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# Work-family integration and segmentation in the gig economy: An exploratory study on Airbnb hosts' experiences

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## Abstract
Currently, there are four million hosts on Airbnb worldwide (Airbnb (2021). Although the number of Airbnb hosts keeps on rising, little is known about their experiences, as most studies on accommodation sharing services have predominantly focused on guests' perspectives. This exploratory study investigates the work-family experiences of Airbnb hosts. Following preliminary interviews, we recruited Airbnb hosts to complete an online survey in which we examined the relationships between hosts' preference for managing their work-family responsibilities (segmentation vs integration) in relation to work-family conflict, satisfaction, and intention to stay with Airbnb, and life satisfaction. Our results—from 136 respondents—indicated that Airbnb hosts who prefer segmentation (separating work and family) experience higher work-family conflict, which was associated with lower job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and intention to stay, compared to those who prefer integration (mixing work and family). Indirect effects were also found; work-family conflict mediated the relationship between segmentation preference and the studied outcomes. Findings suggest that work-family conflict needs to be re-examined in light of the unique demands associated with the gig economy. This study breaks new ground by investigating the work-family lives of Airbnb hosts, with important consequences for individuals, families, guests, and communities.

## Keywords

## Introduction

The gig economy features temporary employment, contracts, and projects offered by gig workers who provide services or share assets with consumers via an online platform. Airbnb resides within the gig economy and relies on sharing lodging and services to guests as an alternative to hotels. In 2013, companies in the leading five gig economy sectors (i.e., crowdfunding, online distance work, home sharing, car sharing, and

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online music and video streaming) generated 15 billion dollars in sales revenue (Pricewaterhouse Coopers, 2015). The same study estimates that by 2025, the earned sales revenue will grow to 335 billion dollars which represents 50% of the revenues in these markets. Recent estimates suggest that 40% of the US and European workforce are involved in the gig economy (Varty, 2018); these estimates do not account for the Covid-19 pandemic, which has forced some to start engaging in—and others to adapt their current—gig economy work (Spajic, 2021).

Airbnb is a leading accommodation sharing service and has grown exponentially since it was founded in 2008. In 2021, Airbnb counts 5.6 million active listings spread across 100,000 cities in over 220 countries and regions worldwide (Airbnb, 2021). A study by Adamiak found that the total number of Airbnb listings in countries is influenced by the level of economic development and size of inbound tourism flow (Adamiak, 2019). The same study shows that while Airbnb operates in most countries of the world, half of its supply is located in Europe. Asian countries are on the rise (China's active Airbnb listings rose from 13th to 3rd place over the last 13 years), and the USA represents a rather stable presence, representing an estimated 15% of all listings. Among the listings, a third are located in major cities and another third in coastal areas. Yet, in mature Airbnb markets (e.g., Paris, London, and Barcelona), the number of offers outside of major cities grew faster than within these cities. And, despite the pandemic-related downturn, Airbnb's recent earnings report (Novet, 2021) demonstrates that their post-pandemic pivot helped produce massive success this past year. This, along with a record-breaking IPO at the end of 2020 (Griffith, 2020), supports CEO Brian Chesky's reported need for "millions more hosts" to meet current and future Airbnb demand (Bursztynsky, 2021).

Despite the rising number of Airbnb hosts, little is known about their experiences, as most studies on accommodation sharing services have predominantly focused on guests' perspectives (see e.g., Moon et al., 2019; Serrano et al., 2021) and increasingly on the impact of COVID-19 on Airbnb (see e.g., Bresciani et al., 2021). The limited studies on Airbnb hosts fall in two main categories. The first comprises hosts' profiles and reviews presented on Airbnb's official website; these studies examine rental price (Ert et al., 2016; Han et al., 2019; Sainaghi et al., 2021), pricing strategy (Gibbs et al., 2018; Magno et al., 2018), racial discrimination (Kakar et al., 2018; Marchenko, 2019), and satisfaction (Johnson and Neuhofer, 2017). The second category comprises investigations of the psychological aspects of being an Airbnb host, in

particular the motivation for hosting (see e.g., Guttentag et al., 2018), which is primarily associated with financial gains (Crommelin et al., 2018; Karlsson and Dolnicar, 2016; Lampinen and Cheshire, 2016). Not much is known about other aspects such as Airbnb hosts' work-family lives. This is surprising given the fact that many Airbnb accommodations are properties (e.g., rooms and basement apartments) that hosts physically share with guests, potentially impacting the experiences of Airbnb guests as well as hosts. Specifically, nearly half (47.6%) of Airbnb listings are for a "private room" (located within a house or flat that hosts might live in and share with guests), 49.3% of listings are for an "entire space" (where guests and hosts do not share living space, common areas, or bathroom), and the remaining <3% are for rooms shared with other guests.[1]

This exploratory study contributes to the work-family literature in several ways. First, we examine the work-family experiences of Airbnb hosts, a population that has received little attention in the literature. Since accommodation sharing services are on the rise, it is important to have a more holistic view of Airbnb hosts and their experiences managing the work-family interface. Although the work-family literature has examined employees who work at home or who telecommute, these work arrangements do not involve direct physical presence of customers (guests) in the employees' home/family environment per se (i.e., sharing a living space). Hosts have a unique work arrangement that can help in furthering an understanding of the work-family nexus in the gig economy.

Next, we apply boundary theory to explain the possible strategies for integration or segmentation of hosts' lives and how they might choose to interact with guests. Some hosts might welcome and encourage interactions with guests while others might feel that such involvement is an intrusion and inconvenience. Understanding such preferences is critical for effective host/guest experiences. Finally, we explore the impact of work-family conflict (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985) on host job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and intention to stay with Airbnb. Amidst continuing growth of the gig economy, we hope this, and future examinations of hosts' experiences, will provide guidance to hosts in choosing and managing within the gig environment. Moreover, we offer strategies that may increase host retention, thereby affecting future growth of the Airbnb business model.

## Contextualizing boundary theory

Accommodation is a 24/7 business. It is well-documented that individuals are subject to high

levels of work and non-work conflict in the hospitality industry (see meta-analysis of Xu and Cao, 2019). Compared to traditional hoteliers, Airbnb hosts have greater control in terms of room availability and pricing, house rules, and interaction with guests. Yet, hosts might also experience interference as they respond to guests requesting pre-arrival information, demanding assistance during stay, and arriving and departing at irregular non-work hours. This might be particularly true for hosts who rent a shared space (such as a room in their own house) and thus experience blurring of spatial work-family boundaries that affect their personal life. In addition, as travelers booking Airbnb properties may hail from locations half a world away, their "urgent" inquiries may land in a host's in-box during the host's sleeping hours; thus, creating potential for even more interference. Indeed, one of the principal challenges of self-employed individuals (i.e., gig workers) working from home is managing the boundaries between work and home (Mustafa and Gold, 2013). By examining the Airbnb context, we respond to the need to study "extremely integrated or segmented work and family situations" to better understand boundary dynamics (Allen et al., 2014).

The term "*boundaries*" refers to "mental fences" that individuals create to manage their environment (Zerubavel, 1991) and specifically denotes the spatial, temporal, psychological, and social separation between work and family life (Standen et al., 1999). Boundary theory postulates that individuals actively create boundaries around their work and family domains (Ashforth et al., 2000). Segmentation and integration are two mechanisms used to manage the boundaries (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Although segmentors prefer to keep activities of each domain within their respective boundaries (e.g., not solve personal issues at work, not think of work at home), integrators willingly allow activities in each domain to influence the other (e.g., responding to work emails during the weekend, making personal calls at work).

Segmentation (v. integration) preference thus predicts a low degree of boundary permeability (Kim and Hollensbe, 2017), or the degree to which thoughts, emotions, and behaviors from one domain affect another domain (Clark, 2000). However, boundary permeability can be asymmetrical. For instance, for some individuals, work-related issues might rarely permeate in the home sphere (strong home boundary). Yet, family-related issue might regularly infiltrate in the work domain (weak work boundary) such that putting family first becomes a boundary management tactic itself (Thompson et al., 2021). Past research shows that segmentation preferences and behaviors tend to reduce work-family conflict because individuals consciously keep their work and family separate and prevent interference between the two domains (Methot and LePine, 2016; Park et al., 2011; Powell and Greenhaus, 2010; Yang et al., 2019).

However, we postulate the opposite—that preference for segmentation is linked to increased work-family conflict for Airbnb hosts—because of the nature of the accommodation sharing business, which is highly integrated. Just as individuals prefer to segment or integrate, workplace environments also vary in the degree to which they promote segmentation or integration (Hochschild, 1997). For example, integrating policies such as on-site day care at the workplace, favor the blurring of work-family boundaries. Hence, research has concluded that segmenting and integrating strategies are most effective when individuals' boundary preference and workplace norms, climate, and expectations are congruent (Kreiner, 2006; Rothbard et al., 2005). In an extremely integrated setting such as Airbnb, particularly for those hosts who share their guest accommodations with their own living space, a preference for segmentation would be incongruent.

Given Airbnb hosts' 24/7 expected availability and the possibility that hosts accommodate guests (work) in their home (shared space), work-related issues are likely to infiltrate the home domain and have differential impact on hosts' work-family experiences. Previous research suggested that boundary violation, such as work intruding into family time when individuals are segmentors, can result in increased work-family conflict (Kreiner et al., 2009). Within the Airbnb environment, which is a high-boundary permeability condition, we expect that hosts who are segmentors would experience greater work-family conflict, both in terms of work interfering with family (WIF) and family interfering with work (FIW). For example, segmentors might have to respond to guests' urgent inquiries at times they have dedicated solely for family-related responsibilities, which can contribute to the experience of work-family conflict. On the other hand, hosts who are integrators might appreciate the interaction across work and home domains enabled in the Airbnb environment, such as being able to fulfill demands from both domains simultaneously (e.g., a host using a smartphone to respond to a guest request while attending their child's sporting event) and may therefore experience lower levels of work-family conflict in comparison to segmentors.

**Hypothesis 1.** Preferences for segmentation (versus integration) will be associated with greater (a) WIF and (b) FIW in the Airbnb context.

In addition to segmentation preference, the type of space provided by hosts is also expected to be related to

work-family conflict. Because shared space boundaries (such as a room in a host's home) are likely to be more permeable than non-shared accommodations (such as a host's entire apartment or house), we expect that hosts providing shared space—with increased guest interactions and interruptions, will report higher levels of both directions of work-family conflict. Thus, we propose:

**Hypothesis 2.** Shared space (versus non-shared space) will be associated with greater (a) WIF and (b) FIW in the Airbnb context.

The scarcity hypothesis (Goode, 1960) proposes that when individuals experience inter-role conflicts due to the limited resources available to fulfill the dual demands of work and family roles, there are negative repercussions, such as stress and anxiety. In the extant work-family literature, researchers have tended to find that work-family conflict, regardless of its direction, has detrimental effect on well-being (Grant-Vallone and Donaldson, 2001; Greenhaus et al., 2006) and work-related outcomes for individuals. Since previous work suggests that higher levels of work-family conflict are associated with reduced job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and intention to stay (Allen et al., 2000; Amstad et al., 2011; Shockley and Singla, 2011), we expect to see similar relationships in the context of Airbnb hosts.

**Hypothesis 3.** Both WIF and FIW will be associated with reduced levels of (a) job satisfaction, (b) life satisfaction, and (c) intention to stay with Airbnb.

Further, our hypotheses thus far imply the mediating role of work-family conflict. We argue that hosts who have a higher preference for segmentation will experience higher levels of work-family conflict because of the incongruence between their preference and the Airbnb environment. As a result, they may experience lower levels of job satisfaction and life satisfaction and a decreased likelihood of staying with Airbnb. Similarly, when hosts live in a shared space (guests are in the home), they will experience higher levels of work-family conflict, resulting in lower levels of job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and a decreased likelihood of staying with Airbnb. Thus, we predict:

**Hypothesis 4.** Both WIF and FIW will mediate relationships between segmentation preference and (a) job satisfaction, (b) life satisfaction, and (c) intention to stay with Airbnb.

**Hypothesis 5.** Both WIF and FIW will mediate relationships between shared space and (a) job satisfaction, (b) life satisfaction, and (c) intention to stay with Airbnb.

## Method

### Sample

Prior to developing a survey, we created an interview protocol and interviewed a dozen "superhosts" about their Airbnb experiences. Superhosts are experienced hosts who have a 4.8 (or higher) average overall rating (out of five maximum) based on reviews from the Airbnb guests, have completed at least 10 stays in the past year, have less than a 1% cancellation rate in a year, and a 90% response rate within 24 h. Given the unique experience of sharing one's home with strangers as a means for generating income, we felt interviews were necessary to understand—without presupposing a typical work-family conflict model—the context in which these gig workers operate. Our interview comprised open-ended questions that would help us understand: the motivation for or evolution of becoming a host,[2] the likes and dislikes of being a host, the challenges hosts experience in managing the Airbnb work/family interface, and their plans for the future vis-à-vis Airbnb. We also gathered demographic information about their hosting experience (years hosting, hours per week spent managing their Airbnb business, percent of total income derived from Airbnb) to ensure the data collected from interviews were representative. Our analysis of common themes in the interview data guided our survey development.

One hundred and eighty-one respondents were recruited through six different Airbnb-related Facebook groups to participate in the online survey via Qualtrics from late 2018 through early 2019. In order to qualify for the study, participants needed to manage their own Airbnb business, as opposed to hiring someone else to manage their Airbnb listing.[3] After consenting to the study and completing the survey, participants had a chance to win one of five $50 Amazon gift cards. Removing incomplete surveys, the final sample consisted of 136 Airbnb hosts. Respondents were 81.2% female,[4] 66.2% were married or living as married, and 76.9% had a least a bachelor's degree. The majority of the respondents (81.0%) were located in North America, in rural, suburban, and urban areas. For the type of Airbnb listings, 34.1% of the participants leased private or shared rooms (such that they would share their living space with Airbnb guests), whereas 65.9% of them leased entirely private space (such that they would not share their living space with Airbnb guests).

### Measures

Measures for the study were selected from existing scales in the organizational behavior literature. Most of

the scales used have been subjected to extensive development and have exhibited acceptable psychometric properties. Some of the items were adapted so that mentions of "work" referred to respondents' Airbnb-related responsibilities. Given that many of the respondents did Airbnb work (hosting) part-time, we wanted to ensure that the questions tapped into respondents' work/family conflict related to the work of hosting Airbnb property and not another job.

*Preference for Segmentation/Integration.* Preference for segmentation/integration was measured using Kreiner's (2006) four-item variable which captures individuals' desire to keep activities and thoughts about one domain separate from the other domain. Measured on a seven-point Likert scale, higher scores on items (e.g., "I don't like work issues creeping into my non-work roles and activities"), represented stronger preferences for segmentation (v. integration). The four items demonstrated strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.93$) and were averaged to form a composite score.

*Work-Family conflict.* Work-family conflict was measured separately to capture both directions of the conflict. We used the Netemeyer, Boles, and McMurrian's (1996) five-item WIF and five-item FIW scales; both using five-point Likert-type scales. The work interfering with family (WIF) variable ($\alpha = 0.90$) included items such as "Things I want to do at home do not get done because of the demands my Airbnb work puts on me." The family interfering with work (FIW) variable ($\alpha = 0.88$) included items such as, "I have to put off doing Airbnb-related tasks because of the demands on my time at home."

*Type of Space.* Participants were asked to describe the type of space that they provide to guests in their Airbnb business. The response options included shared space with host (which is coded as 1) or non-shared space (which is coded as 0). Shared space includes guests renting rooms inside the Airbnb hosts' house or apartment (i.e., listed as "private room" or "shared room" on their Airbnb listings). Non-shared space involves a guest renting the entire unit without the host present (i.e., listed as "entire place" on their Airbnb listings).

*Job satisfaction.* Job satisfaction, an overall measure of the degree to which an individual is happy with their Airbnb work, was measured using the global job satisfaction scale of Camman et al. (1979). Participants answered questions such as "in general, I am satisfied with my Airbnb work," on a five-point Likert scale. When necessary, we reverse-scored items such as "most of the time I have to force myself to do my Airbnb work"

so that higher scores reflected greater job satisfaction. The Cronbach alpha of this measure was 0.65.

*Life satisfaction.* We used the Satisfaction with Life scale (SWLS)—a five-item construct—to assess an individual's cognitive judgment of their satisfaction with their life as a whole (Diener et al., 1985). Individuals completing the questionnaire responded to statements such as "In most ways, my life is close to my ideal," using a five-point Likert scale. The Cronbach alpha for this measure was 0.87.

*Intention to stay with Airbnb.* Intention to stay with Airbnb was measured by six items compiled from the 15-item organizational commitment questionnaire (OCQ) (Mowday et al., 1979). Sample items include "I feel myself to be part of the Airbnb community," and "I would leave Airbnb if offered the same job with another company" (reverse-scored). Scores from the six items, which were measured on a five-point scale, were averaged to form a composite score. The Cronbach alpha for this measure was 0.71.

## Data analysis

All analyses were conducted using Mplus 8.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2017) with maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors. To examine the measurement model, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to confirm that the observed variables have been satisfactorily loaded onto their respective latent variables. Fit indices including chi-square statistic ($\chi^2$), Comparative Fit Index (CFI; above 0.90 indicates acceptable fit), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI; above 0.90 indicates acceptable fit), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA; below 0.08 indicates acceptable fit; Hu and Bentler, 1999), and Standardized Root Mean Square (SRMR; below 0.08 is good) were used to examine model fit. Then, a path analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses.

Previous research has suggested that men and women have different experiences in the work-family interface, thus we controlled for gender. Because Airbnb hosts' family situation may influence their work-family experiences (Friedman and Greenhaus, 2000), marital status was included in the analysis as another control variable. We also controlled for whether participants had children aged 18 or younger living at home at least 50% of the time.
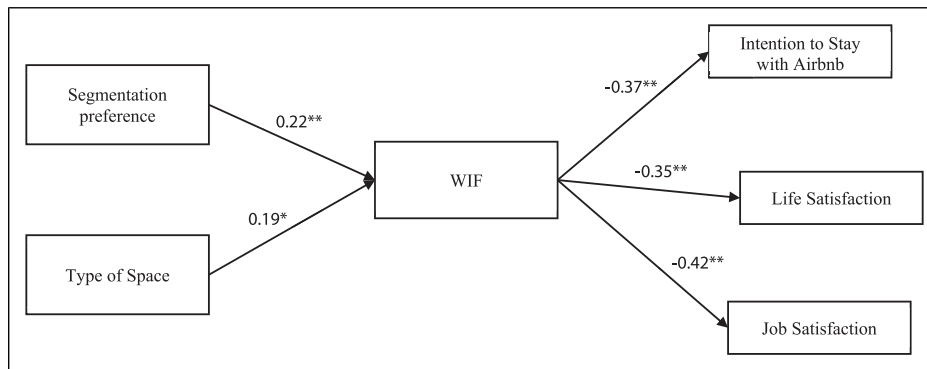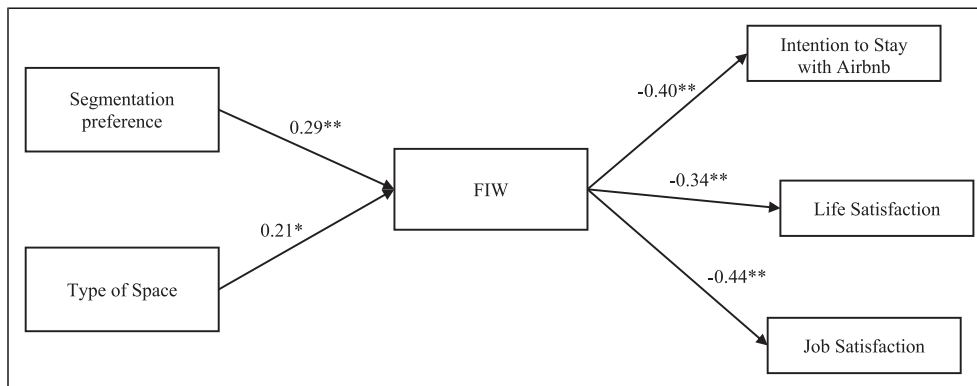
## Results

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables. Note that nearly

**Table 1.** Means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables.

|                                        | M    | SD   | 1       | 2      | 3       | 4       | 5      | 6    |
|----------------------------------------|------|------|---------|--------|---------|---------|--------|------|
| 1. Segmentation preference             | 4.56 | 1.6  |         |        |         |         |        |      |
| 2. Type of space (1=Shared space)      | 0.34 | 0.48 | 0.022   |        |         |         |        |      |
| 3. WIF                                 | 2.29 | 1.06 | 0.22**  | 0.22*  |         |         |        |      |
| 4. FIW                                 | 1.83 | 0.85 | 0.29**  | 0.20*  | 0.74**  |         |        |      |
| 5. Job satisfaction                    | 2.92 | 0.45 | -0.22*  | -0.14  | -0.39** | -0.42** |        |      |
| 6. Life satisfaction                   | 3.99 | 0.80 | -0.09   | -0.22* | -0.35** | -0.32** | 0.37** |      |
| 7. Intention to stay with Airbnb       | 3.51 | 0.71 | -0.06   | -0.14  | -0.34** | -0.37** | 0.42** | 0.11 |

*Note. N* = 136.
*$p < 0.05$. **$p < 0.01$.



**Figure 1.** Path Analysis Results with WIF as mediator. Note. Estimates are standardized coefficients. * *p*<0.05. **p<0.01.



**Figure 2.** Path Analysis Results with FIW as mediator. Note. Estimates are standardized coefficients. * *p*<0.05. **p<0.01.

all correlations are statistically significant and in the expected direction.

We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to test our measurement model. The measurement model exhibited satisfactory fit: $\chi2$ (335) = 462.74, $p < 0.01$, CFI = 0.93, TFI = 0.92, SRMR = 0.07, and RMSEA = 0.05.

Figure 1 shows the path analysis results with WIF as the mediator, and Figure 2 shows the path analysis

results with FIW as the mediator. Hypothesis 1 examined the link between segmentation preference and (a) WIF and (b) FIW. Our results supported this hypothesis, suggesting higher preferences for segmentation (versus integration) was associated with higher levels of WIF ($\beta$ = 0.22, $p < 0.01$) and FIW ($\beta$ = 0.29, $p < 0.01$).

Hypothesis 2 examined the relationship between type of space and (a) WIF and (b) FIW. We found that shared

space (compared to non-shared space) was associated with higher levels of WIF ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.05$) and FIW ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, hypothesis 2 was supported.

For hypothesis 3, we expected both WIF and FIW would be negatively associated with job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and intention to stay with Airbnb. Indeed, when Airbnb hosts experience higher levels of WIF, they faced reduced job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.42$, $p < 0.01$) and life satisfaction ($\beta = -0.35$, $p < 0.01$), as well as reduced intention to stay with Airbnb ($\beta = -0.37$, $p < 0.01$). Similarly, when Airbnb hosts experience higher levels of FIW, they also experienced lower levels of job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.44$, $p < 0.01$), life satisfaction ($\beta = -0.34$, $p < 0.01$), and less likely to stay with Airbnb ($\beta = -0.40$, $p < 0.01$). Our data supported hypothesis 3.

We also looked at the mediating role of WIF and FIW for hypotheses 4 and 5. We found that WIF mediated the relationship between segmentation preference and job satisfaction (indirect effect = -0.09, $p < 0.05$, 95% CI = [-0.17, -0.01]), life satisfaction (indirect effect = -0.08, $p < 0.05$, 95% CI = [-0.14, -0.01]), as well as intention to stay with Airbnb (indirect effect = -0.08, $p < 0.05$, 95% CI = [-0.14, -0.01]). WIF also mediates the link between type of space and job satisfaction (indirect effect = -0.08, $p < 0.05$, 95% CI = [-0.15, -0.004]), life satisfaction (indirect effect = -0.07, $p < 0.05$, 95% CI = [-0.13, -0.002]), as well as intention to stay with Airbnb (indirect effect = -0.07, $p < 0.05$, 95% CI = [-0.14, -0.002]).

Our data also suggested that FIW mediated the relationship between segmentation preference and job satisfaction (indirect effect = -0.13, $p < 0.05$, 95% CI = [-0.21, -0.05]), life satisfaction (indirect effect = -0.10, $p < 0.05$, 95% CI = [-0.17, -0.03]), as well as intention to stay with Airbnb (indirect effect = -0.12, $p < 0.05$, 95% CI = [-0.18, -0.05]). FIW also mediates the link between type of space and job satisfaction (indirect effect = -0.09 $p < 0.05$, 95% CI = [-0.18, -0.01]), life satisfaction (indirect effect = -0.07, $p < 0.05$, 95% CI = [-0.14, -0.001]), as well as intention to stay with Airbnb (indirect effect = -0.08, $p < 0.05$, 95% CI = [-0.16, -0.01]). Thus, hypotheses 4 and 5 were supported.

## Discussion

The gig economy is expected to continue expanding (Pricewaterhouse Coopers, 2015), even more so in light of the economic chaos wrought by the pandemic, which has seen an exponential rise of delivery services, need-driven additional income work, and virtual services previously delivered in an office (Henderson, 2020). In fact, the last of these trends contributes to a different type of work/family interference, wherein employees use home spaces to conduct business, further blurring the work/family boundary. However, we instead focused on the gig work of an Airbnb host, the nature of this environment—wherein hosts' workspace is their home space and vice versa—is of particular interest to work-family researchers. Moreover, as one element of a host's reputation is predicated upon their "within one hour" response time to potential (and current) guest inquiries from around the world, the blurring of the work and home boundary is a potential hazard of the work. To maintain a positive reputation as hosts, these gig workers have no choice but to deal with the blurring of the work/family boundaries.

In support of our hypothesis 1, our results show that hosts with higher preferences for segmentation (versus integration) experience higher levels of work-family conflict in an Airbnb context. This is in line with past research which has underlined that because segmentors prefer to keep work and nonwork roles separate, a working context that reduces boundaries such as working from home, would be incongruent with segmentors' preferences resulting in misalignment (Rothbard et al., 2005). Our study seems to suggest that despite the lure of the highly autonomous, revenue-generating work as an Airbnb host—as "sold" by Airbnb (whether full-time or as a "side hustle"), this work is not suited for everyone. While hosts may experience the benefits of being able to "be their own boss" and "control their own schedule," as well as maybe better manage work and family demands through reduced commuting times and improved relationships with family members (Baruch, 2000), individuals need to balance the costs and benefits of such integration due to its impact on well-being (ter Hoeven and Van Zoonen, 2015). The highly permeable work/life boundary can be problematic for some.

We also tested the relationship between type of space and work-family conflict and found support for hypothesis 2. Without the temporal boundary of set working hours, for example, the unintended results of gig work can increase role interruptions and work intensification, which can be harmful for segmentors and integrators (Kelliher and Anderson, 2010; Lehdonvirta, 2018). For example, self-employed gig workers are often "always-on" for both work and family obligations, responding to their family needs, but also experiencing increased pressure to be available 24/7 for clients in order to generate income (Hilbrecht and Lero, 2014). People who prefer segmented lives—where they can physically and psychologically separate the work and non-work roles and demands—will not thrive in this environment. This is especially the case for hosts whose accommodations are part of (i.e., shared with) their guests' accommodations; not only will the work responsibilities spill over into the non-work

domain but also the guests might physically "intrude" into a host's non-workspace.

Our study also supports hypothesis 3 as WIF/FIW was negatively associated with job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and intention to stay with Airbnb. We were also interested in exploring the casual mechanisms that might underlie boundary management preferences and work and life related outcomes. In hypotheses 4 and 5, we reasoned and found support that segmentors would experience greater work-family conflict leading to lower levels of job and life satisfaction and intention to stay the Airbnb job. Segmentors experience greater work/family conflict (both WIF and FIW) than do integrators, and segmentors also experience lower satisfaction in their work and life in general. For those who may have left the hospitality industry in search of greater freedom in their working lives (Lind Fischer et al., 2019) by applying their skills to their own "hotel" in the Airbnb environment, the increased work/family conflict and reduced satisfaction may be unexpected and jarring—creating the possibility for even greater stress. Added to this is the growing dissatisfaction among hosts who perceive a loss of power in the Airbnb platform as they cannot reject or cancel a reservation due to the associated penalty of being negatively ranked (Farmaki et al., 2020). Yet, a host might need to reject or cancel a reservation if a non-work situation (e.g., becoming seriously ill or traveling somewhere urgently) were to arise. In a more traditional employee role, segmentors might be able to take a last-minute sick day or utilize medical leave (with little to no financial or career penalty). An Airbnb host needing to accommodate their work demands (e.g., impending guest arrival) when unplanned non-work demands arise can increase their stress, especially when adjusting (e.g., cancelling a reservation) or finding a replacement (who else would welcome their guest?), might not be possible due to expectations and penalties associated with the business.

Our study also sheds light on why hosts might intend to leave Airbnb. There is anecdotal evidence that hosts exit their Airbnb businesses due to intrusive guests along with high levels of stress related to the rating system (see e.g., comments found in: community.withairbnb.com). Indeed, perceived lack of control and uncertainty over how algorithmic evaluations work create anxiety among some Airbnb hosts (Jhaver et al., 2018). Our findings support this anecdotal evidence: segmentors are more likely than integrators to express intentions to leave Airbnb.

Finding flexibility in work was key for becoming a host for 40% of respondents (responding either very important or extremely important). Indeed, previous studies have shown that the gig economy has created new jobs, additional income, and flexibility to choose where to work, when to work, and which work to perform (Lampinen and Cheshire, 2016; Schor and Attwood-Charles, 2017). Yet, our results indicate that the flexibility afforded by hosting may come with a cost in the form of high levels of work-family conflict and reduced life satisfaction, particularly for those who are segmentors or who share their homes with their guests. These findings add to the increasing negative outcomes (such as lack of employment benefits such as sick time or holiday pay, job security, and promotion opportunities; see e.g., Calo and Rosenblat, 2017) associated with the growing gig economy.

Future researchers might examine whether segmentors in traditional hospitality jobs experience more or less work-family conflict than do integrators in Airbnb hosting jobs, controlling for variables such as number of hours and income. Such research, perhaps comparing the experiences of employees in the hospitality industry with Airbnb hosts, has the opportunity to further elucidate the relative importance of fit between segmentation preference and type of job (traditional versus Airbnb gig work).

In our sample, most (over 60%) indicated that they expected their Airbnb revenues to increase (i.e., growing their business), while a third (32.8%) indicated that they expected their Airbnb revenues to remain the same, in the next year. These findings may suggest that most of the hosts consider sticking with their Airbnb businesses. Only about 7% expected their revenues to decrease, which might be an indication of a host considering dropping out of the business or reducing the number of properties that they own or manage. With so much apparent interest in maintaining their Airbnb business, and the projections that Airbnb's business will continue increasing,[5] we consider several suggestions for those whose segmentation preference might not align well with the Airbnb environment.

## Practical implications

The first set of recommended strategies for hosts concerns managing boundaries—physical and psychological. The investment in having non-shared space may help hosts—especially segmentors—cope with the work-family boundary blurring. Because work-family conflict is lower for hosts whose rental (i.e., work) spaces are physically separated from the family (i.e., home) space, we recommend that hosts consider creating separate entrances and separate quarters for eating and doing laundry, if possible. A less costly solution would be to specify certain hours that guests can use shared spaces, like the kitchen or laundry areas. Although such restrictions are not uncommon in a hotel, how similar Airbnb guests' expectations are for

hotel versus Airbnb stays may impact how they rate hosts, which could have a substantial impact on future bookings. Other possibilities to address boundary management needs include hiring an external manager, or if possible, renting out space in another structure (home, street, and city). Additional income may not be worth the psychological (and physical) risk of sharing your home with guests. Perhaps other gig work or contract work that does not involve sharing one's house (or car!) with strangers could be pursued by segmentors in particular should additional income be needed or desired, even more important amidst the current pandemic.

Psychological boundary management will be more difficult given the expectations that an Airbnb host should be available 24/7 (if they want to maintain a positive reputation). However, one suggestion is for hosts to clearly indicate the times during the day (denoting the time zone where their rental space is located) that they can respond within one hour versus times when this is not possible. Some guests may honor this indication while others choose more "accommodating" hosts or "punish" hosts for slow response times in the form of low star ratings. Further, hosts might consider teaming up with another person or host in a different time zone who can provide the quick response as expected. However, teaming up with another host runs counter to the independence and autonomy that may have attracted hosts to and is presumed to be important in the world of Airbnb. Future research might compare several factors that entice people to become hosts, such as need for autonomy, desire for social interaction, and preference for segmentation to determine the relative impact each has on the hosts' experience of work-family conflict and satisfaction with work and life. Moreover, these factors may differ among different populations. For example, the fastest growing segment of Airbnb hosts is seniors over 60 (Muthara, 2018) whose concerns about hosting may center more on personal safety than on balancing work and family responsibilities, as compared with the need for 24/7 availability which may work for single adults but not those with children (or aging parents) requiring care. It may also be the case that because women outnumbered men in the "Great Resignation"[6]—partly attributed to the burnout women experienced as they bore the brunt of family responsibilities (and children's schooling and daycare responsibilities) when the pandemic forced employees out of the workplace—we may see an even higher (and disproportionate) number of women seeking Airbnb and other gig employment to better manage work and family. Whether women hosts—prior to or after the pandemic—have lower work/family conflict or greater work and life satisfaction (and the factors that impact

these outcomes) would be a fruitful avenue for future study.

Another practical implication of our study is addressed to the Airbnb company. The organization could provide a more balanced view of the pros and cons of the role of hosting on their website, along with greater transparency about the profit projections (revenues minus fees and additional incremental costs such as utilities—preparing for and hosting guests—and the occasional damages the hosts incur) that would enable thoughtful decision making about joining Airbnb. In addition, their website and other onboarding materials or processes can offer suggestions and solutions that enable hosts to have a less conflictual and more satisfying experiences given the work/family challenges that exist despite potentially opposite expectations. Although such an approach might seem to undermine business opportunities (fewer hosts, fewer properties, and less revenue for Airbnb), being transparent about the benefits and consequences of working in this sharing economy subset of the gig economy might help preserve the image and reputation of Airbnb that has been increasingly degraded via social media. In addition to presenting the pros and cons, Airbnb could provide advice for current and prospective hosts for selecting into and succeeding in such contexts.

## Limitations of study

Although this study provides insights into the work-family dynamics of Airbnb hosts, several limitations should be noted. The sample size, although adequate, could be larger. Women comprised a disproportionate share of the sample, but it was not possible to determine the extent to which this sample is representative of the Airbnb host population. In addition, missing data limited the sample size for some statistical analyses.

At a more granular level, the overall means for two key study variables—WIF and FIW—on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high) were 2.29 and 1.83, respectively. Compared to prior work/family research, these numbers were relatively low, suggesting that while the experience of work/family conflict was indeed related to preference for segmentation, shared space, and lower satisfaction (job and life) and intent to stay, it may be that those who work in the Airbnb context have less work/family conflict than those in more traditional workplaces. More research is needed to adequately assess this phenomenon.

Finally, as the gig economy continues to grow, researchers need to examine both traditional and contemporary individual and contextual characteristics relating to gig employment, while controlling for the level of involvement in the gig economy relative to other

compensated employment. For example, some hosts worked only 5 hours a week, on average, in their Airbnb business while maintaining fulltime employment. Whether Airbnb hosting represents a side hustle, a fulltime gig apart from a host's traditional job (part or fulltime), or the entirety of hosts' working hours and income would be worthy of analysis in future research. As the nature of work and working evolves, so too must our research on the lives of individuals working in these "new" contexts.

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## Notes

1. The latest statistics we identified cover the period 2008–2017 and the proportions have varied very little over this period. Source: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-percentage-of-entire-home-private-room-and-shared-room-listings-in-Airbnb_tbl1_320274463
2. As noted in the 2016 McKinsey study, 70% of 6000 gig workers they surveyed (which includes Airbnb, and also Uber, Lyft, and several other professions) were in the gig economy by choice while 30% were forced by economic necessity, for example, laid off.
3. The question as to whether a host contracted someone else to manage their property was a screener; respondents who did not manage their own property were pushed out of the survey.
4. Airbnb reports that 56% of hosts are female (Airbnb, 2021); that our sample was more heavily female-skewed may reflect the fact that we used Facebook (also skewed female) to recruit most of the respondents, and that the researchers appeared to be female.
5. It is important to note that the data were collected prior to the Coronavirus pandemic. Although early in the pandemic, Airbnb occupancy rates were down significantly, the numbers rebounded as travelers sought lodging options that were more private and hence safe than hotels.
6. The Great Resignation refers to the millions of people voluntarily leaving the global workforce in mid-2021, due to burnout, availability of social safety net programs, and the availability of higher-paying jobs. See for example,

https://www.cnbc.com/2021/11/17/women-are-quitting-at-higher-rates-than-men-during-the-great-resignation.html.

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