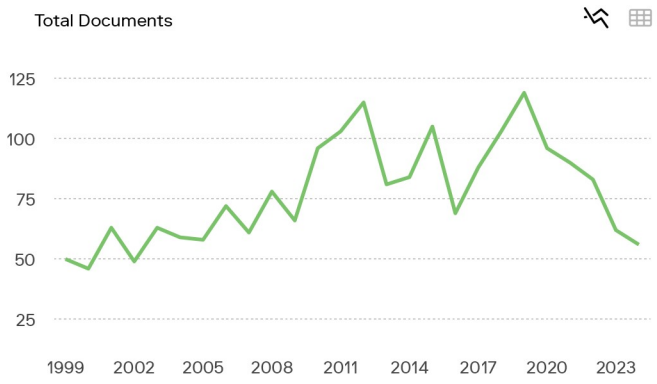

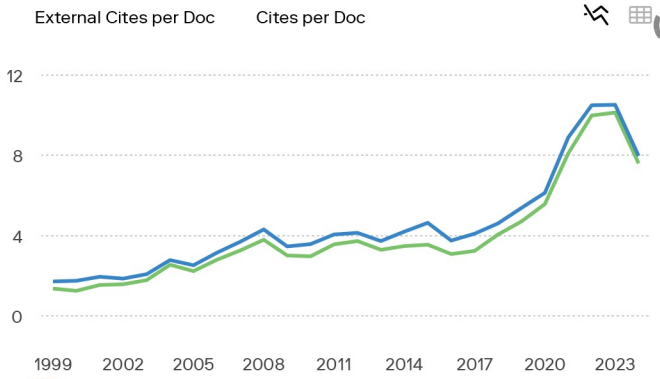

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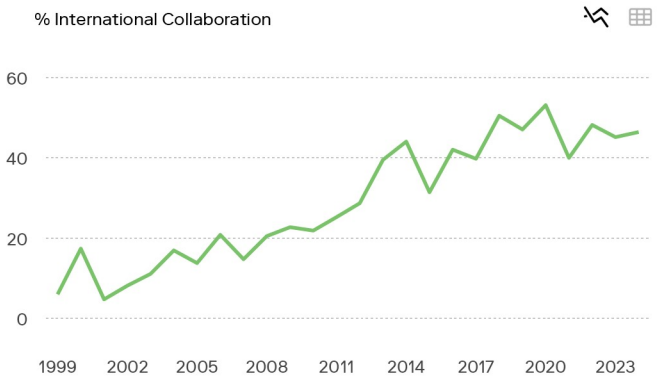

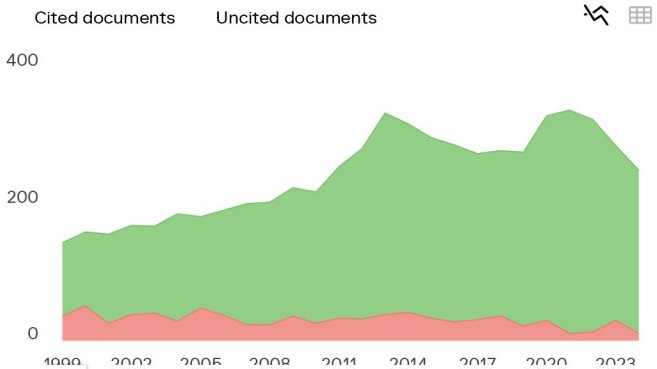

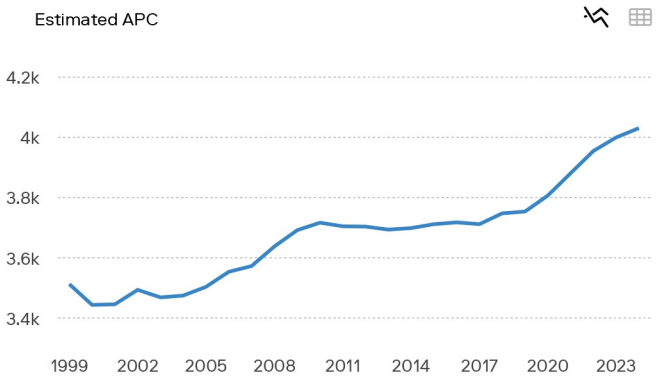
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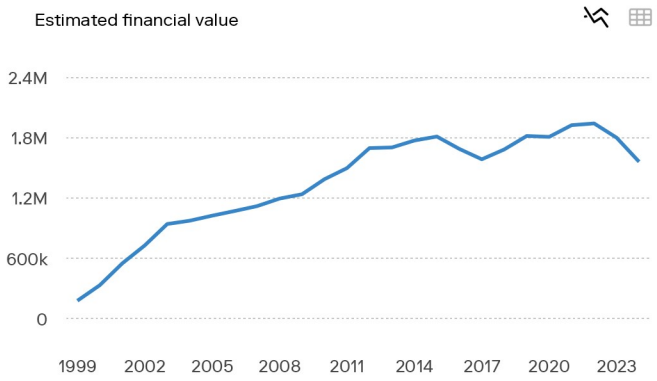
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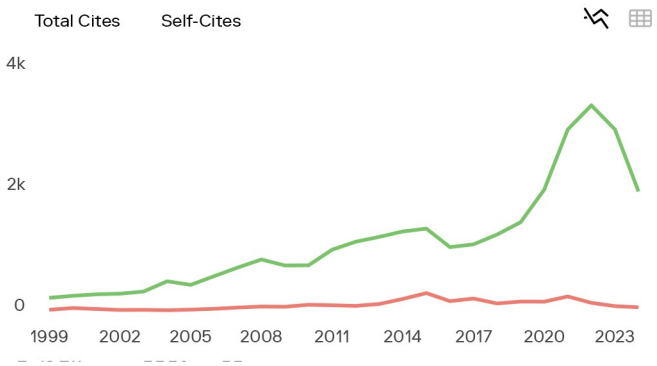
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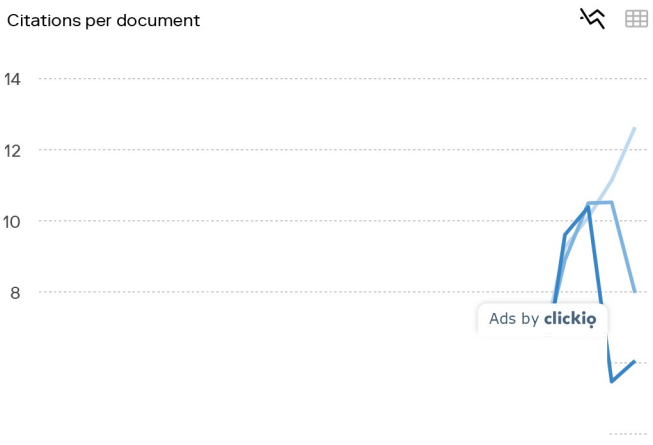
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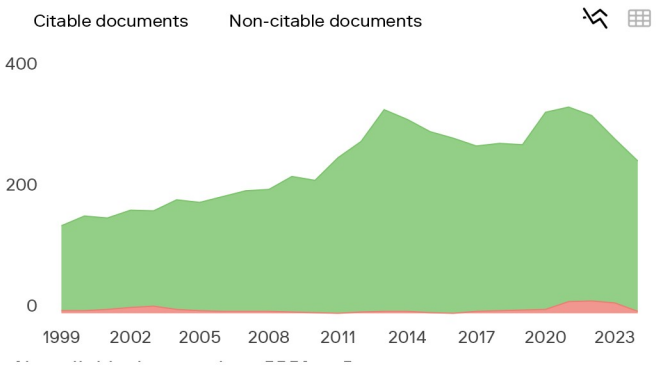

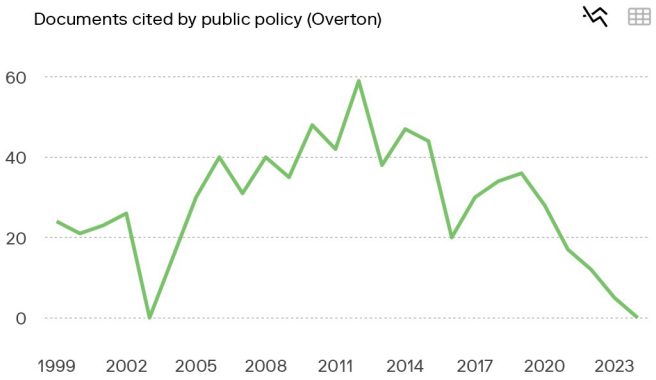

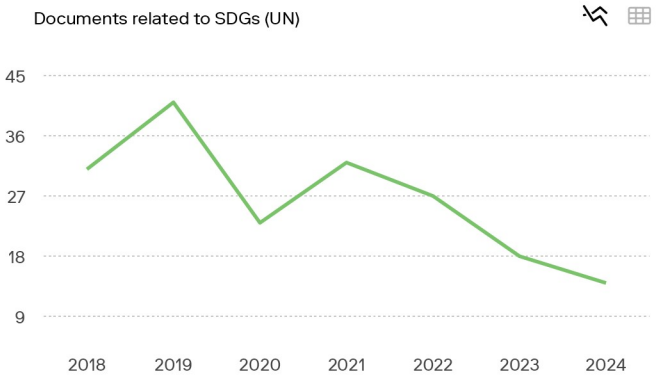

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