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COVID-19 and the Uneven Stress of Social Change: Remote Work and Subject Well-Being

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Abstract

The large-scale move to remote work has been framed as a "silver lining" of COVID-19, despite mixed pre-pandemic evidence on working remotely. To understand intersectional disparities of pandemic-precipitated remote work, we conducted a nationally representative panel survey (October 2020 and April 2021) of workers who worked remotely during the pandemic. Changes (both increases and decreases) in work hours with the move to telecommuting predict worse well-being. Women are at risk of poor well-being concomitant with increased hours, especially younger women without care responsibilities, women with care obligations, minority women, and non-managers. By contrast, men whose hours decrease are at risk, especially minority men, middle-adult men without care responsibilities, and men with care obligations. Sequence analysis identifies four pathways of workplaces—continuous remote working, early return, recent return, and hybrid. Women and men at both ends of the life course (younger and older adults) without care responsibilities, and women with care obligations benefit emotionally from hybrid or continuing remote working arrangements as opposed to returning to working-at-work, whereas the reverse is found for men with care obligations. Minority men and less-educated men benefit from a hybrid arrangement, and men managers gain in well-being when they return to working-at-work fully or partly.

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COVID-19 and the Uneven Stress of Social Change: Remote Work and Subjective Well-Being

One long-standing question in the social sciences is how the changing social organization of work affects people's subjective well-being, thereby (re)producing social inequalities in human welfare (Marx 1964; Weber 1978). Historical evidence abounds on the material and subjective well-being impacts of industrialization (Marx 1964), and with it, increases in bureaucratization and routinization (Weber 1978). Today we are again witnessing upheavals in the social organization of work, transforming where, when, and how work is done. Ratcheting intensification and extensification of paid work have concurred concomitant with globalization and the advancement of information and communication technologies (Burgard et al. 2009; Kalleberg 2018; Kelly and Moen 2020; Schieman, Glavin, and Milkie 2009; Schneider and Harknett 2019). This constitutes the underlying context in which the COVID-19 pandemic precipitated a sudden spike in "home" work, from just around 10%-20% pre-pandemic (Mas and Pallais 2020) to as high as 60% during the pandemic (Brenan 2020). Unprecedented numbers of previously office-bound workers suddenly found themselves working from home.

Working remotely is thus a transformation in process and in flux, evolving in real time and involving deep changes in working conditions. For many workers, for example, hours on the job shifted in both directions, sometimes drastically, as workers moved into remote work (Fan and Moen 2021). But after a sharp increase in distance work in the initial few months, there has been a gradual return of workers to their workplaces through the fourth quarter of 2020, when the trend began to stabilize (Dey et al. 2021). Still, one-and-half years into the pandemic, the number of remote workers remains substantially higher than pre-pandemic levels (Dey et al. 2021). This is a fundamental social change in where and sometimes when work is done. What are the human meanings, in terms of emotional well-being, of these different dynamics—both changes in remote workers' hours and their transitioning into or out of working from home or the office? Moreover, such social transformations often have disparate

impacts (Williams 2021). How are remote working women and men of different ages and life stages and in historically vulnerable subgroups affected by these shifts in work times and work places?

To begin to answer these questions, we conducted a panel (over a six-month period) survey of workers who spent at least some time working remotely following the onset of COVID-19. Our sample was drawn from a nationally representative panel, with the two survey waves conducted in October 2020 (N = 3,017) and April 2021 (N = 2,286). We examine three research questions. First, do continuities and shifts in hours on the job concomitant with the move into remote work predict well-being outcomes, in terms of burnout, work-to-family conflict, job satisfaction, and life satisfaction? Second, as some remote workers begin to transition back to the office, do various trajectories of work arrangements (in terms of where work is done) predict corresponding changes in well-being over the six months between the two survey waves? Third, is the subjective well-being of remote workers located in different intersectional social locations—by gender, to be sure, but also gender intersecting with life-course stage, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status—disparately affected by the dynamics of pandemic-precipitated remote work? Working from home was itself unequally available to different subgroups of the workforce (Dey et al. 2020; Mas and Pallais 2020); but was the actual experience of doing so also stratified across intersectional identities?

COVID-19 constitutes a valuable natural experiment, an exogenous shock unfolding in real time and transforming for many where work is done. Such a large-scale transformation touched the lives of many workers, but was this valued flexibility or imposed constraints? Investigating its psychosocial impacts can bring new understanding to the changing 21st century work/well-being interface. First, we produce timely new knowledge about shifting work arrangements and their well-being implications. This is important, since many have touted the opening up of remote work possibilities as a silver lining of the pandemic (e.g., Spiggle 2020), even as, after the initial spike, many working from home were required to go back to office as early as April 2020 and this trend persisted through October 2020 (BLS 2021). Also unclear is whether there is, in fact, a "silver lining." Does

working remotely indeed promote psychosocial well-being, relative to the well-being of those moving back to working at work? How about those who work in a hybrid arrangement? Pre-pandemic research on the remote work/well-being relationship does not provide a clear picture given the selective nature of who could work remotely. That is, in the years before COVID-19, remote working options tended to be available to better-paid white-collar professional workers who were typically advantaged in ways predictive of emotional well-being (Kelly and Moen 2020; Mas and Pallais 2020). But the pandemic became an inflection point, necessitating all whose jobs could be done remotely to move to home work. This huge national experiment, when everyone who could do so moved to working from home, greatly reduces (though does not eliminate) selectivity issues. For the first time it is possible to examine the psychosocial impacts of remote work among all workers whose jobs could be accomplished remotely.

Second, we contribute to stress process theory by incorporating an intersectionality perspective (Collins and Bilge 2020; Romero 2018) to further flesh out Pearlin's (2010) emphasis on life course as well as other inequalities in stress outcomes. Both stress process and life course theoretical approaches underscore the uneven stress of social change (Elder et al. 2003; Moen 2021; Pearlin 2010). Accordingly, we use the external shock of COVID-19 as a strategic research site to understand stress processes shaping the subjective well-being of remote working women and men at different points in their life courses and in historically vulnerable subgroups.

Third, we examine a broad set of well-being outcomes spanning different domains. Two are related specifically to work. Burnout refers to feelings of being exhausted by the demands of work (Maslach and Jackson 1986), and job satisfaction represents workers' overall evaluation of their jobs and is strongly correlated with both mental health and turnover (Karsh, Booske, and Sainfort 2005). Work-to-family conflict captures strains and spillovers from work to home and to life in general. And life satisfaction is widely used to assess global well-being. Whereas burnout and work-to-family conflict tend to result from insufficient time or energy, job satisfaction and life satisfaction measure

overall cognitive assessment of one's job or life. Collectively, these four outcomes offer a rich and nuanced picture of the well-being impacts of remote work dynamics.

Theoretical Approaches

To examine the well-being implications of remote work dynamics in the time of COVID-19, we build on gendered life-course and stress process perspectives emphasizing the uneven risks of, and vulnerabilities to, work and other transitions (Aneshensel et al. 1991; Elder et al. 2003; Moen 2021; Moen and Spencer 2006; Pearlin 1999; Pearlin et al. 2005).

Both life course and stress process theoretical approaches underscore the dynamics of and need for explicit identification of the disparate human meanings of *social change* (Elder et al. 2003; Moen 2021). Pearlin (1989, 2010), for example, theorizes in his stress process model the importance of macro-level structural arrangements and *changes in them* as contributing to disparities in the risks of chronic stress exposure, as well as in the personal and social resources and capabilities with which to deal with them. The exogenous shock of COVID-19 offers a strategic research site for the study of the dynamics of and disparities in emotional distress. Accordingly, we investigate deliberate shifts in the work environment and subsequent effects on the human experience, a design far superior to cross-sectional studies of workers with and without certain working conditions. We exploit the external shock of the COVID-19 pandemic and the unprecedented remote work experiment that ensued to examine how this social change produces cascading exposures and vulnerabilities—including shifting dislocations in where work is done and changing work hours—detracting from, or possibly enhancing, subjective well-being.

Gendered life course and stress process theories also point to the importance, for psychosocial outcomes, of *timing*—when in individuals' biographies an external shock such as COVID-19 occurs, and *disparities* depending on social locational status. We therefore theorize the social stratification of stress, that people with different social-locational identities not only experience inequalities in social

change, they come to that experience by disparate life course paths with unequal human, cultural, social, and material capital. Cumulative dis/advantage (Dannefer 2020; O'Rand and Henretta 1999) can thus be accentuated in times of dramatic social change. The move to remote work, therefore, will likely heighten existing inequalities. Drawing on six-month panel data, we assess how changes in working conditions, in terms of work times and work places, affect emotional well-being.

To capture disparate experiences, we adopt an intersectional approach (Collins and Bilge 2020; Romero 2018) to examine well-being across overlapping social-locational identities based on the intersections of gender with life-course stage, race/ethnicity, and class. An intersectional approach enables understanding of the well-being effects of deviations from the prevailing gendered ideal worker norm, based on the (white, male) model of commitment to working long hours (Acker 1990; Moen and Roehling 2005; Williams 2000). We expect those who do not live up to the ideal worker norm of being an unencumbered worker suffer more from shifting work hours or places. For example, remote working women caring for young children and/or older infirm relatives may be particularly vulnerable emotionally to increased work hours, given the corollary pandemic-driven closing of childcare facilities and the move to on-line schooling. Less educated and racial/ethnic minority workers are more likely to experience disparities in being excluded from remote working in the first place, but those who do move to remote work during the pandemic are apt to be in lower status jobs (such as administrative support) that are typically closely supervised, possibly deriving fewer emotional benefits from working from home. Women in these circumstances may be particularly disadvantaged, in that they are socially expected to be responsible for housework and childcare, and thus can be more susceptible to the dual demands of work and home (Blair-Loy 2009; Moen and Roehling 2005; Williams 2010) made even more acute during the COVID-19 precipitated lockdown (Williams 2021).

Remote Work Dynamics and Well-being: Hypotheses

COVID-19 has been a stark reminder that systemic arrangements are neither durable nor stable. In this research, we examine two stages of the remote work natural experiment, first when workers who move to remote work experience possible shifts in their work hours, and second when work arrangements continue to evolve for remote workers, with some beginning to return to working at work.

Working from Home: Changes in Work Hours and Well-being

COVID-19 precipitated a massive move to working from home for those whose jobs made this possible, but shifts in working conditions varied considerably. For example, Fan and Moen (2021) find that whereas about half remote workers maintained stable hours, roughly equal numbers of remote workers experienced either increases or declines in work hours in the face of the pandemic.

What are the well-being implications of these shifts or, conversely, continuity in work hours? Existing literature has predominately focused on work hours at a given time point, as opposed to shifts in them in a time of social change (e.g., Adkins and Premeaux 2012; Golden and Wiens-Tuers 2008). Exploiting the sea change in working conditions precipitated by the pandemic, we expect work-hour shifts—both increases and reductions—to be associated with lower well-being among remote workers. Working more than before the pandemic can consume energy as well as time, leading to a sense of burnout and complicating family and personal life, and therefore lower job and life satisfaction. Experiencing a reduction in work hours can be equally distressing, given that low work hours can reflect workers' inability to obtain or maintain the number of hours they would prefer (Reynolds and Aletraris 2006), particularly among white, educated men embracing the ideal worker norm, but also those who are at the margins of the labor market, struggling with making ends meet in these precarious times. Conversely, work hours can also decrease for some due to improved productivity (Fan and Moen 2021), thereby promoting well-being, a pattern more likely to be found among remote workers without care responsibilities or those with more resources to manage the transition to remote work.

Given that paid work and a dedication to the "ideal worker" norm remain central to men's identities (Moen and Roehling 2005; Williams 2000), we expect remote working men's emotional well-being to be more negatively affected by a reduction in work hours; an increase in hours, in comparison, may not affect remote working men's emotional well-being as much, or may even predict their greater well-being relative to women. Conversely, women's dual responsibilities for paid and unpaid family work imply lower emotional health concomitant with an increase in work hours, as well as corollary better well-being with a decrease in hours. But these gendered expectations may well differ for different groups of the remote working population, with deleterious effects particularly pronounced among those working remotely while providing care for young children and/or older infirm relatives, as well as racial/ethnic minority remote workers, less educated remote workers, and non-supervisor remote workers in jobs offering little flexibility despite being accomplished remotely (such as customer service and administrative support).

Shifting Work Locations and Well-being

As the economy began to offer suggestive signs of recovery in the summer of 2020, some remote workers were asked to return to the office, voluntarily did so, or experienced some combination of the two. And some moved into a hybrid arrangement, combining both in-person and remote work. We expect variations in changes in subjective well-being for those in different pathways in terms of where they do their work.

Pre-pandemic evidence is mixed on whether remote work attenuates or intensifies work demands, facilitates or complicates combining work and home roles, or promotes or reduces job and life satisfaction (Allen et al. 2015; Butts et al. 2013). An early review article concludes that little clear evidence exists that remote work increases job satisfaction (Bailey and Kurland 2002). More recent (but still pre-pandemic) studies paint an equally mixed picture. On one hand, offering employees flexibility as to where they do their work reduces time pressures by cutting commuting time (Hansson

et al. 2011). It may also enable employees to better schedule their work hours around their home demands (Gajendran and Harrison 2007; Golden et al. 2006; Versey 2015), leaving more time for family life and other activities (Kelly and Moen 2020). Consequently, remote work may result in less work–family conflict and contribute to increased job satisfaction and quality of life (Gajendran and Harrison 2007; Golden et al. 2006; Kelly et al. 2014; Kelly and Moen 2020).

On the other hand, remote work is often geared to business rather than employee needs, blurring traditional spatial, temporal, and psychological boundaries (Chesley 2014; Kaduk et al. 2019; Kossek and Lambert 2005; Russell et al. 2009) as well as the boundaries between work and home (Golden et al. 2006; Hammer et al. 2005; Hill et al. 2003; Lapierre and Allen 2006; Schieman and Glavin 2008; Schieman and Young 2010; Voydanoff 2005). This is supported by the pre-pandemic finding that working at home was associated with working longer hours (Noonan and Glass 2012). Employees find it more difficult to "leave work at work," especially in view of communication technologies that make it possible and often expected to be available 24/7, a key pathway through which remote work can lead to increased stress and lower job satisfaction (Chesley 2014; Fonner and Roloff 2012; Kelly and Moen 2020).

A randomized trial conducted with call center employees in a Chinese firm (Bloom et al. 2015) offers rigorous experimental evidence on the psychosocial impacts of remote work. Workers who volunteered to work from home were randomly assigned either to work from home or in the office. Those assigned to work remotely reported improved satisfaction, lower emotional exhaustion, and more positive attitudes, compared with those who were randomized to stay in the office. Note, however, that this study relies on a selective sample, consisting of only those interested in working at home. Furthermore, when the firm allowed the experimental employees to reselect between the home and office, more than half switched, indicating a potential learning effect whereby workers' preferences for remote work changed after experiencing it firsthand. Another randomized field trial among IT professionals in the U.S reinforced that voluntary work arrangements (whether remote or in person)

matters for emotional well-being (Kaduk et al. 2019; Kelly and Moen 2020; Moen et al. 2016). And yet the move to working from home concomitant with COVID-19 constituted an external shock, not chosen by those suddenly mandated to do so.

These pre-pandemic studies also focus disproportionately on professional and technical workers, which is understandable given who was privileged, pre-pandemic, to work remotely. But it points to the need to examine the well-being impacts of changing where work is done for workers in diverse occupations and industries, as was the case with the COVID-19 pandemic. What are the psychosocial implications of moving to working remotely when it suddenly becomes a constraining arrangement, or of then being required to return to working in the office?

These transitions occurred in the larger context of a pandemic that itself was inherently stressful, upending the lives of women and men at all ages and life stages and in all walks of life. We theorize remote work may engender additional stress, especially for some segments of the population. Communication technologies fostering connections with managers and coworkers have been shown to promote expectations of instant response, frequent meetings, and always-on availability—chronic stressors in tandem with what are often 24/7 demands (Kelly and Moen 2020; Microsoft 2021). Remote workers whose jobs are at risk—a risk disproportionately shouldered by racial and ethnic minorities, and those with less education—may also experience the stress of uncertain career prospects and feel that they have no legitimate excuse for being unavailable (Filipovic 2020). Looking for ways to demonstrate that they are engaged, they may work longer, at typical non-work as well as conventional working hours, and feel the need to be "always-on", leading to heightened feelings of distress.

Conversely, pandemic-precipitated remote work could have salutary effects. Previous research shows working remotely to be associated with increased perceptions of autonomy as to how to do one's job; it also enables employees to better schedule their work hours around their home demands (Gajendran and Harrison 2007; Golden et al. 2006; Kelly and Moen 2020; Kossek et al. 2006). Moreover, this social crisis may have led to more support provided by coworkers and supervisors.

Managers, for example, may have changed their management strategies to adapt to the changes brought on by telecommuting, even as doing so could have increased their own psychosocial distress.

Combined, these alternative possibilities make it difficult to predict a priori whose emotional well-being will improve or worsen over time, remote workers, returnees, or hybrid workers. Remote work can be perceived as a desired or involuntary arrangement, with correspondingly differential mental health consequences (Kaduk et al 2019; Kelly and Moen 2020). Those required to go back to the office may feel less need to be always on, but they may also perceive less support and less autonomy along with greater health concerns in returning to working at work at a time when the pandemic remains widespread. Those moving to hybrid arrangements may enjoy the benefits of both worlds, but, again depending on their social location, may experience the stresses of each work arrangement.

To capture these potentially heterogeneous outcomes, our uneven stress of social change lens posits disparities in the psychosocial effects associated with remote work for those with different social-locational identities. Much pre-pandemic evidence focuses on gender and parental differences, showing that employees with higher family demands, captured by having children living at home and/or providing care for elderly relatives or other dependent adults, have greater work–family strain and thus a greater need for a flexible, supportive work environment (Kelly et al. 2014; Michel et al. 2011; Moen et al. 2016). For example, a group-randomized trial in an IT setting shows that, when provided with greater control over when and where they work, women experience greater reductions in psychological distress and perceived stress than men, with non-supervisory employees' job satisfaction improving more than that of managers (Moen et al. 2016).

It is not clear whether the same pattern may emerge in the turbulent times of the COVID-19 crisis, which very probably precipitated, especially for women care-providers, heightened tensions and contradictions between the ethic of care and the ideal worker norm (Blair-Loy 2009; Moen and Roehling 2005; Williams 2010). Pre-pandemic evidence documents that mothers (but not fathers) with access to remote work replace the time saved from commuting with childcare and household chores

(Noonan et al. 2007). Women with children at home and/or providing care for elderly relatives may in fact experience increased stress while working from home. It is similarly an empirical question whether racial/ethnic minority, less educated, and non-supervisory women and men workers benefit or suffer from remote working, returning to office, or engaging in hybrid work. In their efforts to juggle demands from work and family, the absence of resources—including less job and schedule control, but also likely the absence of home offices—and their overall lower status may lead such disadvantaged workers (especially women) to find working-at-work or hybrid work arrangements more advantageous than working remotely. Accordingly, we examine disparities in well-being in tandem with shifts in where work is accomplished by gender as it intersects with life stage, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

Data, Measures, and Methods

Data

This research draws on two-wave longitudinal data from a nationally representative survey of remote workers. The longitudinal survey was fielded using KnowledgePanel, the largest probability-based online panel in the United States. Both random-digit-dialing and address-based sampling methodologies are used to recruit KnowledgePanel members. Unlike many opt-in non-probability internet research panels that sample only individuals with internet access and who volunteer for research, KnowledgePanel does not accept self-selected volunteers but is based on a household sampling frame that recruits households regardless of their internet access. Households without an internet connection are provided with a web-enabled device and free internet service to complete online surveys. The survey was pretested to validate all measures and ensure clarity of the questions.

Our baseline survey was conducted in October 2020. The sample consists of 3,017 randomly selected respondents ages 18 and above who worked remotely at some point since the onset of COVID-

19 (ensured through a screening question), regardless of their employment status or work arrangements at the time of the survey. These respondents were surveyed again six months later, in April 2021, with a follow-up rate of 76% (n = 2,286). Attrition analysis indicates that respondents who are younger, with lower household income or greater baseline burnout, and non-Hispanic Blacks are more likely to be lost to follow-up. Attrition, however, is not related to respondents' subjective well-being at baseline (other than burnout), their remote work experience before COVID-19, or their employment status, location of work, managerial status, marital status, or sector measured at baseline. As described below, all regression models are weighted using a weight variable that takes attrition into account.

When analyzing Wave 1 outcomes, we remove 45 respondents who never worked before COVID-19, given our focus on changes in work hours (compared with before COVID-19) as a form of work dynamics; we also remove 143 workers who were not employed (i.e., laid-off, left job voluntarily, or not in the labor force) when surveyed at Wave 1. After further removing 35 respondents who have missing values for any variables used in the analysis, the final sample size for Wave 1 analysis is 2,794. When analyzing changes in well-being between Wave 1 and Wave 2, we remove respondents who were not employed when surveyed at Wave 2, or who spent at least three months in non-employment between Wave 1 and Wave 2 (n = 171). We do not include these respondents so as not to confound the well-being effects of shifting work places and shifting employment status. The final sample size for this panel analysis is 2,094 after removing 21 respondents who have missing values for any variables used in our analysis.

Measures

Outcomes

We examine four well-being outcomes—burnout, work-to-family conflict, job satisfaction, and life satisfaction. All of these measures were asked in both waves, allowing us to examine well-being at Wave 1 and changes in well-being between Wave 1 and Wave 2. *Burnout* is assessed by the question

"How often do you feel burned out by your work?" (1 = never to 4 = often). *Work-to-life conflict* is assessed by the question "How often do the demands of your job interfere with your family or personal life?" (1 = never to 4 = often). *Job satisfaction* is measured through the statement "In general, you are satisfied with your job" (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). *Life satisfaction* is measured through the question "All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole nowadays?" (1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied).

Key Predictors

Changes in work hours (compared with before the pandemic). At Wave 1, respondents were asked how their work hours changed compared with before COVID-19, with five response options (decreased by a significant amount, decreased somewhat, no change, increased somewhat, and increased by a significant amount). For respondents who no longer work from home when surveyed, this question refers to the period when they worked from home during COVID-19. We combine the two "decreased" and the two "increased" categories for ease of interpretation.

Changes in work places (between Wave 1 and Wave 2). As described in the "Analytical Strategy" section below, we use respondents' work arrangements in each month from Wave 1 to Wave 2 to identify patterned sequences of where they work. Specifically, at the second wave, for each month between November 2020 and April 2021, respondents were asked to choose from: (1) working mainly at home; (2) working mainly away from home at a fixed location (e.g., office); (3) hybrid (i.e., about equally at home and away from home); (4) working mainly on the road from a car, truck, train, plane, hotel, or motel room; (5) working at changing client or customer locations; (6) furloughed or laid-off; (7) left my job voluntarily; and (8) other (e.g., retired, keeping house, student). A similar question was asked at Wave 1, though only for the month when they were surveyed (October 2020). We use these seven months' information to conduct sequence analysis. Given the small numbers in some categories, we combine categories 2, 4, and 5 (working away from home), as well as categories 6, 7, and 8 (non-

employment). Therefore, the categories for sequence analysis are: mainly at home; mainly away from home; hybrid; and non-employment. Recall that, to not confound the well-being effects of shifting work places and shifting employment status, our Wave 2 analytic sample consists of respondents who were largely employed between waves; as such, there are few person-months of non-employment for Wave 2 analysis.

Moderators

We compare results across various social locational groups including first gender and then gender in intersection with life-course stage (age/parenting/adult-care obligations), race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. For *life-course stage*, we differentiate five groups based on age, parental status (parents with preschool [younger than 6] or school-aged [6–17] children living at home), and adult-care responsibilities ("During the past 6 months, have you provided at least 3 hours of care per week to an adult relative living with you or living somewhere else?"). Based on ages of respondents and amounts of intensive care for preschoolers, we categorize life-course stage as follows: (1) younger than 35, no childcare/adult-care responsibilities (mean age 28); (2) preschool child at home (regardless of school-aged child), or those in the "sandwich generation" (child at home and care for adults) (mean age 37); (3) ages 35-49, no childcare/adult-care responsibilities (mean age 42); (4) school-aged child at home or caring for adults (but no preschool child) (mean age 46); and (5) ages 50 or older, no childcare/adult-care responsibilities (mean age 59).

Race/ethnicity includes non-Hispanic Whites, non-Hispanic Blacks, non-Hispanic other, and Hispanics. In some analyses we only distinguish between non-Hispanic White workers from minority workers, given the small sample sizes when conducting intersectional analysis. We use *educational attainment* and *managerial status* to measure socioeconomic status, distinguishing those with a Bachelor's degree from those without, as well as those who report themselves to be owners, senior management, or middle management for the job level question.

Covariates

To capture baseline variability in *family circumstances*, we categorize respondents into four groups: (1) single (including a few respondents who have a spouse or partner but do not live with them), (2) spouse or partner working remotely, (3) spouse or partner working at work, and (4) spouse or partner not working. We also control for baseline *household income*, measured as total family income from all sources before taxes. Respondents were asked to choose one category that best describes their family income from a range of categories from under $5,000 to $250,000 or over. We use the midpoint to code each category (e.g., $55,000 for the category of $50,000 to $59,999) and take the log to deal with skewness. We also control for workers' *experience of remote work before COVID-19*, distinguishing those who never worked from home before COVID-19 and those who had at least some prior experience working from home.

Analytical Strategy

Sequence analysis. To identify patterned trajectories of change in work locations, we use sequence analysis and cluster analysis, conducted using the R packages TraMineR (Gabadinho et al. 2011) and WeightedCluster (Studer 2013). Based on respondents' working arrangements—working mainly at home, working mainly away from home, hybrid, and not working—in each month from October 2020 to April 2021, each respondent is assigned a sequence. We then use optimal matching to obtain a distance matrix, describing how far away each respondent is from another (see Appendix A for methodological details). Next, to identify clusters representing ideal typical constellations of work arrangements, we use partitioning around the medoid clustering method, which minimizes a global criterion measuring residual variation (Kaufman and Rousseeuw 2009). We evaluated various fit criteria, including point biserial correlation and the average silhouette width, and found that a three or four-cluster typology provides the best fit for our data (Appendix A). We decide to use the four-cluster typology because the additional cluster represents workers who transitioned from remote work to

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work-at-work between two waves, a theoretically and practically important group to examine separately.

  Ordered logit regression models. For Wave 1 analysis, we use recalled change in work hours to predicts respondents' well-being at Wave 1. To examine changes in subjective well-being between Wave 1 and Wave 2, we use the identified sequences to predict respondents' well-being at Wave 2, while controlling for their corresponding well-being at Wave 1 and other covariates. We use ordered logit regression models for simplicity. We tested for the parallel odds assumption for all models and found the assumption satisfied in most cases; a comparison between ordered logit and multinomial logit regression models in these cases indicates similar findings (see Appendix Table B for details). Missing values are held at a minimum level (less than 1.5%), so we use listwise deletion to handle missingness. All models are weighted to yield findings that are nationally representative and robust to attrition.

  All models are estimated separately by gender; we also examine whether results are different for subgroups at the intersections of gender and other variables of interest—life-course stage, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Given that significance of interaction terms in nonlinear models (such as ordered logit regression models in our case) cannot be used directly to determine whether or not coefficient estimates indeed differ by groups, we provide figures to present findings in the metric of probabilities to better showcase differences across intersecting groups (Long and Mustillo 2018).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for variables used in our analysis, first for the overall sample and then separately by gender. Our sample, consisting of those who ever worked remotely since COVID-

19 onset, has slightly more men than women (45% women). In terms of life-course stage, for both men and women, about one fifth are young adults (younger than 35) without childcare or adult-care responsibilities, one fifth are parents of preschoolers or else in the sandwich generation, and another fifth are older adults (50 or older) without care responsibilities. Men are overrepresented in the group of middle adults (35-49) with no childcare or adult-care responsibilities (12% versus 9% among women, $p < .05$), whereas women are overrepresented in the "school-aged children or adult care" group (29% versus 23% among men, $p < .01$). About three in five respondents are non-Hispanic Whites (64%), followed by Hispanics (15%), people from other racial/ethnic categories (11%), and non-Hispanic Blacks (10%). The proportion of this sample who are in historically disadvantaged subgroups is slightly higher among women, as can be seen among non-Hispanic Blacks (12% versus 9% among men, $p < .05$) or Hispanics (17% versus 13% among men, $p < .05$). In terms of socioeconomic status, our sample consists of 59% college graduates, higher among men than women (61% versus 56%, $p < .05$), reflecting the nature of jobs that can be accomplished remotely. Women are also less likely to be managers (34% versus 48% among men, $p < .001$).

[Table 1 about here]

The mean age of the overall sample is 43 (median 42), regardless of gender. Women in our sample are more likely than men to be single (32% versus 26%, $p < .01$) and to have a spouse/partner who works at work (15% versus 11%, $p < .05$), whereas men are more likely to have a non-working spouse/partner (20% versus 13%, $p < .001$). Household income averages $129,578, with women's ($117,825) significantly lower than men's ($140,155, $p < .001$). Two in five respondents never worked from home, even occasionally, before COVID-19, with the percentage higher among women (47% versus 36% among men, $p < .001$). Most respondents (53%) in our sample of remote workers are employed by a private for-profit company, 22% are in the public sector, 12% work for non-profit organizations, and 13% are self-employed or in a family business; women are more likely to be in public sector or non-profit organizations ($p < .001$).

We capture dynamics in working arrangements through workers' reported change in work hours from prior to during the pandemic in Wave 1, and actual changes in workplace arrangements between Wave 1 and Wave 2 (identified through sequence analysis). When surveyed at Wave 1, most workers report no change in their work hours, regardless of gender (52%-55%), with women more likely to experience a major increase or decrease in work hours (see also Fan and Moen 2021). When it comes to workplace arrangements at Wave 1 (October 2020) and Wave 2 (April 2021), the great majority of this remote worker sample—men and women alike—work from home at both waves, though the percentage declines from 65%-66% at Wave 1 to 58%-59% at Wave 2. Correspondingly, there is an increase in the share of respondents who work mainly at work, from 29% at Wave 1 to 31%-33% at Wave 2, as well as those who work in a hybrid arrangement (5%-6% to 9%-10%).

Changes in Work Hours and Well-being at Wave 1

We first examine the relationships between respondents' reported continuity and change in work hours and their well-being at Wave 1 (Table 2). We compare those whose work hours decreased or increased at Wave 1 (in contrast to before the pandemic) relative to those whose work hours remained stable.

[Table 2 about here]

Overall pattern. Results from ordered logit regression models in Table 2 paint a clear picture that, for both women and men, reporting an increase in work hours from pre-pandemic to October 2020 predicts lower levels of well-being across the board, but especially in terms of burnout and work-to-family conflict (see Figure 1). Specifically, compared with women with unchanged work hours, women whose work hours increase following COVID-19 have higher odds of burnout (1.287 [log odds], $p < .001$) and work-to-family conflict (1.393, $p < .001$), as well as lower odds of job satisfaction (-0.563, $p < .001$) and life satisfaction (-0.285, $p < .05$). Similar results are also evident for men (see Table 2).

[Figure 1 about here]

But note reporting a *decrease* in work hours over this time period also predicts lower levels of well-being, especially for job satisfaction (Figure 1). Women whose work hours decrease following the onset of COVID-19 report higher odds of work-to-family conflict (0.403, $p < .05$) and lower odds of both job satisfaction (-0.702, $p < .001$) and life satisfaction (-0.335, $p < .05$) by October 2020. For men, a decrease in work hours following COVID-19 is similarly associated with greater work-to-family conflict (0.422, $p < .01$) as well as lower job satisfaction (-0.774, $p < .001$) and life satisfaction (-0.384, $p < .05$) by October 2020.

Intersections between gender and life-course stage. How do these results differ for women and men at different ages and life stages? Below we focus on patterns that show statistically significant differences across intersecting subgroups (see Appendix C for results of pairwise comparisons). We find younger women, as well as women or men with care responsibilities, are the most emotionally vulnerable to increased hours. For example, the story in the Burnout panel of Figure 2a is that increased hours on the job predicts greater burnout, but the pattern is most striking for women (than for men) regardless of life stage, and especially for younger women not caring for others and women with preschoolers or in the sandwich generation (caring for younger and older family members). Increased hours also predict higher burnout for men, though to a lesser degree compared with women.

[Figure 2a about here]

There are also gendered life stage differences in job satisfaction related to those whose hours increase (Figure 2a), with younger women not caring for others and men engaged in adult care or with school age children reporting significantly lower job satisfaction compared with many other groups when their work hours increase. Increased work hours are also associated with particularly lower life satisfaction for women with preschoolers or in the sandwich generation (Figure 2a), whereas no significant differences are found for work-to-family conflict across intersecting subgroups.

Recall that a decrease in work hours following COVID-19 onset is not predictive of burnout for the overall sample (Figure 1); this finding, however, masks countervailing patterns exhibited by

men and women at different life-course stages. In the face of a reduction in work hours, middle adult men without care obligations, as well as men with school-age children or caring for infirm adults, are at the highest risk of both burnout and work-to-family conflict (Figure 2a). By contrast, reduced hours have little or even a slightly beneficial impact on the burnout and work-to-family conflict experienced by older (age 50 plus) men without care responsibilities, as well as for most women regardless of life stage (Figure 2a). As for the impact of reduced hours on job and life satisfaction, we do not find it to differ in statistically significant ways at the intersections of gender and life-course stage according to pairwise tests (Appendix C).

Intersections between gender and race/ethnicity. Gender in combination with race/ethnicity also predicts the relationship between changes in work hours and some components of emotional well-being. Nevertheless, one notable finding in Figure 2b is that, regardless of their race or ethnicity, women and men whose hours increase are at heightened risk of burnout and work-to-family conflict concomitant with COVID-19. Gendered and racialized patterns do emerge, with minority women more emotionally vulnerable in the face of increased hours and minority men more emotionally disadvantaged in the face of decreased hours. Figure 2b shows that increased hours predict lower job satisfaction, especially among non-Hispanic Black women and Hispanic women, as well as lower life satisfaction for non-Hispanic women from racial groups other than White or Black. The disadvantaged well-being of these minority women groups whose hours increase is statistically significant relative to similarly situated men or non-Hispanic White women (see Appendix C).

[Figure 2b about here]

Non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic men are most at risk of distress if they experience a reduction in their work hours. The story around low job satisfaction, in particular, is a story of reduced hours, especially for non-Hispanic Black men and Hispanic men. Black men are additionally the most vulnerable to burnout when their work hours decline (Figure 2b), whereas Hispanic men are the most

vulnerable to work-to-family conflict in the face of reduced hours (Figure 2b). No race/gender intersections with life satisfaction are observed in relation to decreased work hours.

Intersections between gender and educational attainment. We do not find strong evidence that the relationship between changes in work hours and subjective well-being differs across intersecting groups of college or non college-educated women and men. However, as Table 2 shows, having a college degree predicts lower well-being (especially in terms of burnout and work-to-family conflict) for women and men, regardless of their change in work hours, consistent with a "stress of higher status" perspective (Schieman et al. 2009). And as Figure 1 shows, regardless of educational attainment, women and men are both vulnerable if their hours either increase or decrease during the pandemic.

Intersections between gender and managerial status. Managerial status appears to matter for the relationship between increased work hours and life satisfaction. Figure 2c shows the disadvantaged position, in terms of life satisfaction, of remote working men and women in nonmanagerial jobs who experience an increase in work hours. That is, increased hours predict significantly lower life satisfaction for women and men in nonmanagerial positions, but have no impact on the life satisfaction of women managers or men managers.

[Figure 2c about here]

Changes in Workplace Arrangements between Waves

Next, we examine whether continuity and change in remote work arrangements produce corresponding changes in well-being. To do so, we first use sequence analysis to identify patterned constellations of remote working pathways, finding that a four-cluster solution fits the data well. In Figure 3 we present the sequence index plot, which represents sequences across time, with different colors indicating distinct states and each horizontal line representing one individual sequence. The four constellations are ranked by prevalence. With the exception of the third cluster, most clusters have one arrangement

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dominating throughout the entire time frame, suggesting these clusters capture largely stable work pathways (Appendix A provides more information on sequence analysis).

[Figure 3 about here]

The largest constellation, representing 60% of the sample, consists of stable remote workers— those who work at home throughout the observational window (October 2020 to April 2021). The second most prevalent constellation is also marked by stability, consisting of those who returned to working on the job by October 2020 and remain working at work throughout the observational period—they make up 21% of the sample. Recall that our sample consists of workers who work remotely at least at some point since the beginning of COVID-19; the second cluster thus consists of "early returners," those who return to the workplace before Wave 1. The third constellation, about 12% workers, transition from home work to working on the job ("recent returners") by the second survey wave (April 2021). Lastly, 7% move to a hybrid arrangement during the study period.

There are of course selection processes in terms of who follows different pathways around remote work, as described more fully in Appendix D. But note that women, workers from "other" (non-Hispanic, non-Black, non-White) racial/ethnic groups, and college-degree holders are more likely to remain in the remote workforce on a continuous basis, whereas managers are more likely to return to their workplaces. Older workers without care responsibilities are the least likely to be in a hybrid arrangement.

Sequences of Workplace Arrangements and Changes in Well-being Over Six Months

In Table 3 we present whether continuities or shifts in workplace arrangements predict actual changes in well-being from six months into the pandemic (October 2020, Wave 1) to six months later (April 2021, Wave 2). We use as the reference group respondents who continue to work primarily from home during the pandemic and into April 2021. They constitute an ideal comparison group, suggestive of how well-being outcomes might have changed over time had there been no change in working from

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home between the two waves. In additional analysis (not shown), we separate the reference group into those who worked primarily from home even before the pandemic and those who move into remote work and continue doing so during the pandemic; changes in well-being are statistically indistinguishable between the two groups. We therefore do not make this distinction in the analysis we present below.

[Table 3 about here]

Overall pattern. The well-being effects of changing workplaces are not uniform across outcomes and differ by the timing of the change. Compared with consistent remote workers, women and men who return to the workplace early in the pandemic (before October 2020) report an increase in burnout (women: 0.472, $p < .1$; men: 0.562, $p < .01$), an increase in work-to-family conflict for men (0.647, $p < .001$) but not women, but also, to some degree, an increase in job satisfaction (women: 0.594, $p < .05$; men: 0.554, $p < .01$) (see Figure 4). More recent returners, men and women who return to the workplace between the two waves (from October 2020 to April 2021), experience significantly greater work-to-family conflict by Wave 2 (women: 0.400, $p < .1$; men: 0.694, $p < .01$) compared to those who remain working remotely. Another path, moving to a hybrid arrangement, has gendered effects. Compared with consistent remote working women, women moving to a hybrid arrangement report significantly reduced job satisfaction concomitant with their move from remote work into a mixture of some in-office and some home work (-0.484, $p < .05$). By comparison, hybrid working men do not differ from remote working men in their change in well-being outcomes from Wave 1 to Wave 2; the gender difference is statistically significant for job satisfaction ($p < .01$; not shown).

[Figure 4 about here]

Intersections between gender and life-course stage. Gendered life stage matters in shaping the relationship between remote work pathway and changes in well-being, with results depending on well-being outcome (Figure 5a). First, for an early return, we find the greatest increase in burnout occurs for older women (50 and above) without family care responsibilities who return to the office early in

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the pandemic. The greatest increase in work-to-family conflict occurs for younger women and men without family care responsibilities (Figure 5a), suggesting it is greater conflict between work and their personal lives that changes. Second, in terms of a more recent (by April 2021) return, older men without care obligations see the greatest increase in burnout and work-to-family conflict from moving back into the office, along with the largest decline in their job satisfaction. Recent returning younger men without family care obligations also report greater increase in work-to-family conflict, compared with those continuing to work from home.

[Figure 5a about here]

Third, returning to work has largely negative implications for the emotional health of caregiving women but positive or null effects for caregiving men. Women either with older children or who provide adult care experience higher burnout and work-to-family conflict when they return to the office (whether early or recent) (Figure 5a). By contrast, men returning most recently with heavier care responsibilities (i.e., with preschoolers or in the sandwich generation) tend to actually benefit the most from moving back into the office (as opposed to remaining working remotely), evidenced by their larger decreases in burnout and increases in job satisfaction compared with recent returning men or women from other life-course stage groups (Figure 5a). Men with older children or who provide adult care experience little change in well-being when they return to the office (whether early or recent).

Fourth, a hybrid arrangement similarly shows disparate well-being impacts. The "some of each" model predicts significantly decreased burnout for younger women and men without care responsibilities but significantly higher odds of burnout for men with more intensive care obligations and most women across life stages (Figure 5a). Hybrid working (relative to remote working) is also associated with the greatest decrease in work-to-family conflict for older non-care providing women (Figure 5a). In terms of job satisfaction, being in a hybrid arrangement predicts the greatest increase in job satisfaction for older men or younger women without care concerns, as well as for women with intensive care responsibilities. By contrast, job satisfaction declines the most among hybrid working

men shouldering care responsibilities (Figure 5a). Taken together, women and men at both ends of the adult life-course without care responsibilities suffer the most from returning to office and tend to benefit the most from a hybrid arrangement. By contrast, men with heavier care obligations benefit the most from returning to office and suffer from a hybrid arrangement.

Intersections between gender and race/ethnicity. The type of change in work location has different repercussions depending on workers' combined gender and race/ethnicity. We find that, compared with other gender-racial groups, minority men engaged in hybrid work report significantly greater decreases in burnout and significantly greater increases in both job and life satisfaction relative to those continuing in a fully remote work arraignment (Figure 5b). By contrast, a hybrid arrangement has less impact on the well-being of White men and of minority women, but significantly reduces job satisfaction for White women. Early or recent returns to working fully at work also seems to benefit minority men the most in terms of life satisfaction (but not other well-being outcomes—see Figure 5b).

[Figure 5b about here]

Intersections between gender and educational attainment. Changes in well-being with the move to hybrid work differs depending on the intersection of gender and educational attainment. Men with no college degree moving to a hybrid arrangement experience salutary effects, as evidenced by significantly greater declines in burnout, as well as significantly greater increases in both job and life satisfaction. In comparison, the well-being of women without a college degree and college-educated women and men moving to a hybrid arrangement does not differ from that continuing in a fully remote arrangement, with one exception—college-educated men moving to hybrid work report increased work-to-family conflict.

[Figure 5c about here]

Intersections between gender and managerial status. Men managers generally tend to benefit the most from either returning to the office or else shifting to hybrid work, especially in terms of increases in their job and life satisfaction. For example, Figure 5d shows that men managers who return

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to the office early or else shift to a hybrid arrangement report significantly greater job and life satisfaction, a pattern not found in other groups. Most vulnerable in terms of declines in job and life satisfaction are early returning men with no managerial responsibilities and hybrid working women managers. Specifically, relative to those continuously working from home, making an early return is associated with statistically significant decreases in life satisfaction for men in non-managerial positions, while moving to a hybrid arrangement is associated with significant decreases in job satisfaction for women managers (Figure 5d).

[Figure 5d about here]

Discussion and Conclusion

A Silver Lining or Triple Jeopardy?

The large-scale social experiment of pandemic-driven reconfiguring where work is done has been repeatedly framed as a possible "silver lining" of COVID-19 (e.g., Spiggle 2020). Many social observers hail the pandemic-driven push to remote work as heralding a future of greater flexibility, as vast numbers of contemporary workers are coming to demand options in when and where they work (Alexander et al. 2021). But this framing obscures the fact that working from home might not be a panacea, and certainly not for workers with different social locational identities who find themselves working remotely for business needs, not personal preference. As Williams (2021:194) argued in her 2020 presidential address, "having a job, even a so-called good job, is no guarantee of a secure livelihood—and these conditions were made worse by the pandemic." In fact, for some workers the "flexibility" of working from home could involve tracking technologies enabling close supervision (Holmes 2020), along with expectations of instant response and 24/7 availability (Cutter 2021). Still other remote workers could be subsequently required to move back to working at work, despite their preferences (Segal 2021).

It could even be argued that some groups of workers suffer triple jeopardy, rather than a silver lining, concomitant with and following the COVID-19 lockdown. Women broadly, but especially non-college educated women and those with caregiving obligations, along with minority women and men were more at risk of job loss (Moen, Pedtke and Flood 2020; Williams 2021) and less likely to be in jobs that could be accomplished remotely (Dey et al. 2020). Such "essential" workers were not only exposed to health risks; many also had to put in long hours (Williams 2021). We see job loss and jobs requiring in-person work as two sources of jeopardy with obvious well-being implications (*The Lancet* 2020). We focus here on a possible third form of jeopardy for those who escape the first two and actually move into remote work—possibly deleterious or positive well-being effects around the dynamics of doing so.

Is there, in fact, a silver lining in the form of emotional well-being, concomitant with changes in hours and places of work around COVID-19, and for what subgroups of the remote workforce? To begin to answer these questions, this study draws on a combined intersectional, gendered life course, and stress process framework to capture the uneven stress of social change, examining disparities in well-being across overlapping social groups exposed to different work-related stressors precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, we focus on disparities in the stress of changes in work hours during the initial transition into remote work, and disparities in the stress of changes in subsequent workplace arrangements as remote workers begin to return fully or partially to working at work.

We find the story to be more than simply a cumulation or amelioration of disadvantage (Dannefer 2020) for those historically at risk in the labor market who find themselves working remotely during COVID-19. We consider first outcomes related to subgroups of remote workers' hours change and then possible effects on changes in well-being of moving back to do at least some work at work.

Remote Work and Changing Hours

Working More. Did changes in work hours concomitant with the pandemic-driven remote work surge put vulnerable groups of workers at risk of lower well-being or is this indeed a silver lining? To be sure, women whose move to remote work came with working more hours report higher levels of burnout and work-to-family conflict, as well as lower levels of job and life satisfaction, suggesting they are at particularly high risk. But these same patterns are found for men (Figure 1). Working more than prior to the pandemic appears to predict greater distress for women and men who find themselves working remotely. But gender and life stage intersect to suggest that working more may be especially deleterious (in terms of burnout, and lower job and life satisfaction) for younger remote working women with no caregiving responsibilities but also for women with preschoolers or sandwiched between caring for both children and older infirm adults. Men with older children at home or caring for adults whose hours increase also report lower job satisfaction.

Race/ethnicity combines with gender to predict different effects of hours increase depending on the well-being outcome experienced. Non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic women working more report low job satisfaction, for example, and women from other racial or ethnic groups whose hours increase have the lowest levels of life satisfaction. More hours also appear to be detrimental, in terms of life satisfaction, for non-manager remote workers regardless of their gender.

Clearly, well-being outcomes tied to increased work hours are not evenly shared across groups differentially located in the social structure, but women in disadvantaged positions—in terms of caregiving obligations, race/ethnicity, or managerial status—are more susceptible to increased hours, as are men caring for children or infirm adults and non-manager men. The well-being costs associated with increased hours could reflect the mismatch between time wanted or needed for personal lives and ratcheting care obligations accompanying the move to working from home, as well as associated difficulties in separating work from non-work time.

Working Less. What about those who work fewer hours concomitant with remote work? Does doing so offer better fit between one's job and pandemic-driven spiraling personal and family needs and obligations? Our evidence suggests the opposite is the case. For women as well as for men, a decrease in work hours (relative to stable hours compared with before the pandemic) is associated with higher levels of work-to-family conflict and lower job and life satisfaction.

Some subgroups of especially men in the remote workforce are disadvantaged by reductions in hours. Non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic men, for example, are more vulnerable emotionally to decreased work hours, with adverse impacts in the form of burnout, work-to-family conflict, and job satisfaction. Middle-adult men without care responsibilities and men with either older children at home or who care for older adults also appear disadvantaged by a decrease in work hours. Recall that this decrease in work hours is occurring in the context of overwhelming job loss and precarity during the pandemic. Having fewer hours on the job may instill a greater sense of job or financial insecurity, an adversity more likely to be shouldered by minority workers. Men in the middle of their prime career-building years may well see declining hours on the job as a threat to opportunities to both keep their jobs and advance their careers. That these findings show up only among men indicate the possibly central role of paid work for men, compared with women (Moen and Roehling 2005; Williams 2000).

Extending previous empirical studies that focus primarily on work hours at a single time point, these findings underscore that shifts in hours worked also matter for emotional health. Importantly, we show the relationship between changes in work hours and well-being is not linear. Increases in hours predict less well-being, but, to a lesser degree, so do declines in hours on the job. Also note differences across outcomes; whereas increased work hours tend to predict burnout and work-to-family conflict, decreased work hours predicts less job satisfaction. In the context of the pandemic, it is thus *stability* in work hours that seems to be associated with optimal well-being—maintaining some degree of normalcy may have been all the more important in these turbulent times.

Back to Working at Work

As the pandemic-precipitated economic downturn began to show signs of recovery by April 2021, different dynamics of work arrangements begin to emerge. What are the implications of moving back to working at work, fully or partially, in terms of corresponding shifts in well-being? The story here is one of timing and the nature of the return, as well as mixed effects depending on the outcome considered.

For both women and men, an early return to the workplace (before October 2020), compared with continuing remote work, is associated with a greater increase in burnout. But also note, to a less extent, an opposite effect: a greater increase in job satisfaction. Early returning men, as well as men and women who return to their workplaces between October 2020 and April 2021, also report a greater increase in work-to-family conflict. A hybrid arrangement does not predict change in men's well-being but is associated with women's reduced job satisfaction by Wave 2. Combined, these results paint a mixed picture but also showcase the value of assessing a range of well-being outcomes to capture the complex stress process associated with shifting work locations. They also suggest that working remotely is associated with generally better well-being than returning to working at work (other than job satisfaction). However, these average patterns mask the uneven stress associated with shifting work locations across intersecting subgroups of remote workers.

Intersections of gender with life-course stage. Compared with those continuing to work remotely, women and men at both ends of the life-course (younger and older adults without care responsibilities) suffer emotionally from a total return to the workplace but benefit from a hybrid arrangement. For these women and men in their early or later careers, the ability to work from home—fully but especially partially—seems to facilitate their combining work with their personal lives, with suggestive evidence that their mental health may be at risk when returning fully to working at work.

For women and men with care obligations—that is, having a child and/or providing care for an adult—a gendered pattern emerges. Men with more intensive care obligations, with preschoolers or in the sandwich generation, report a decrease in burnout and an increase in job satisfaction when they return to the workplace, but increased burnout and decreased job satisfaction when they are in a hybrid arrangement, relative to continuing to work remotely. In comparison, the well-being (in terms of burnout and work-to-family conflict) of women with older children at home or caring for adults tends to worsen as they move back to working at work. This gendered finding is consistent with previous research showing that women benefit more from work redesigns that allow more flexibility in where and when to work (Moen et al. 2016), likely because a remote working arrangement helps women combine work and care but may be perceived as leading to more disruption for similarly situated men, who traditionally segment their work from their personal lives.

Intersections of gender with race/ethnicity or education. Minority men and men without a college degree tend to benefit the most from a hybrid arrangement, as evidenced by lower burnout as well as greater job satisfaction and life satisfaction. Additionally, minority men also benefit from returning to the workplace in terms of their increased life satisfaction. Several factors may contribute to this finding. Occupational segregation in particular types of occupations and industries means intersecting differences, by gender and race/ethnicity and education, in the experience of returning, either fully or partly. Minority and less-educated men's better well-being when they shift away from fully remote work may thus reflect better recovery in some types of work. It is also likely many of these men may have a partner with an inflexible job, making a hybrid arrangement all the more important to address family needs.

Intersections of gender with managerial status. An early return lowers life satisfaction for non-manager men but increases job and life satisfaction for men who are managers. Managerial men moving to a hybrid arrangement similarly benefit, as reflected by their increased job and life

satisfaction; in contrast, women managers moving into a hybrid arrangement suffer the most in terms of reductions in their job and life satisfaction. Managers tend to face greater job demands when it comes to coordinating tasks in a remote setting (Fan and Moen 2021), and therefore may feel better when moving back to the workplace. The finding that only men managers experience an increase in job and life satisfaction when returning fully or partly, however, suggests other processes may be at work. It is likely the generally greater support men managers have toward a traditional facetime workplace (Kelly et al. 2010) leads them to gain more well-being benefits when returning. Furthermore, unlikely men managers who are more likely to have a partner responsible on the home front, women managers often need to manage housework and childcare along with their work obligations (Blair-Loy 2009); a hybrid arrangement, therefore, may only feel like too little time for both.

Combined, our findings paint a picture of uneven stress associated with shifting workplaces across different subgroups. Continuing to work from home seems to be less stressful generally than a total return to work, even as a hybrid arrangement tends to promote well-being even more for many subgroups of workers—women and men who are not in the prime career building stage, women who care for children, minority men, and men without a college degree. Men managers also benefit from a hybrid arrangement in terms of job and life satisfaction, even women managers suffer on these measures when in a hybrid arrangement. Returning to working completely, nevertheless, does seem to be particularly salutary for men with intensive care obligations and men managers.

Limitations

Our research has a number of limitations. First, we capture the impacts of the unprecedented shift to remote work on workers' emotional well-being only through April 2021. Given the still ongoing pandemic and uncertainties around workplace arrangements, future research is needed to shed light on the longer-term impact of COVID-19 on post-pandemic working conditions and well-being among remote workers. Second is the issue of selection. The triple jeopardy described above means that many

workers in historically disadvantaged social locations are not in our sample because they lost their jobs even before moving to remote work or are in occupations requiring in-person work. This also includes women with heavy caregiving obligations who have left the workforce. Third, given the small sizes of some intersecting groups, we cannot examine, for example, whether the well-being of women and men in the sandwich generation differs from that of those in other life-course stages when work hours or work places change. Future studies with larger samples are necessary to reveal the disparate well-being effects across other important subgroups.

Despite its limitations, this study promotes understanding of the dynamics and disparities in psychosocial well-being when working remotely and, for some, subsequently returning back to working at work. We do so by exploiting an exogenous shock—the massive move to working from home associated with the COVID-19 lockdown—to capture the human meanings of this social change for subgroups of remote workers differentially located in the social structure. We focus in particular on gender, but also on the timing of this transition in terms of the life course stages of those impacted, as well as intersections of gender with race/ethnicity, educational level, and managerial status. The results from this natural experiment provide a complicated, nuanced story of uneven advantage and disadvantage in tumultuous times.

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Table 1: Descriptive Statistics, Overall and by Gender

	Overall (N = 2,794)		Women (N = 1,259)		Men (N = 1,535)		
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	
Well-being Outcomes							
Burnout (W1) (1-4)	2.49	0.94	2.58	0.95	2.41	0.92	***
Burnout (W2) (1-4)	2.62	0.87	2.72	0.87	2.53	0.85	***
Work-to-Family Conflict (W1) (1-4)	2.32	0.86	2.34	0.87	2.30	0.85	
Work-to-Family Conflict (W2) (1-4)	2.38	0.79	2.40	0.81	2.36	0.77	
Job Satisfaction (W1) (1-5)	3.94	0.97	3.93	0.98	3.95	0.96	
Job Satisfaction (W2) (1-5)	3.95	0.89	3.90	0.93	3.99	0.85	*
Life Satisfaction (W1) (1-5)	3.74	0.94	3.67	0.95	3.81	0.92	**
Life Satisfaction (W2) (1-5)	3.79	0.89	3.76	0.89	3.82	0.90	
Dynamics in Working Conditions							
Recalled Change in Work Hours versus Before COVID-19 (W1)							
Decreased by a Significant Amount	7%		8%		5%		**
Decreased Somewhat	14%		15%		14%		
No Change	54%		52%		55%		
Increased Somewhat	19%		18%		21%		+
Increased by a Significant Amount	6%		8%		4%		**
Workplace Arrangements (W1)							
Work from Home	66%		65%		66%		
Work Away from Home	29%		29%		29%		
Hybrid	5%		6%		5%		
Workplace Arrangements (W2)							
Work from Home	58%		59%		58%		
Work Away from Home	32%		31%		33%		
Hybrid	10%		10%		9%		
Moderators							
Women	45%						
Life-course Stage							
No Childcare/Adult-care Responsibilities, < 35	21%		21%		21%		
Preschooler or Sandwich Generation	20%		19%		21%		
No Childcare/Adult-care Responsibilities, 35-49	11%		9%		12%		*
School-aged Children or Adult-care, No Preschooler	26%		29%		23%		**
No Childcare/Adult-care Responsibilities, >= 50	22%		21%		23%		
Race/Ethnicity							
Non-Hispanic White	64%		62%		66%		+
Non-Hispanic Black	10%		12%		9%		*

Non-Hispanic Other	11%		10%		12%	
Hispanic	15%		17%		13%	*
College Educated	59%		56%		61%	*
Manager	41%		34%		48%	***
Covariates						
Family Circumstances						
Single	28%		32%		26%	**
Spouse/Partner Remote Work	42%		40%		43%	
Spouse/Partner Onsite Work	13%		15%		11%	*
Spouse/Partner Not Working	17%		13%		20%	***
Household Income	129578	73978	117825	70158	140155	75734	***
Never Worked from Home Before COVID-19	41%		47%		36%	***
Sector						
Public	22%		27%		18%	***
Private For-Profit Company	53%		45%		60%	***
Non-Profit Organization	12%		16%		8%	***
Self-Employed or Family Business	13%		13%		14%	

Note: All statistics are weighted. Asterisks in the last column denote results from t-tests showing whether gender differences in the variables are statistically significant.

Unless indicated otherwise, the presented statistics are based on Wave 1 measures. The sample size for Wave 2 measures is 2,094 in total (1,192 men and 902 women).

*** $p<0.001$, ** $p<0.01$, * $p<0.05$, + $p<0.1$

Table 2: Estimates from Ordered Logit Regression Models Predicting Well-being at Wave 1 (October 2020), by Gender

VARIABLES	Women				Men			
	Burnout	Work–Family Conflict	Job Satisfaction	Life Satisfaction	Burnout	Work–Family Conflict	Job Satisfaction	Life Satisfaction
Changes in Work Hours versus Before COVID-19 (Ref. = No Change)								
Decreased	-0.009	0.403*	-0.702***	-0.335*	0.189	0.422**	-0.774***	-0.384*
	(0.145)	(0.158)	(0.157)	(0.157)	(0.161)	(0.150)	(0.156)	(0.164)
Increased	1.287***	1.393***	-0.563***	-0.285*	1.112***	1.339***	-0.284*	-0.340**
	(0.157)	(0.151)	(0.148)	(0.140)	(0.118)	(0.134)	(0.125)	(0.119)
Life-course Stage (Ref. = No Childcare/Adult-care Responsibilities, < 35)								
Preschooler or Sandwich Generation	0.051	0.781***	0.285	0.247	-0.020	0.730***	-0.191	-0.327
	(0.203)	(0.187)	(0.199)	(0.208)	(0.187)	(0.197)	(0.193)	(0.212)
No Childcare/Adult-care Responsibilities, 35-49	-0.182	0.137	0.537+	0.245	0.243	0.123	-0.284	-0.843***
	(0.227)	(0.229)	(0.276)	(0.248)	(0.215)	(0.214)	(0.213)	(0.223)
School-aged Children or Adult-care, No Preschooler	-0.196	0.481**	0.278	0.212	-0.089	0.518**	-0.315+	-0.542**
	(0.183)	(0.173)	(0.177)	(0.170)	(0.184)	(0.193)	(0.187)	(0.199)
No Childcare/Adult-care Responsibilities, >= 50	-0.737***	-0.503**	0.647***	0.824***	-0.506**	-0.099	0.081	-0.194
	(0.185)	(0.172)	(0.183)	(0.175)	(0.179)	(0.187)	(0.173)	(0.196)
Race/Ethnicity (Ref. = Non-Hispanic White)								
Non-Hispanic Black	0.078	-0.148	-0.088	-0.018	-0.444*	-0.515**	-0.162	0.305+
	(0.203)	(0.190)	(0.202)	(0.209)	(0.203)	(0.191)	(0.187)	(0.169)
Non-Hispanic Other	-0.141	0.329	0.077	-0.359	-0.303+	-0.056	-0.024	-0.044
	(0.218)	(0.232)	(0.225)	(0.233)	(0.165)	(0.190)	(0.198)	(0.209)
Hispanic	-0.078	0.070	0.069	0.026	-0.114	-0.283	-0.020	-0.100

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	(0.169)	(0.196)	(0.179)	(0.172)	(0.191)	(0.208)	(0.183)	(0.185)
College Attainment	0.427**	0.510***	-0.363**	0.082	0.250*	0.298*	-0.152	-0.328*
	(0.130)	(0.127)	(0.134)	(0.138)	(0.124)	(0.133)	(0.138)	(0.137)
Manager	0.092	0.118	0.162	-0.123	0.095	0.391***	0.418***	0.355**
	(0.126)	(0.127)	(0.131)	(0.125)	(0.109)	(0.118)	(0.116)	(0.117)
Family Circumstances (Ref. = Single)								
Spouse/Partner Remote Work	-0.106	0.183	0.167	0.613***	0.250	0.247	0.094	0.788***
	(0.152)	(0.151)	(0.157)	(0.166)	(0.152)	(0.157)	(0.156)	(0.161)
Spouse/Partner Onsite Work	-0.172	0.051	0.375+	0.684***	0.055	-0.040	0.109	0.739***
	(0.186)	(0.191)	(0.193)	(0.197)	(0.194)	(0.197)	(0.199)	(0.207)
Spouse/Partner Not Working	0.009	0.272	0.040	0.496**	0.222	0.220	0.063	0.488**
	(0.194)	(0.190)	(0.184)	(0.191)	(0.175)	(0.185)	(0.171)	(0.189)
Household Income (logged)	-0.012	0.025	0.206+	0.140	-0.033	0.003	0.047	0.306**
	(0.094)	(0.096)	(0.112)	(0.099)	(0.095)	(0.119)	(0.090)	(0.104)
Never Worked from Home Before COVID-19	-0.146	-0.385**	-0.183	-0.155	-0.241*	-0.298*	-0.264*	0.076
	(0.121)	(0.125)	(0.122)	(0.125)	(0.121)	(0.122)	(0.120)	(0.124)
Sector (Ref. = Public)								
Private For-Profit Company	-0.177	-0.270+	0.168	-0.100	0.235+	0.133	-0.371*	-0.416**
	(0.143)	(0.148)	(0.144)	(0.148)	(0.141)	(0.142)	(0.150)	(0.131)
Non-Profit Organization	-0.042	-0.156	0.067	-0.112	0.131	0.065	-0.171	-0.571**
	(0.182)	(0.179)	(0.180)	(0.182)	(0.212)	(0.219)	(0.225)	(0.205)
Self-Employed or Family Business	-0.520*	-0.103	0.159	-0.173	-0.247	-0.239	-0.186	-0.698**
	(0.223)	(0.229)	(0.232)	(0.226)	(0.213)	(0.233)	(0.223)	(0.231)
Observations	1259	1259	1259	1259	1535	1535	1535	1535

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1

Table 3: Estimates from Ordered Logit Regression Models (Lagged Dependent Variable Approach) Predicting Well-being at Wave 2 (April 2021), by Gender
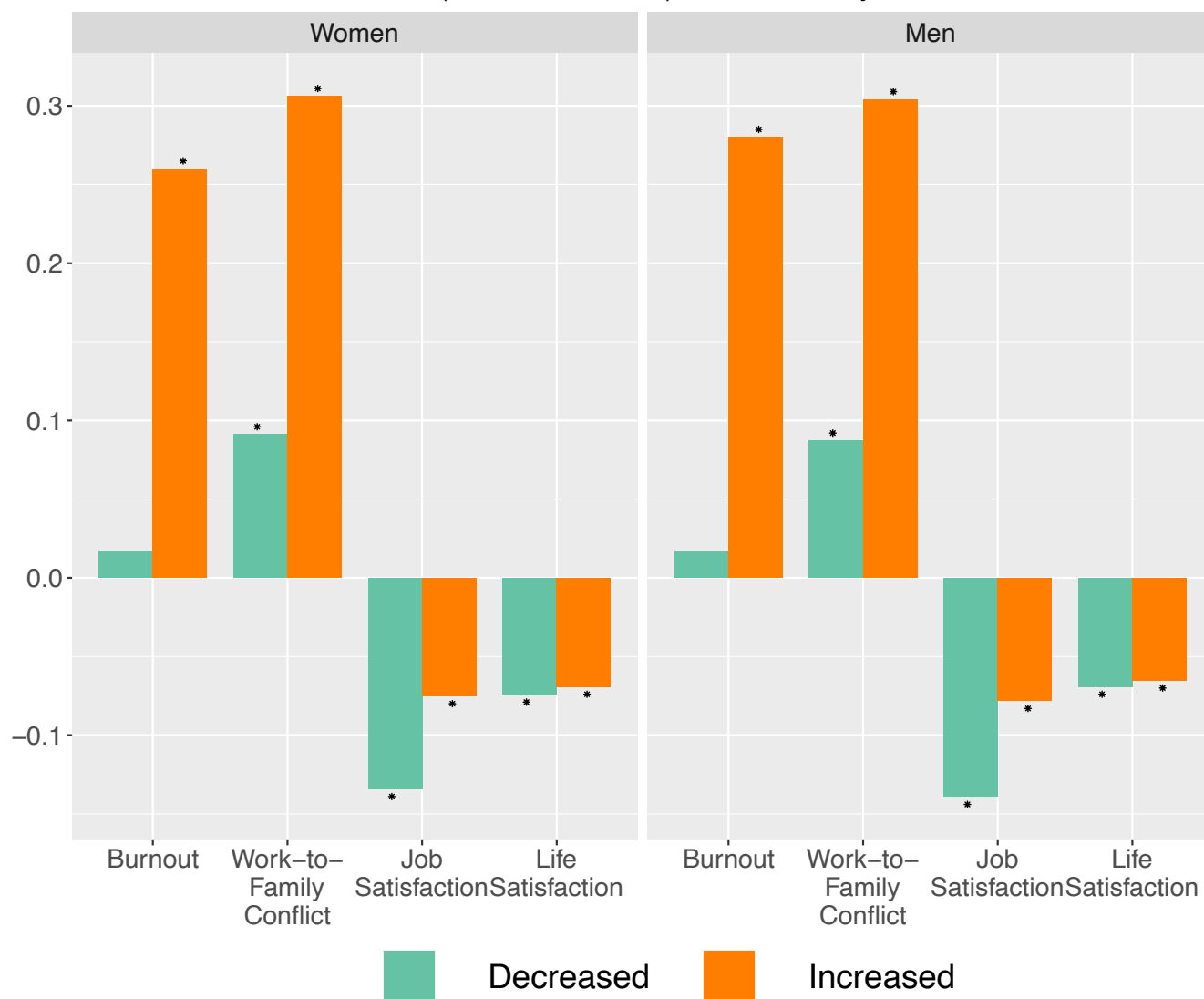
VARIABLES	Women				Men			
	Burnout	Work–Family Conflict	Job Satisfaction	Life Satisfaction	Burnout	Work–Family Conflict	Job Satisfaction	Life Satisfaction
Shifts in Work Arrangements (Ref. = Continuous Remote Work)								
Early Return (Before W1)	0.472+	0.395	0.594*	0.029	0.562**	0.647***	0.554**	-0.115
	(0.247)	(0.266)	(0.235)	(0.197)	(0.182)	(0.179)	(0.183)	(0.176)
Recent Return (Between W1 and W2)	-0.266	0.400+	0.281	-0.057	0.261	0.694**	0.143	0.270
	(0.263)	(0.225)	(0.234)	(0.269)	(0.232)	(0.212)	(0.204)	(0.252)
Hybrid	0.226	0.266	-0.484*	-0.342	-0.194	0.347	0.161	0.314
	(0.271)	(0.243)	(0.221)	(0.402)	(0.258)	(0.279)	(0.227)	(0.240)
Life-course Stage (Ref. = No Childcare/Adult-care Responsibilities, < 35)								
Preschooler or Sandwich Generation	-0.185	0.384	0.436+	0.327	0.320	0.540*	-0.128	0.012
	(0.273)	(0.285)	(0.264)	(0.276)	(0.239)	(0.225)	(0.225)	(0.260)
No Childcare/Adult-care Responsibilities, 35-49	0.242	0.413	0.429	0.203	0.280	0.309	-0.010	0.163
	(0.287)	(0.275)	(0.279)	(0.297)	(0.252)	(0.255)	(0.231)	(0.229)
School-aged Children or Adult-care, No Preschooler	0.083	0.475*	0.407+	-0.082	0.345	0.741***	-0.209	-0.043
	(0.251)	(0.234)	(0.229)	(0.250)	(0.228)	(0.204)	(0.220)	(0.228)
No Childcare/Adult-care Responsibilities, >= 50	-0.313	0.049	0.666**	0.410	-0.217	0.480*	-0.040	0.163
	(0.267)	(0.235)	(0.241)	(0.252)	(0.213)	(0.201)	(0.202)	(0.212)
Race/Ethnicity (Ref. = Non-Hispanic White)								
Non-Hispanic Black	-0.142	-0.327	-0.367	0.221	-0.155	-0.171	-0.317	0.194
	(0.297)	(0.302)	(0.272)	(0.247)	(0.275)	(0.294)	(0.261)	(0.224)

Non-Hispanic Other	0.315	0.209	-0.465	-0.513*	-0.289	0.052	0.031	-0.216
	(0.338)	(0.324)	(0.374)	(0.241)	(0.211)	(0.198)	(0.199)	(0.196)
Hispanic	0.409*	0.230	-0.344	0.289	-0.113	-0.158	0.333	-0.234
	(0.204)	(0.217)	(0.210)	(0.228)	(0.296)	(0.278)	(0.219)	(0.264)
College Attainment	0.001	0.534**	-0.023	0.071	-0.097	0.143	-0.377*	-0.020
	(0.182)	(0.173)	(0.193)	(0.178)	(0.159)	(0.164)	(0.150)	(0.156)
Manager	0.402*	0.286+	-0.280	0.251	0.073	0.353*	0.280*	0.245+
	(0.164)	(0.162)	(0.173)	(0.158)	(0.135)	(0.142)	(0.135)	(0.139)
Family Circumstances (Ref. = Single)								
Spouse/Partner Remote Work	-0.179	-0.334	0.393+	0.644**	0.089	0.270	0.167	0.436*
	(0.215)	(0.207)	(0.206)	(0.241)	(0.191)	(0.181)	(0.188)	(0.206)
Spouse/Partner Onsite Work	-0.088	-0.309	0.070	0.211	0.303	0.266	0.253	0.529*
	(0.202)	(0.193)	(0.207)	(0.217)	(0.213)	(0.216)	(0.195)	(0.205)
Spouse/Partner Not Working	-0.301	-0.535*	0.406	0.736**	0.005	0.154	0.342+	0.564**
	(0.299)	(0.242)	(0.255)	(0.261)	(0.218)	(0.216)	(0.205)	(0.210)
Household Income (logged)	-0.061	0.022	-0.034	0.168	-0.163	0.021	0.135	-0.009
	(0.141)	(0.124)	(0.146)	(0.129)	(0.147)	(0.118)	(0.105)	(0.115)
Never Worked from Home Before COVID-19	0.395*	-0.091	-0.092	-0.058	0.022	0.087	-0.054	0.108
	(0.164)	(0.175)	(0.164)	(0.173)	(0.149)	(0.147)	(0.145)	(0.152)
Sector (Ref. = Public)								
Private For-Profit Company	0.089	0.552**	-0.045	-0.257	-0.008	0.114	-0.315+	0.256
	(0.190)	(0.188)	(0.182)	(0.182)	(0.163)	(0.182)	(0.176)	(0.161)
Non-Profit Organization	-0.024	0.177	-0.190	-0.339	0.036	0.095	-0.248	-0.046
	(0.225)	(0.220)	(0.246)	(0.236)	(0.240)	(0.284)	(0.245)	(0.257)
Self-Employed or Family Business	-0.151	0.414	0.031	-0.531+	-0.296	0.128	-0.263	-0.000
	(0.293)	(0.271)	(0.255)	(0.309)	(0.261)	(0.293)	(0.245)	(0.264)
Lagged Dependent Variable	1.229***	1.339***	1.111***	1.396***	1.379***	1.318***	1.100***	1.460***
	(0.107)	(0.119)	(0.109)	(0.104)	(0.097)	(0.101)	(0.094)	(0.116)

Observations	902	902	902	902	1192	1192	1192	1192

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1

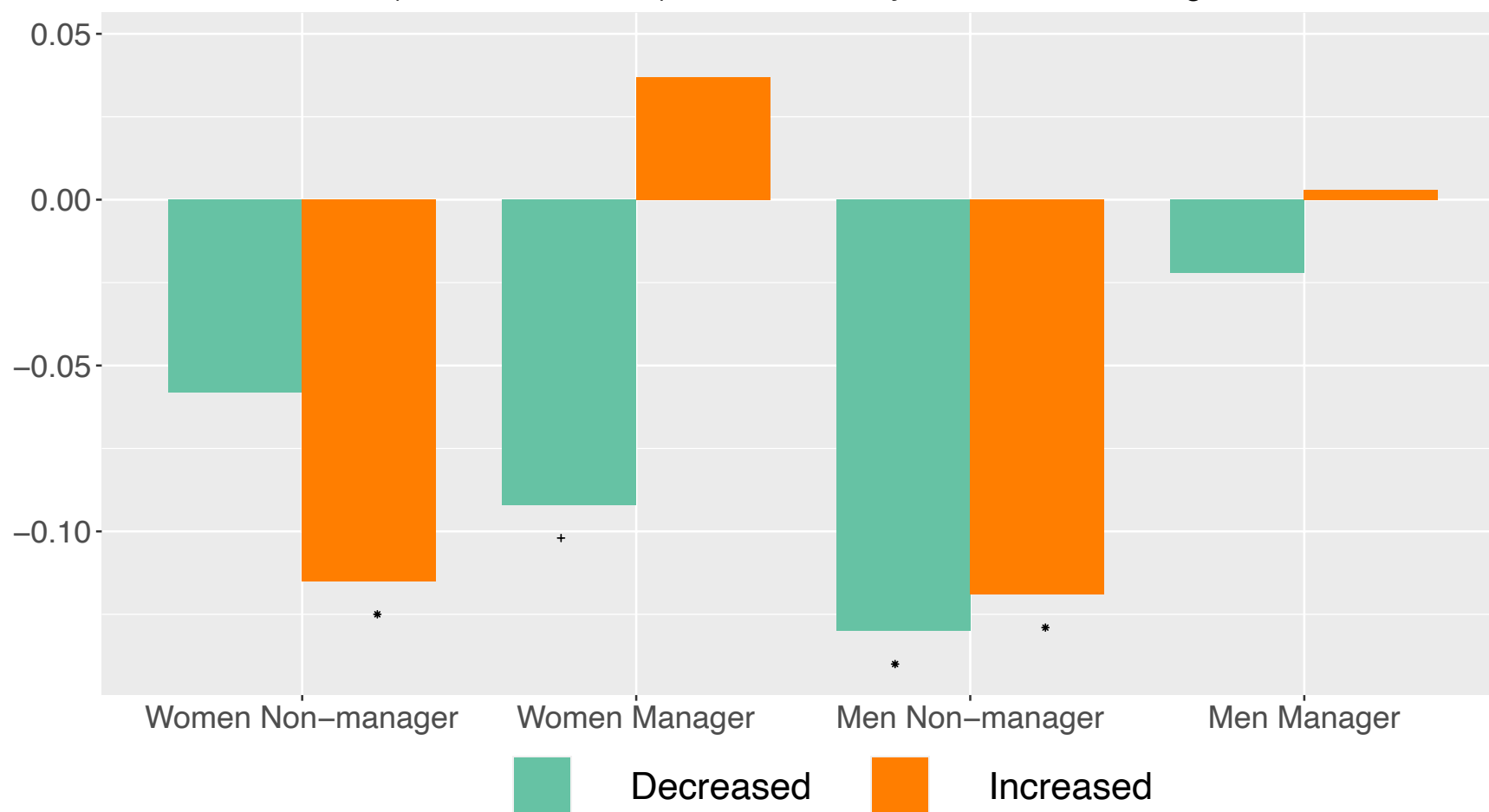Figure 1: Predicted Probabilities of Well-being at Wave 1 Associated with Decreased or Increased (Relative to Stable) Work Hours, by Gender

Note: * p<0.05, + p<0.1 for tests that presented values are significantly different from zero.

Figure 2a: Predicted Probabilities of Well-being Associated with Decreased or Increased (Relative to Stable) Work Hours, by Gender and Life-Course Stage

Note: * p<0.05, + p<0.1 for tests that presented values are significantly different from zero.

Figure 2b: Predicted Probabilities of Well−being Associated with Decreased or Increased (Relative to Stable) Work Hours, by Gender and Race/Ethnicity

Note: * p<0.05, + p<0.1 for tests that presented values are significantly different from zero.

Figure 2c: Predicted Probabilities of Life Satisfaction Associated with Decreased or Increased (Relative to Stable) Work Hours, by Gender and Managerial Status

Note: * p<0.05, + p<0.1 for tests that presented values are significantly different from zero.
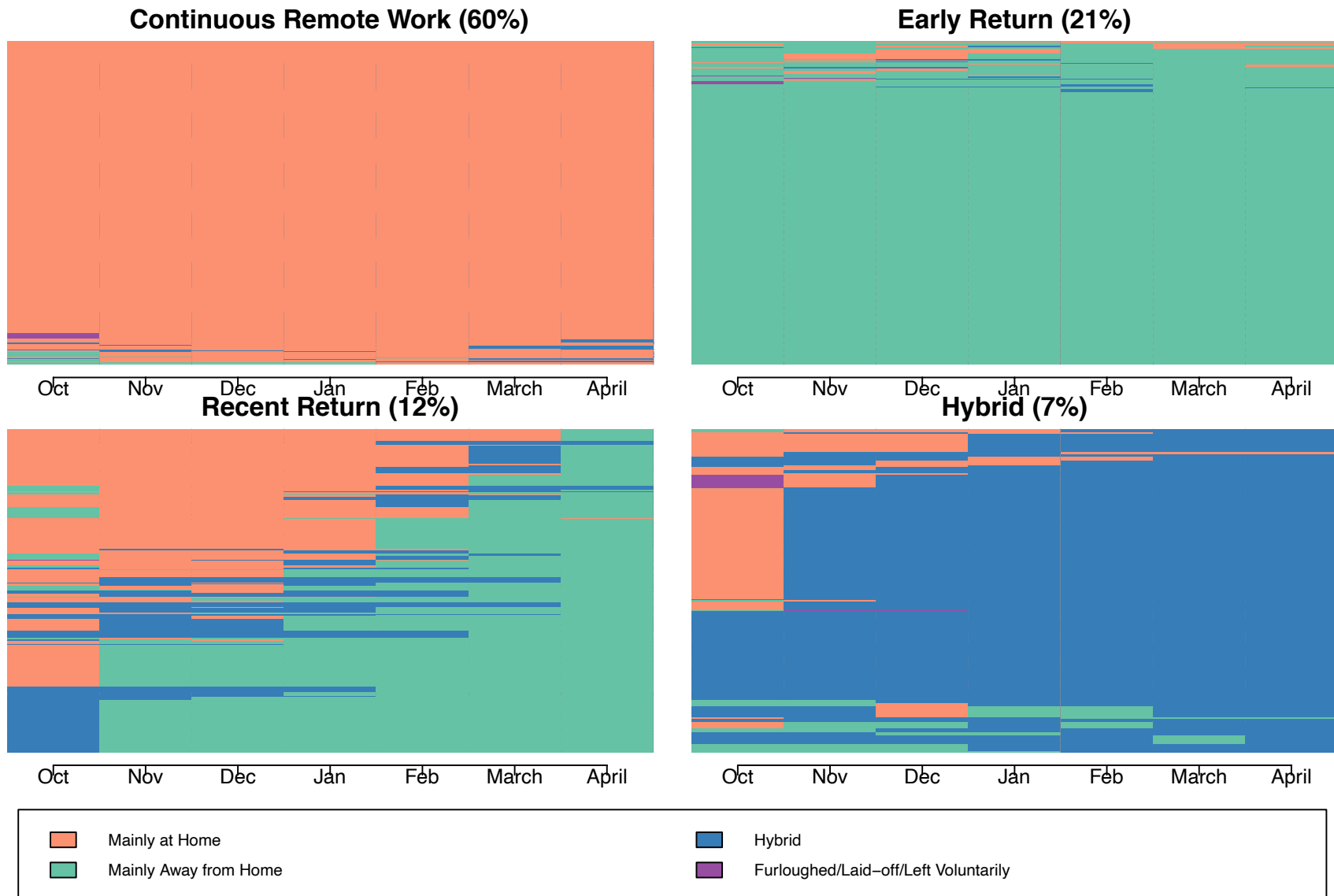
Figure 3: Sequence Index Plot of Remote Work Pathways

Continuous Remote Work (60%)

Early Return (21%)

Recent Return (12%)

Hybrid (7%)

Legend:
- Mainly at Home
- Mainly Away from Home
- Hybrid
- Furloughed/Laid−off/Left Voluntarily

Figure 4: Predicted Probabilities of Changes in Well−being Associated with Various Workplace Arrangements (Relative to Continuous Remote Work), by Gender

Note: * p<0.05, + p<0.1 for tests that presented values are significantly different from zero.

Figure 5a: Predicted Probabilities of Changes in Well−being Associated with Various Workplace Arrangements (Relative to Continuous Remote Work), by Gender and Life−Course Stage
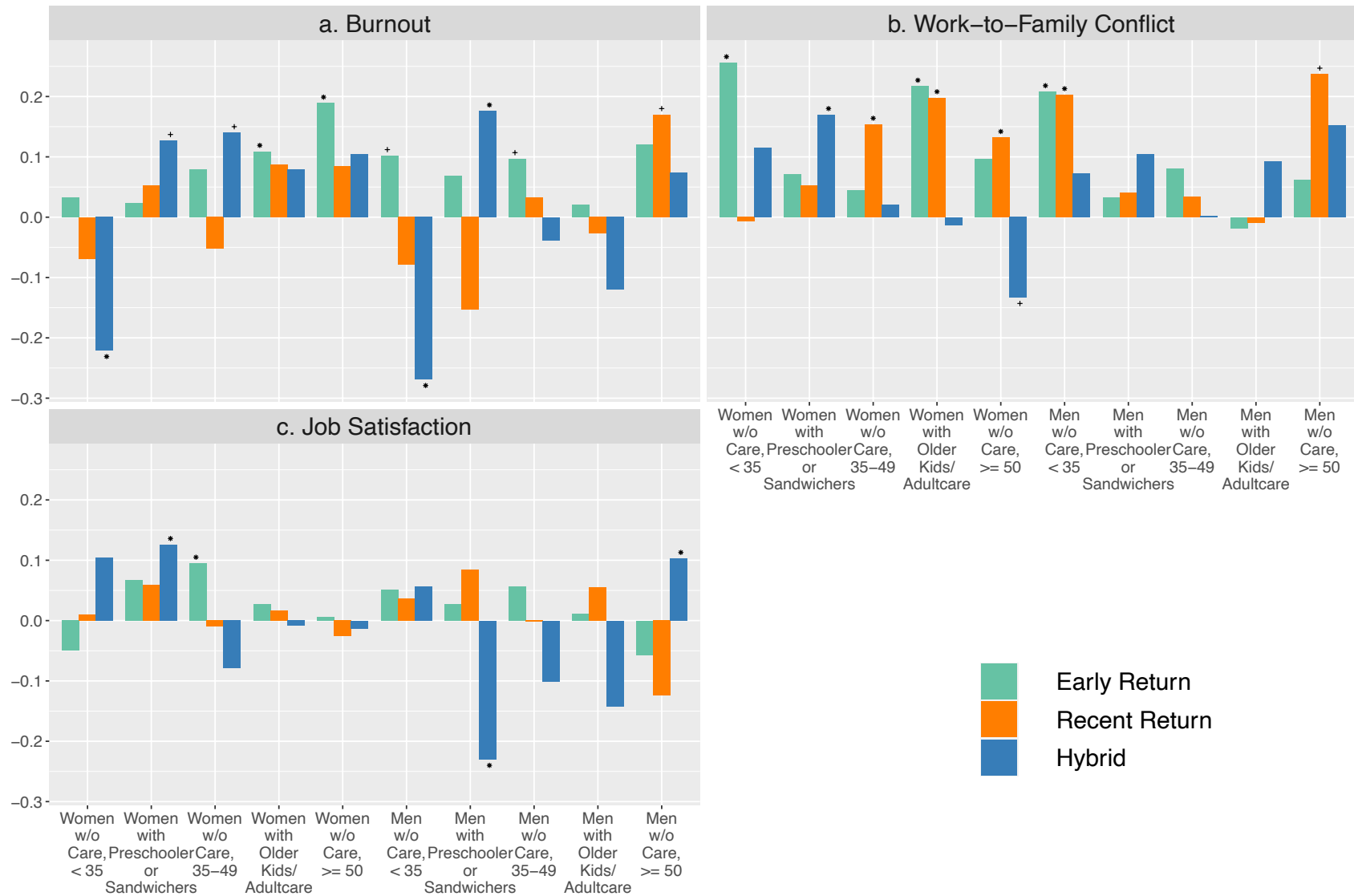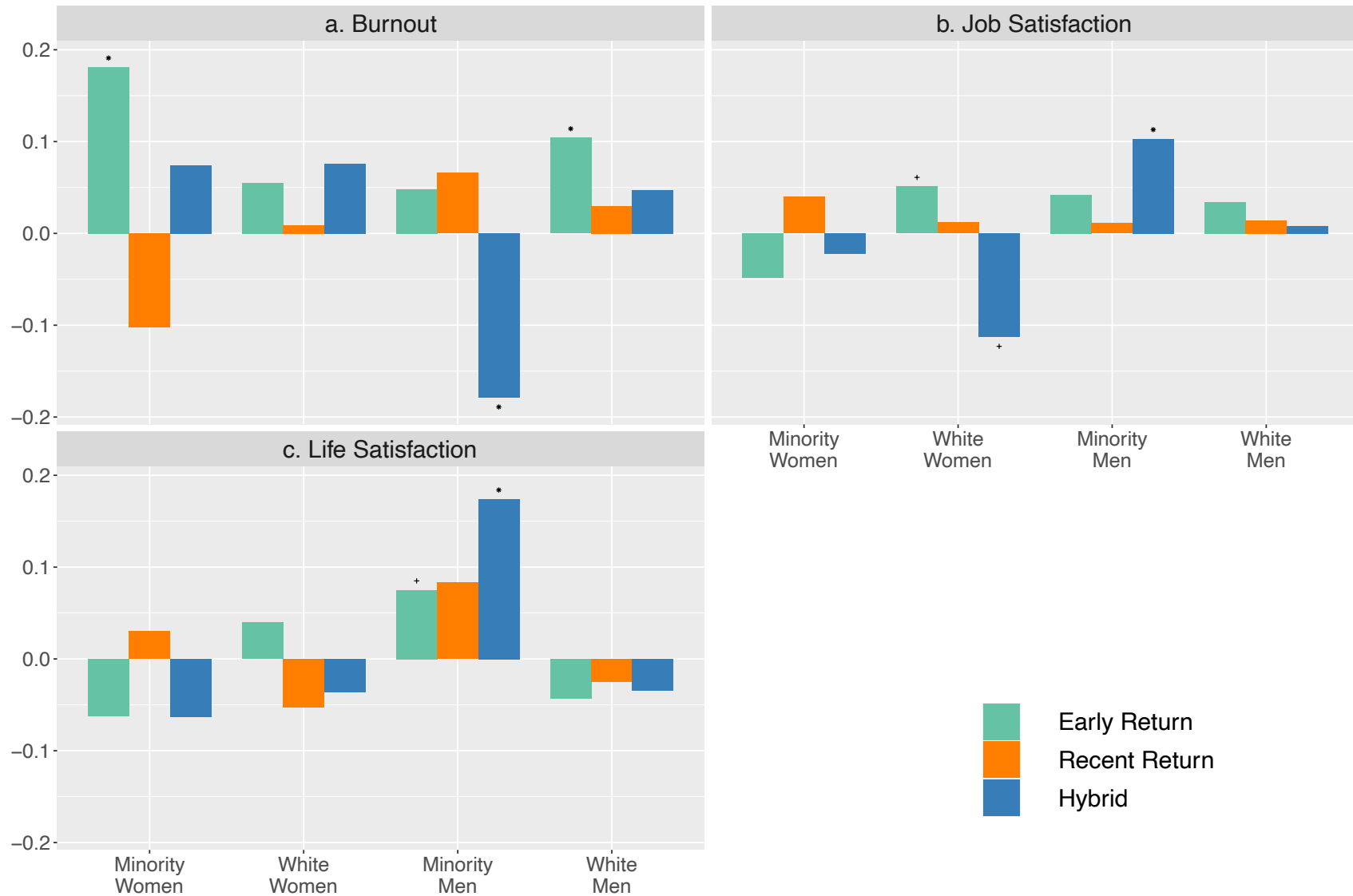
Note: * p<0.05, + p<0.1 for tests that presented values are significantly different from zero.

Figure 5b: Predicted Probabilities of Changes in Well−being Associated with Various Workplace Arrangements (Relative to Continuous Remote Work), by Gender and Race/Ethnicity
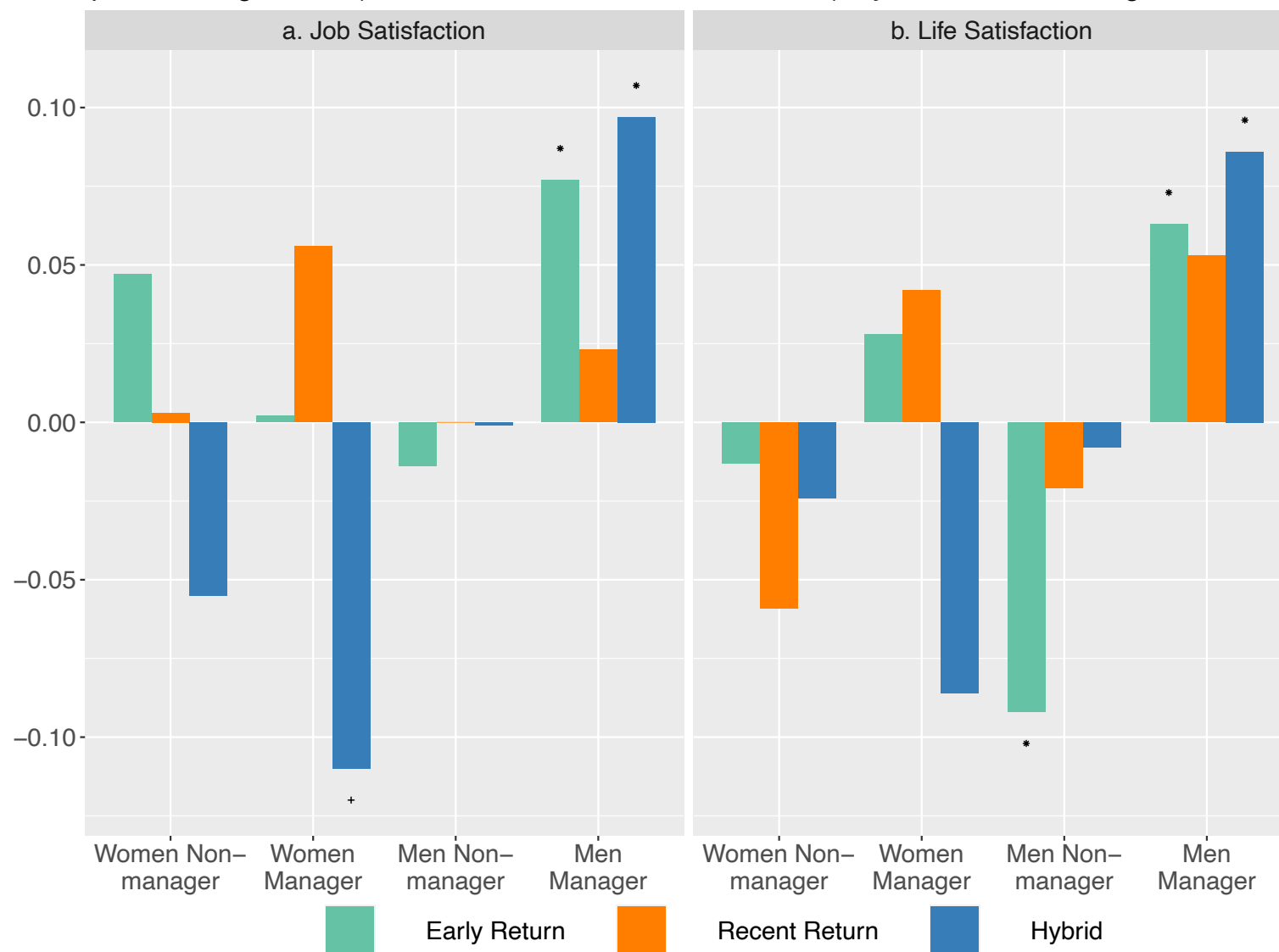
Note: * p<0.05, + p<0.1 for tests that presented values are significantly different from zero.

Figure 5c: Predicted Probabilities of Changes in Well−being Associated with Various Workplace Arrangements (Relative to Continuous Remote Work), by Gender and Educational Attainment

Note: Asterisks indicate values are significantly different from zero.

Figure 5d: Predicted Probabilities of Changes in Well−being Associated with Various Work−place Arrangements (Relative to Continuous Remote Work), by Gender and Managerial Status

Note: * p<0.05, + p<0.1 for tests that presented values are significantly different from zero.