J Fam Econ Iss (2009) 30:386–398
DOI 10.1007/s10834-009-9166-7

ORIGINAL PAPER

The Use of Boundaries by Self-employed, Home-Based Workers to Manage Work and Family: A Qualitative Study in Canada

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Published online: 10 September 2009
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Abstract This qualitative study used grounded theory methodology to explore the experiences of 30 self-employed, home-based workers in Canada. Using boundary and work–family border theories as central theoretical constructs, this research examined the extent to which workers used boundaries to manage work and family, the nature of these boundaries, and how they were negotiated by the workers and their families. The results indicated that self-employed, home-based workers used both conceptual and physical barriers to create and manage the boundaries between home and work and that these boundaries were reinforced by rules. Gender differences and similarities were observed in the ways that boundaries were constructed and managed. Based on these observations, several areas for further investigation are proposed.

Keywords Canadian qualitative study · Home-based work · Self-employed workers · Work–family boundaries

Introduction

Work and family separation, generally accepted as the norm since the industrial revolution, has been challenged as increasing numbers of workers attempt to reintegrate family and work within the confines of their homes. This trend is driven by the intersection of several factors. Workers, especially women, are searching for greater flexibility to accommodate work and family needs (Estes et al. 2007; Fitzgerald and Winter 2001; Golden 2008; Hochschild 1997; Mirchandani 1998; Sullivan and Lewis 2001). Staff reductions by governments and corporations have led many to self-employment and home-based work. These social changes have been facilitated by technologies such as the Internet and email. By the end of the 1990s, home-based work included a range of clerical, professional, trade, and service work that were previously carried out from offices, shops, and factories (Diamond and Lafferty 2000; Yttri 1999).

In 1991, 6% of the Canadian population were home-based workers. This figure amounted to 743,000 Canadians and included all categories except agricultural workers. Of this number, one-third were self-employed; the remainder were paid employees. Statistics Canada predicted that by the year 2001, over 1.5 million Canadians would be working from home (Akyeampong 2007; Nadwodny 1996). In 2000, Statistics Canada indicated that this number was underestimated, and there were 2.8 million Canadians working from home. These home-based workers represented 17% of the work force and were split equally between employees and self-employed workers (Akyeampong and Nadwodny 2001). Statistics Canada further reported that while 10% of employees worked from home, 50% or 1.4 million of self-employed workers were engaged in home-based work (Akyeampong and Nadwodny 2001). Recognizing this growth, Statistics Canada provided separate profiles for home-based employees and home-based, self-employed workers for the first time in 2000 (Akyeampong and Nadwodny 2001). In 2007, Akyeampong (2007) observed that the number of tele-workers did not increase, a development he found puzzling given the

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support from public administration and advocacy groups. Comparable figures for self-employed, home-based workers were not given so it is difficult to determine if there is a relationship between the two.

According to the National Association for the Self-Employed (2006) in the United States, 23.3 million people do some work at home, including paid and unpaid work, full-time and part-time work, as well as first and second jobs. Of this number, about 12.2 million, or 9% of the workforce conducted paid part-time or full-time work from their homes. In 1998, a U.S. Bureau of Labor survey found that 6.1 million U.S. households, or about 6% of households operated a home-based business. The survey also reported that 4.1 million of these home-based businesses were operated by self-employed individuals and the number of workers doing paid work from home doubled, from 1.9 million to 3.6 million between 1991 and 1997 (National Association for the Self-Employed 2006). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2005) reported in *Work at Home in 2004*, that one-third of home-based workers were self-employed, and two-thirds of the 7.0 million self-employed workers were home-based.

These figures point to a growing population of home-based workers in both the United States and Canada. Fitzgerald and Winter (2001) indicated that most home-based workers (in the United States) were in fact, self-employed. This growth creates a need to understand how families share their homes with work and the ways in which such sharing affects family relationships. Home-based work requires different approaches to time and space, as workers experience what it means to work in the family's living space as family members experience what it means to live in a work environment, and as both groups negotiate the intricacies of sharing the space (Lewis and Cooper 1999; Standen et al. 1999). It seems reasonable that the ideas about work and family that were developed and reinforced within a geographically removed work setting might not always be necessary or applicable to home-based work (Grzywacz and Marks 2000; Lewis and Cooper 1999; Steward 2000).

While most of the literature on home-based work focuses on tele-workers; that is, employees linked to an office by technology (Parasuraman and Simmers 2001), there is a growing body of research on self-employed workers, reflecting the importance of this population (Heck et al. 1995). The earlier research focused primarily on conflicts about time. By contrast, there is less emphasis on boundary negotiation in home-based work, conflicts over entitlement to space in home-based work, and the impact of home-based work on workers and their families; although, newer research has begun to address these issues (Fitzgerald and Winter 2001; Lewis and Cooper 1999; Mirchandani 1998; Standen et al. 1999; Sullivan 2000). There is also a need for more research on changes in the meaning of work when it is conducted in the home (Christensen 1988a, b; Desrochers and Sargent 2003; Lewis and Cooper 1999; Mirchandani 1998). Our research was designed to explore the types of boundaries that are created by home-based workers, the strategies they use to maintain these boundaries, and the effects these boundaries have for both work and family life.

Theoretical Sensitivity

Much of the existing research on home-based work uses a quantitative approach. This grounded theory study allowed workers who were self-employed, and therefore not accountable to an employer, to describe their experiences of working at home using their own words. It also allowed them to share their perceptions of the effects of the home-based work on their families and on family interactions. In a grounded theory study such as this, existing theoretical constructs and empirical literature can serve to sensitize the researcher to various aspects of the issue being considered (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Specifically, we focused our attention on boundary theory and the conceptualization of home-based work. The theoretical concepts that are available in these theories were used to guide and orient the inquiry. Furthermore, in the process of conducting analysis on the data, these pre-existing ideas served as a backdrop to the process of organizing and assigning meaning to the data. In grounded theory methodology, categories are inductively created out of the participants' experiences. These emergent categories are then considered in relation to the existing theory.

Boundary Theory

The central theoretical construct for this study was the concept of boundaries, which has been extensively used in the work–family literature. We also used a more recent and closely related concept, work–family border theory. According to Zerubavel (1991), boundaries are fundamental to human culture. They are socially constructed in *artificial* and *arbitrary* ways and they govern the manner in which people think and act. Lamont describes them as *symbolic*. The conceptual and geographic boundaries that people use to categorize and define can be both a source of conflict and of order. The shape of boundaries helps to organize societies, and social entities become meaningful according to their relationship to these boundaries (Lamont 2001). People impose boundaries over the natural non-order of things, including daily activities and the people and places with whom they come in contact (Nippert-Eng 1996; Yttri 1999).

Work–family border theory focuses specifically on work and family as separate but interdependent domains. The borders or lines between work and family may be temporal, physical, or psychological. This theory suggests that people are border crossers, and it helps to explain how workers manage to find a balance as they navigate these borders between work and family (Campbell-Clark 2000; Desrochers and Sargent 2003). Both boundary theory and work–family border theory provide useful frameworks for understanding the ways in which home-based workers create and manage the boundaries between work and family (Golden 2008). The term *boundary* as used here, includes both.

The concept of the work–family boundary is rooted in the traditional view that family and work are separate and competing systems (Barnett 1998). More recent research presents work and family as complementary, rather than competing systems (Greenhaus and Powell 2006; Pedersen, et al. 2009; Zody et al. 2006) but the idea of a separation between them remains embedded in both viewpoints (Barnett 1998, 2001; Grzywacz and Marks 2000; Lewis and Cooper 1999; Tuttle and Garr 2009; Voydanoff 2001). It would appear that the difference in these conceptualizations lies in the extent to which the boundaries between them are perceived to be permeable (Lewis and Cooper 1999; Voydanoff 2005; Zody et al. 2006).

The boundaries between work and family are multifaceted. Socially, work and family are accepted as being separate (Standen et al. 1999) and structurally, they are conducted in different spaces and at different times (Perlow 1998; Standen et al. 1999). Boundaries also have a psychological component, which relates to how workers move mentally from one domain to another (Campbell-Clark 2000; Mirchandani 1998; Nippert-Eng 1996; Standen et al. 1999; Yttri 1999). Boundary work, therefore, occurs on both a mental and a physical level. It includes *boundary placement*, or drawing the lines, and *boundary transcendence*, or crossing the lines (Nippert-Eng 1996; Yttri 1999).

The terms integration and segmentation have been applied to the degree to which people draw lines or cross lines between home and work (Nippert-Eng 1996; Yttri 1999). Workers move along a continuum of integration (permeable boundaries) to segmentation (rigid boundaries) as they face situations and try to find a place where they feel most comfortable (Campbell-Clark 2000; Nippert-Eng 1996; Yttri 1999). Segmentators move clearly in one direction or the other between the two categories, while with integrators, it is often difficult to tell the direction in which they are going (Nippert-Eng 1996; Yttri 1999).

Conceptualization of Home-Based Work

The idea of conflict is entrenched in the work–family literature, and this is carried over into the way in which home-based work is conceptualized. Studies indicate that boundaries do exist between work and family, but changing social conditions point to the need for researchers to look at them differently (Barnett 2001; Greenhaus and Powell 2006; Grzywacz and Marks 2000; Lewis and Cooper 1999; Voydanoff 2001, 2005). The interactions between work and family have become increasingly complex (Damiano-Teixeira 2006; Karimi and Nouri 2009; Philbrick and Fitzgerald 2007; Seery et al. 2008) and some newer research has argued for beneficial integration rather than conflict (Grzywacz and Marks 2000; Johnson et al. 2001; Lewis and Cooper 1999; Pedersen et al. 2009; Zody et al. 2006). The language of work–family interaction now includes terms such as facilitation, enhancement, and enrichment, in acknowledgement of the mutually positive interactions between work and family (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006; Karimi and Nouri 2009; Seery et al. 2008; Tuttle and Garr 2009).

Flexibility is often cited as the reason for home-based work (Barnett 2001; Heck et al. 1995; Hochschild 1997; Kirby 1999; Mirchandani 1998; Sullivan and Lewis 2001). However, home-based work lacks the time-honoured controls that are taken for granted in public work environments (Yttri 1999). Many home-based workers, therefore, adopt the patterns of public work environments which focus on *presence* (Kirby 1999; Perlow 1998) and which link presence in the workplace with productivity, as well as convenience in scheduling and monitoring (Kirby 1999; Mirchandani 1998; Perlow 1998). Lack of presence accounts for many of the real or imagined drawbacks that are commonly associated with home-based work. The temporal, spatial, and psychological boundaries created and maintained by home-based workers help to overcome lack of physical presence and portray an image of being at work (Kirby 1999; Mirchandani 1998).

Boundary Construction and Use Among Home-Based Workers

The extent to which home-based workers experience temporal, spatial and psychological boundaries is related to access to resources; such as, experience, education, income, extra space, and equipment (Fitzgerald and Winter 2001; Philbrick and Fitzgerald 2007). In general, workers with lower levels of pay and schedule control were home-based by circumstance, while at the higher levels, it was more often by choice (Christensen 1988b). When home-based work is by choice, workers cited advantages such as flexibility, financial gains, and the ability to work in a more relaxed environment (Sullivan and Lewis 2001).

The literature also indicates that gender is an important factor in the way home-based work is experienced (Daly 1996; Golden 2008; Mirchandani 1999; Sullivan and Lewis

2001). More women than men said that it allowed them to gain greater control over the environment within which they work, while managing family responsibilities with less stress (Perrucci et al. 2007; Rowe and Bentley 1992; Sullivan and Lewis 2001). It was found that the constructions of men's family roles were secondary. Women were more likely to report that child care was a primary motivation for working from home while men were more likely to mention increased productivity (Standen et al. 1999; Sullivan and Lewis 2001).

Home-based workers create temporal boundaries by following a fixed schedule, but they also transgress these boundaries in response to specific situations, thus acknowledging some degree of flexibility (Hall and Richter 1988; Mirchandani 1999; Perlow 1998). They also use psychological boundaries or mental routines to switch between work and family roles. This *mental commute* (Nippert-Eng 1996) serves two purposes—it represents the physical separation of work and home and helps to alleviate the stress of functioning in one domain while being physically located in the other (Campbell-Clarke 2000; Hall and Richter 1988; Mirchandani 1999). Segmentators use more time than integrators to make transitions between the two spheres (Campbell-Clark 2000; Nippert-Eng 1996; Yttri 1999).

In most instances, work that is conducted from home takes place in space that was intended for family needs. The use of separate physical space for living and working can help to create and reinforce the boundaries between them (Kirby 1999; Sullivan 2000). Separation of space could also reduce conflicts over entitlement since shared space is more likely to result in competition among family members for access to the same physical space at the same time (Daly 1996; Sullivan and Lewis 2001). The literature shows mixed results regarding the location of home-based work. Some workers have separate and exclusive work areas; others have designated space in common areas; such as, the den, basement, garage, sleeping areas, or kitchen (Mirchandani 1999; Sullivan 2000; Sullivan and Lewis 2001).

As suggested by the literature on home-based work, the key influences affecting the ways in which boundaries are created and maintained are flexibility, schedule control, work demands and intrusions, physical space, education, experience, and gender, as well as personal inclination towards integration or segmentation. The literature does not distinguish between employees and self-employed workers, and in the absence of this distinction, it is reasonable to extrapolate that the same influences are at work in both groups, but that they may be experienced in different ways. Such differences might arise from considerations; such as, degree of control, time monitoring, and work supervision.

Methodology

A grounded theory methodology was considered appropriate for this research for several reasons. Grounded theory is consistent with research that according to Daly (1992), seeks to "understand the meanings, interpretations, and subjective experiences of family members" (pp. 3–4). There were no a priori hypotheses for testing (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Instead, the study was conducted within the participants' own settings, and its aim was to capture in their own words, their views of how they worked from home. Moreover, grounded theory methodology provides a rigorous but flexible methodology for data collection, analysis, and theorizing. Study results have been presented largely from the participants' perspectives, but these have been filtered through a "process of self-awareness and self-reflection" (Morrow et al. 2001, p. 582).

A semi-structured questionnaire was constructed based on the sensitizing concepts in the literature. The open-ended questions provided structure to the interview while allowing the participants to use their own words in describing the ways in which they worked at home. This format also allowed the interviewer to modify questions in the spirit of emergent design and to follow up on interesting leads with additional questions in order to explore unanticipated areas (Charmaz 2002). Thus, emerging explanations served to guide the right questions to ask along the way, enabling a fuller, more saturated understanding of the participants' experiences.

Participants

Participants were recruited through personal contacts, snowball sampling, a press release on a university website and an announcement in a local newspaper. Men and women who were self-employed, worked from home, and lived with at least one other person were eligible to participate. Thirty volunteers—10 men and 20 women—from several communities in southern Ontario were interviewed. There were 23 Caucasians and 7 Blacks between the ages of 22 and 69. There was considerable diversity in the participants' family life stages, family configurations, and previous work experience in a public setting. Their educational backgrounds ranged from college diplomas to doctoral degrees, and they worked in a wide variety of professions and services. The oldest participant was 69 years old, the youngest 22, and the average age was 42 years old. The table below provides further details of the participants' occupations, the number of years of home-based work, and some demographic information.

All participants thought that they could find paid employment outside the home if they chose to do so. They also envisioned being self-employed, home-based workers

for the next 2 years. The average length of time they performed home-based work was 7.5 years. Some would consider working outside the home in the long term future (3–5 years) but would probably remain self-employed. Those who had chosen home-based work for personal rather than family or child care reasons, did not envision other forms of employment in the short- or long-term (Table 1).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through audio-taped interviews lasting approximately 1 h. Most of the interviews took place in the participants' home offices. To accommodate some participants, three interviews were conducted by telephone, and one took place in a university office. The interviews covered the following information: (a) demographics, including the number of family members, ages of family members, gender of the worker and family members, type of business, (b) use of time, space, and other boundary strategies, negotiation of boundaries, flexibility of boundaries, and transition strategies utilized and their effectiveness, and (c) the workers' perceptions of the attitudes of family members toward the strategies and rules that created or optimized the boundaries between the home-based business and the family.

In keeping with the grounded theory approach, data collection and analysis were guided by theoretical sampling, that is, sampling on the basis of the emerging theory (Charmaz 2002). Initially, open sampling was used to discover and identify data that were relevant to the research question. As the study progressed, sampling focused on

Table 1 Profile of participants

Nature of work	Age	Gender	# of Co-residents	# of Children[a]	Years of home-based work
Architect	44	M	3	2	16
Chartered accountant	69	M	1	0	30
Computer consultant	47	M	2	1	10
Corporate trainer	47	F	1	0	10
Editor	45	F	1	0	7
Editor/indexer	37	F	4	3	4
Financial planner	55	M	2	0	5
Financial planner	40	M	2	1	7
Life/executive coach	47	F	3	2	4
Marriage and family therapist	50	F	1	0	15
Marriage and family therapist	56	F	1	0	10
Marriage and family therapist	35	F	3	2	2
Marriage and family therapist	38	F	4	2	7
Massage therapist	43	F	4	3	6
Medical transcriptionist	35	F	3	2	3
Music instructor (group)	29	F	3	2	3
Music instructor/Tae Kwon Do instructor	29	F	3	2	3
Network support provider	28	M	1	0	2
Online editor	22	M	5	0	3
Personnel placement agent	38	F	3	3	6
Pet groomer	40	F	3	2	13
Public relations specialist	35	F	4	3	2
Research lawyer	39	F	3	2	5
Researcher	55	F	3	2	20
Researcher/meeting facilitator	41	F	1	1	5
Researcher/writer	40	F	4	3	8
School co-op program coordinator	52	M	1	0	5
Website designer	30	M	4	0	1½
Writer	45	M	3	3	7
Writer/graphic designer	40	F	5	4	2½

[a] Excludes children over age 18

confirming, elaborating, and validating relations between categories and eventually on confirming and verifying the core category and the theory as a whole, and on saturating poorly developed categories (Charmaz 2002; Strauss and Corbin 1998).

The grounded theory data analysis proceeded as outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) using comparative analysis. This involved integrating the data collection and analysis. Therefore, transcribing and analysis began after the first interview. By so doing, codes in the transcripts that held potential meanings could be identified and explored in subsequent interviews. These initial codes were constantly compared to subsequent codes as the interviews proceeded.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), constant comparative analysis occurs in three stages: (a) open, (b) axial, and (c) selective coding. Open coding began with line-by-line coding to identify emerging experiences, ideas, and processes. Codes were assigned to the data rather than forcing the data into preconceived codes. For example, questions relating to the home-based worker's experience of the intrusion of work and family time and space on each other elicited information about rules. Some of these were coded as: (a) rules relating to the worker's hours of work, their availability to clients and availability to family; (b) rules governing the use of work related equipment, supplies, and other objects; (c) rules regarding the use of space; and (d) rules for going to, and leaving work. There were also codes relating to the transgression and reinforcement of the rules. The coding process revealed ideas that were not part of the original questioning. These included ideas about how the home-based workers' self-knowledge helped them manage the boundaries. Examples of these codes were: (a) work during more productive hours; (b) preferred ways of working (multi-tasking or performing one task at a time); (c) desire for independence; (d) need for structure; and (e) the influence of client and family demands on the home-based worker's preferred way of working.

Line-by-line or open coding was followed by axial coding. This involved developing categories from the multitude of codes. These categories served to consolidate and organize the codes that emerged around a particular theme. Following through with the example of rules, categories were formulated as: (a) rules for self, (b) rules for clients, (c) rules for family, and (d) rules for others. Additional categories that emerged related to implicit and explicit rules and intentional transgression or reinforcement of the boundaries.

Axial coding was followed by selective coding, which involved looking for connections among the categories and developing the framework for the emerging substantive theory. These revealed, for example, (a) relationships between personal preferences, (b) the ways in which workers created and maintained boundaries, (c) the types of boundaries used, and (d) the processes for transitioning between work and home. Open, axial, and selective coding followed a pattern of recursiveness, and as categories emerged from the data they were connected with themes, thus reducing the number of categories.

Throughout the analysis process as ideas about the data occurred, memoing was used to document and elaborate on these ideas, categories, hypotheses and the emerging theory (Charmaz 2002; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1998). After each interview, observations were recorded using memos. Later in the analysis process, memos were written which included subjective interpretations and developing ideas about categories and themes (Charmaz 2002). Mapping the data involved organizing the categories, grouping them into themes and comparing them with memos and other notes prepared during the study.

Several strategies recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were utilized to ensure that the findings of this study would be credible. Each participant was interviewed only once, but the length and depth of the interviews provided the opportunity to obtain a clear understanding of the home-based worker's environment and its effect on both work and family. The responses by participants were accepted as given, but in order to avoid misunderstandings, questions were asked to clarify contradictory or confusing information, and to solicit additional detail during the interviews. In order to ensure fairness in reporting on the ideas and experiences of the participants, the transcripts were read, and the taped interviews listened to on multiple occasions.

Transferability was achieved by providing *thick descriptions*. To this end, verbatim quotations are used in this paper, accompanied by brief descriptors to animate and contextualize the participants. Dependability and confirmability were assured by maintaining an audit trail and through consultations with academic advisors who also coded two transcripts during the process. For purposes of confirmability, negative instances were identified and accounted for. In addition, copies of transcripts and taped interviews, as well as notes and memos describing personal observations and interpretations, have been documented and maintained.

Findings

This study began as an exploration of the ways in which self-employed, home-based workers use time, space, and mental routines to create and manage the boundaries between work and family. Early in the interviews, several other strategies for boundary creation and management became evident. In addition to time and space, participants talked about the symbolic importance of physical objects,

routines, and rules in the creation and management of boundaries. In the presentation of our substantive theory about the nature of boundaries in home-based work, we first present a description of time and space boundaries followed by a discussion of the symbolic processes used in the creation and maintenance of these boundaries. Where the findings are illustrated by direct quotations from the participants, the nature of the work performed is included in parentheses.

Time

All participants reported using time as a means of creating and managing boundaries. Temporal boundaries were sustained primarily by blocking specific time periods for work and family and attempting to complete activities in one domain within the specified chunk of time. Scheduling of time was the most commonly used means of creating boundaries between work and family. Most participants spoke of planning their time in order to avoid conflicts and to be available for both family and work. The practice of *chunking* or *blocking* to demarcate specific times for work and family was a frequently used strategy, and several participants spoke of clearly separating work time from family time to ensure that they did not *sacrifice family for work*.

Schedules were often dictated by external circumstances; such as, client needs or academic calendars. From a mother of three, we got a typical example of how school hours determined the time that was available to be blocked off for work.

> I would do everything that I had to by 3:00, and then close things down and go get him, and then it would be play time, dinner time that sort of thing, and then I would come back to work when the kids went to bed (Public Relations Specialist).

Most participants were inclined to ignore clock time and focus on results rather than on the amount of time spent, or the time of day when particular tasks were completed. To this end, many ignored the standard nine-to-five work day and performed tasks at their convenience.

> I can take a project that I have been working at sporadically during the day, finish it at night and have it on someone's desk at 9:00 the next morning…And also I enjoy during the day other things that are better done in daylight. Gardening is a daylight activity; I can't do that at midnight. Cooking meals is something I can't do at midnight. So those are my daily activities, and if it means I have to put in four hours of work after 9:00 at night, I am fine with that (Writer & Graphic Designer).

Interspersed between work activities were blocks of time for family activities; such as, child care, home maintenance, and relationship building. Several participants were also careful to schedule time for self-care and community involvement. Blocking off times sequentially for work and family created a dilemma of being physically present but unavailable to family. Despite their best efforts to block time, participants were often faced with unavoidable and unwanted blurring of the boundaries. During personal and family emergencies, most participants said that family demands took precedence over work even when it disadvantaged the home-based worker. Participants' families took it for granted that, when necessary, the flexibility they enjoyed would be called upon to benefit them. One participant related this experience:

> A few weeks ago, I had on Monday a sick child home. Then on Tuesday, it was a snow day, and on Wednesday I had a school meeting in the morning. When I have a week like that, I get a bit edgy because I feel that it is my work (pause) I am the one that has to compensate (Researcher & Writer).

Temporal boundaries were also blurred by multitasking across the two domains as many participants simultaneously performed work-related and family-related activities. Participants who sometimes appreciated having blocks of uninterrupted work time would, at other times, intentionally integrate work and family time. Most participants, therefore, fell somewhere between the extremes of the segmentation-integration continuum. Those who preferred greater integration took advantage of schedule control to blur the boundaries between work and family, performing work and family activities simultaneously rather than sequentially. Time boundaries were frequently blurred to allow participants to integrate self, family, relationships, and work in ways that were meaningful to them. Some had a *kid fix* by spending short periods with their children and then going back to work. Others folded laundry while working the telephone, and yet others prepared meals while continuing to work.

Space

The construction and management of spatial boundaries by participants were largely determined by whether the work space was dedicated or shared. Most participants, however, had separate and dedicated working space. They had purchased homes with additional space to be used as offices, or they renovated, redecorated or otherwise modified existing homes to create workspace. Dedicated space was often located in main floor dens and offices, spare bedrooms, converted formal living and dining rooms, and basements.

Some work areas were quite substantial, including meeting, waiting and treatment rooms for clients.

Dedicated space was often accompanied by a strong association with the area for work only. This was particularly evident where there was a need to maintain confidentiality of the client or the information. Several participants mentioned that families were either not allowed or not inclined to enter their work space. Others noted that they never use the work area for relaxation and had no desire to do so. The participants' location in the space was also an important factor in the way meaning was associated with the space. Several spoke of their presence in the work space and how this was interpreted by themselves and their family members. It was understood by the workers, their partners, and children that when they entered the work space, they were at work and did not wish to be disturbed. Also, by leaving the work space, they signaled that they were no longer at work.

Not all participants wanted total or even partial separation of work and family space. One participant appreciated the fact that his commute consisted of swiveling his chair from one desk to another. Another, who worked out of his bedroom, expressed a strong desire to have no visible separation of the different areas of his life. Another made a point of mixing work with personal and business entertainment. Clients were equally welcome in her personal and business spaces. One participant reported that his new home was being built using a *semi-open* concept so that he could work while supervising his children's homework or while keeping an eye on them as they ate their after school snacks. Most often located in bedrooms, dens, offices, basements, and in one case, the laundry room, shared space was protected by rules, physical barriers, or both. In some cases, shared space was clearly designated for work but could, under specific conditions, be used for other purposes. For example, children were allowed to play quietly, and partners used computers located in the office space. Some participants created a *kid-friendly* corner in their offices. Another parent with three young children described her efforts to blur spatial boundaries thus:

> I have paper and all that stuff in here, and my son loves to go in there and color. He is a big crafter, and he would find anything and everything he could to craft, so now we have created a little spot for him. And he knows that's the only place that he can go to get it. I also have a little bed set up and a swing to keep the baby if I am working, and he is not sleeping (Public Relations Specialist).

Some home-based workers of both sexes seemed to prefer a boundary-less approach in their daily routine. Several participants worked in different rooms at different times of the day as they followed the sunlight. Others used family rooms because the temperature or furniture were more comfortable. Some participants met clients on patios, spread materials over the living floors and dining tables, and worked in living rooms, family rooms, bedrooms, and kitchens. When the boundaries were blurred in this manner, family members were not always pleased with the *sprawl*, as one participant who worked out of her bedroom commented:

> My husband thinks that I spread too many of my supplies around the entire house, and there is stacks of paper here and there, and the mail and other things like that filter down and up and down and up (Writer/Graphic Designer).

Another man shared that his tendency to roam the house on his portable phone disturbed other family members in the course of carrying out their everyday routine. Some of the participants, who expressed a preference for fewer or no boundaries between work and family, had no need to accommodate the needs of children and other family members. Others exercised this preference even when it was not convenient for family members. This would suggest that personal preference was more influential than family structure or family stage in determining the participants' use of boundaries.

The study participants acknowledged that while time and space were used independently to create and sustain boundaries, they sometimes intersected, resulting in competition for the space. When spatial boundaries were erected or sustained to give work priority, family members often felt deprived. For example, when family members could not be within close proximity of working areas, they were sometimes deprived of the use of family spaces that adjoined work areas. A sense of deprivation related not only to the space but also to the use of objects located within the space; such as, computers and television sets.

Symbolic Processes in Boundary Creation and Maintenance: Physical Objects, Routines and Rules

Physical Objects

The location, use, and sharing of physical objects was an important aspect of boundary creation and maintenance. Objects that were used to create and maintain boundaries between home and work fell into four types. The first type was particularly important to the participants who saw clients at home. It included partitions, doors, and room dividers, such as curtains and screens, which help to mute sounds and provide a sense of privacy and safety for clients. They also helped to protect family spaces as shown by this music instructor:

> I would close my bathroom door so nobody could go in…. I set boundaries… set expectations for them, and then stand firm to that. The odd time I say, "Please don't go up the stairs because that's my boundary…. A very simple way of creating boundaries is to close doors (Music Instructor-Group).

Secondly, directional signs were important for creating and managing boundaries. Signs were posted to advise or remind clients to use specific entrances or areas, and they were directed to the signs when they transgressed the boundaries. For example, this marriage and family therapist noted that when clients come to the family entrance:

> I wait until they see the sign that says to use the side door, and sometimes I go and get them, or the family will say to them "You have to use the side door" (Marriage and Family Therapist).

A third type consisted of office equipment, supplies, and furniture. Boundaries were sustained or blurred depending on whether these were dedicated or shared. Most participants had dedicated telephones to maintain separation between work and family but conceded that these were sometimes used for personal and family activities. One writer gave the following reasons for maintaining separate telephone lines:

> … one, is so that my daughter never answers my business phone. So if a business person chooses to phone me on my home line and she chats away with them, then they take the chance. So it was for that, professionalism. And also when I finish working, if the work line rings I don't answer it. They leave a message, and I will get back to them (Researcher & Meeting Facilitator).

The fourth type included objects that created ambience. Participants appreciated their freedom over the décor, environment, temperature, and lighting of their work space. They used fireplaces, special lighting, water fountains, and personal objects; such as, photographs and hobby paraphernalia to intentionally create a sense of warmth and a *home-like* atmosphere. One marriage and family therapist intentionally decorated her office to focus on the professional, not the personal, aspects of her life in an effort to clarify the distinction between her work and family life.

Routines

Boundaries were also created by routines that helped participants to move from home to work and vice versa. Participants used a combination of mental and physical routines to accomplish the transition from one domain to another. Most of the participants who identified transition routines noted that these were for beginning and ending work. Although many of the participants stated a preference for working during *off hours*, they also worked between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. to facilitate their clients. For this reason, many transition routines for *going to work* centered on personal grooming, drinking coffee, reading the newspaper, getting children ready for school and taking them to school or the bus stop, or completing certain household chores.

Some transition routines simulated commute time. These participants mentally switched while walking from living to working spaces. One participant, who lived and worked in the same physical space, noted that his commute consisted of switching to a different disk drive. Some walked down a hallway, up or down a flight of stairs, others moved beyond a screen or curtain.

For others, the routines involved preparing the work area. This included cleaning or laying out files and documents. At the end of the work period, they reversed the chores. One participant noted that at the end of the day, she swept the floor, turned off the lights, and closed the door. It was the act of closing the door which signaled that she was not at work any more.

> … I finish my work, I finish up my notes, I don't just stop work and then do family. I have a few minutes that I sort of put the work away, and then I will come into a different space, so I think both by making sure my work is completed and the second one is that I physically change spaces, from work to the family area (Pet Groomer).

The act of dressing or changing clothes was another means of transitioning from one domain to another. Participants dressed differently for work, and several changed clothing when they finished working. For some participants, the act of changing clothes signified a transition, while for others, there were personal rules regarding dress code for being at work or with family. For one woman, the transition was powerfully symbolized by a simple elastic:

> It's funny. When I put an elastic in my hair I feel like I am in the work world, and when it's down, I am at home (Writer/Graphic Designer).

In general, those participants who were more inclined to blur the boundaries had fewer transition routines. They also did not talk about routines for frequent switching between work and family activities during the course of a work day (or night). Participants who multi-tasked across work and family domains talked about operating primarily in one domain but that they were able to accomplish tasks in the other without identifiable routines for moving between them. As one woman indicated:

> I am pretty good at focusing on the task that I am in, but I am also good at multi-tasking in a variety of things too. An example, I can throw a load of laundry from the washer to the dryer between clients, and I don't have any trouble doing those kinds of things (Marriage and Family Therapist).

Rules

Rules were also used to create and reinforce the boundaries between work and family. Rules for the participants themselves and their family members related to availability and access, the use of work space, equipment and supplies, the presence of family members and regulation of environmental factors; such as, sounds and smells. Rules for clients specified their responsibilities and governed their behavior while in the home-based working environment. Participants also created rules for relatives, friends, acquaintances, neighbors, and other professionals. These rules were related mainly to the participant's availability for social and professional interactions.

The rules created by the home-based workers served several purposes. First, they protected both work and family. Some rules ensured client safety, privacy, and confidentiality. Setting and communicating boundaries helped to make clients feel safe and comfortable. Rules also served to manage clients' expectations. Several participants noted that they valued their freedom to establish boundaries around their work and used the control it gave them to ensure that clients were clearly told what to expect in terms of hours of operation and turn-around times. Other rules served to protect the work environment, working paraphernalia, completed work, and to preserve an atmosphere that facilitated work. As a mother of four children said:

> … the other rule is that they don't touch my stuff. I have lost a few papers and they have put things through the printer that they shouldn't have, or someone has written a note on my work document. Now the rule is nothing on my desk is moveable or touchable (Personnel Placement Agent).

Some rules also existed to protect family from client intrusions. Rules for clients indicated use of designated entrances and parking areas, arrival and departure times, access to bathrooms, and exclusion from private areas of the home. Most workers strictly enforced rules relating to hours of work, and several noted that they had cutoff hours for answering business calls. Participants also talked about the use of rules as a way to protect themselves from unrealistic family expectations. For example, one woman talked about being clear with her husband about expectations for housework:

> … what I said to my husband, because it was getting frustrating, was: "When you leave in the morning, as you see things, expect them to be the same way when you get home. If dinner is on the table or… something is in the dryer, that is a bonus day, but don't expect it to be like that because just the same way you walk out the door and forget about it for the day, I do too. I have to because I am at work (Corporate Trainer).

There were rules for relatives, friends and neighbors, as the participants set boundaries to ensure that their work was not constantly interrupted.

> One frustration is that… people don't respect my time as work time. Neighbors or family members call me during day on my work [phone] line and I will try to tell them that these are my work hours and I will call them after supper, and they don't understand that (Researcher/Meeting Facilitator).

Rules also served to manage the participants' personal and professional images. These regulated sounds, smells, activities, and the presence of family members. For example, children were not allowed to bounce balls or make loud noises. Activities; such as, cutting the lawn, washing dishes, or vacuuming, were sometimes prohibited, and the volume on television sets had to be turned down low if clients were physically present or if they could overhear these noises during telephone conversations. One participant shared the following anecdote.

> I try to be professional, but I can be on the phone and my son will burst in when I don't want him to, and say, "Mommy I have to go pee" and obviously, it's not what I prefer. And when my daughter was younger… I was breast-feeding, and I had one lawyer on the phone who asked, "What's that sucking noise?" I told him it was interference or something (Research Lawyer).

Regardless of whether rules were implicit or explicit, the participants were frequently faced with breakdowns in their observation and the need to enforce them. Reinforcement of boundaries was often stressful and disruptive, but necessary for the success of their work.

Gender Differences in the Maintenance of Boundaries

Important gender differences and similarities were observed among the study participants. More women than men worked from home to accommodate their families. Both men and women often gave priority to work in terms of time, space, and use of objects when both demanded

attention. The results indicated that men were more likely than women to feel guilty or distressed when they departed from the structured approach used in public work settings. Women, however, were more likely than men to feel guilty when they spent time on work rather than with their children. During family emergencies, male participants sometimes gave priority to family, but women assumed this responsibility more often. Consequently, the women in this study spoke of sacrificing work for family in a way that we did not hear from the men.

Several female participants noted that their male partners performed child care and housekeeping activities to help maintain their home-based working environments. Some women spoke about their spouses' expectations that they would be able to accommodate child care, housework, and paid work because they were at home. All of these women had spouses who worked outside the home. There was less discussion about what women who worked outside the home expected from their male partners who were engaged in home-based work.

Contrary to reports in the existing literature, this study found that men and women did not differ significantly in the quality and amount of work space, or in the extent to which family members contributed to the paid work. Consistent with existing literature, although some men consciously blurred the boundaries, women, especially those with children, were more likely to blur the boundaries to facilitate family. Although men shared the housework and child care responsibilities, the language used by both men and women made it clear that that these were still primarily the women's responsibilities. It should be pointed out that the findings for gender were confounded by other factors; such as, life and family stage. The women in the sample outnumbered the men by 2:1, and many of these women had pre-school and school-aged children. Therefore, they reported more frequent work schedule interruptions and increased blurring of the boundaries between work and family. Several participants referred to the *balance* that they had achieved but also recognized that this balance was fleeting. Men and women who had young families used more rules to govern home and family interactions and spent more time reinforcing those rules. They also transgressed the boundaries more often, either reactively or proactively, in order to meet family needs or to integrate work and personal needs.

Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research

The goal of a grounded theory study such as this involves presenting the substantive theory based on the saturation of the developed categories (Charmaz 2002). The substantive theory that has emerged in this study suggests that boundaries were created and managed to enhance the participants' productivity, to help them find their own level of comfort with either integration or segmentation of work and family, and to manage the ever-changing demands of work and family. The boundaries served to conquer perceptions that the participants were not working, as well as to ensure that they were not perceived as being always at work. In this sense, boundaries helped to protect both work and family while communicating a sense of professionalism.

Successful boundary management was dependent on the worker's ability to adapt. Rigid separation of work and family was sometimes desirable. At other times, selective and intentional transgression of the boundaries allowed the participants and their family members to maximize the opportunities and minimize the challenges presented by the home-based work. The effort required to manage the boundaries in the face of these changes often proved to be mentally, physically and emotionally challenging. Yet, there was every indication that the boundaries between work and family would continue to exist because they provided the means to maintain structure and order. There was also every indication that they could be challenged or undermined by changes in either work or family. It, therefore, seems likely that the boundaries between work and family will shift and change, but will not be completely eroded.

Many participants spoke of their own self-knowledge in the use of boundaries. Knowing their strengths, their weaknesses, distractions, and ways of compensating helped them to establish, transgress and recreate boundaries in ways that were helpful to them. There were times when the process or the outcome of their boundary management contravened conventional wisdom and the desires of others in their family or work systems. Their self-knowledge and their level of comfort were important in helping the participants to sustain, blur or remove boundaries despite the perceptions of others. This is consistent with the findings from a study of female faculty members (Damiano-Teixeira 2006). Individual preferences have been put forward as one possible answer to the ways individuals navigate the work–family boundary. Further research could confirm the importance of individual preferences as well as other factors that impact individual preferences (Desrochers and Sargent 2003).

The home-based work force has persisted numerically and in the scope of services, trades, and professions. This calls for new ideas about work culture and adaptive strategies for balancing work and family (Haddock et al. 2006). Several researchers have argued that some traditional ideas about presence and supervision that were developed in public work settings are not suitable for home-based work (Kirby 1999; Mirchandani 1998; Perlow 1998; Yttri 1999). There is much that is fundamentally different from traditional work environments when the work is located in the home and the worker is self-employed (Grzywacz and

Marks 2000; Lewis and Cooper 1999; Steward 2000). These include the rhythms of home and family, the pace of the work, the design of the work-space, and the need to deliberately create and maintain boundaries between home and work. Further research could shed light on the ways these are different in home-based work and allow for comparison with public work environments.

Since the growth of both home-based and self-employment work have been fueled in part by staff reductions in corporations and governments, it is expected that this trend has economic implications. Additional research is needed to explore the connection between work–family boundaries and family economics (Greenhaus and Powell 2006; Haddock et al. 2006).

One traditional metaphor for managing work and family was evident in the language of the study participants. Many of them mentioned balance, but were quite clear that balance was not a target or event, but a process that required change and adaptability. In this regard, time can be viewed not only as a ledger that involves balancing the work and family columns, but also as a process that must be continually negotiated and navigated on a daily basis. Recognizing that balance is not a static state, Comer and Stites-Doe (2006) expressed a preference for the term *balancing*. Thompson and Bunderson (2001) suggested that "time as a container of meaning" (p. 18) may be a more appropriate metaphor as it allows for a consideration of significance of the activities that occupy an individual's time. From this perspective, temporal boundaries are a means for communicating and clarifying values, needs, and expectations in the family home. Further research on the language used to describe work–family (Greenhaus and Powell 2006; Lewis and Cooper 1999) may shed light on new metaphors that are more applicable to home-based workers. These may replace or enhance traditional ones, such as *juggling* which suggests frenzy, and *walking a tight-rope* which suggests a level of tension that may not be experienced by self-employed, home-based workers. More appropriate metaphors would probably connote images of work and family as providing and sharing resources, communicating preferences and needs, and structuring the routine of everyday work and family life. In contrast with a view of work and family that only communicates conflict between work and personal life, these metaphors would suggest the constructive, enriching nature of work and family boundaries.

The experience of living in a work environment for other family members is one area that begs for further exploration (Fitzgerald and Winter 2001; Heck et al. 1995). While the participants were willing to share their perceptions of their family members' experiences, all were careful to observe that they could not really speak for them. Further research could shed light on the nuances of living in someone else's work space, the impact of establishing or transgressing boundaries to accommodate work, the meaning of having boundary decisions made by someone else, and whether family members are merely acquiescent or truly supportive. Additional research in this area, using the family as the unit of analysis, could make an important contribution to understanding the complex, bi-directional nature of work–family interactions in the home.

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