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# Negotiating the Boundaries between Home and Work Practices:

# The Case of Home-Workers

Volume I of II

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April 2012

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## Abstract

When people work from home, the domains of home and work are co-located, often under one roof. Home-workers have to cope with the meeting of two practices that have traditionally been physically separated. In light of this, we need to understand: how do people who work from home negotiate the boundaries between their home and work practices? What kinds of boundaries do people construct? How do boundaries affect the relationship between home and work as domains? What kinds of boundaries are available to home-workers? Are home-workers in charge of their boundaries or do they co-create them with others? How does this position home-workers in their domains?

In order to address these questions, I analysed a variety of data, including newspaper columns, online forum discussions, interviews, and personal diary entries, using a discourse analytic approach that lends itself to issues of positioning. Current literature clashes over whether home-workers are in control of their boundaries, and over the relationship between home and work that arises out of boundary negotiations, i.e. whether home and work are dichotomous or layered. I seek to contribute to boundary theory by adopting a practice theory stance (Wenger, 1998) to guide my analysis. By viewing home and work as practices, I show that boundary negotiations depend on how home-workers are positioned, e.g. if they are positioned as peripheral in a domain, they lack influence over boundaries. I demonstrate that home and work constitute a number of different practices, rather than a rigid dichotomy, and that the way home and work are related are not the same for all home-workers. The application of practice concepts further shows how relationships between practices are created. The contribution of this work is a reconceptualisation of current boundary theory away from individual and cognitive notions (Nippert-Eng, 1996) into the realm of positioning.

## Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere.

Nora Christina Koslowski

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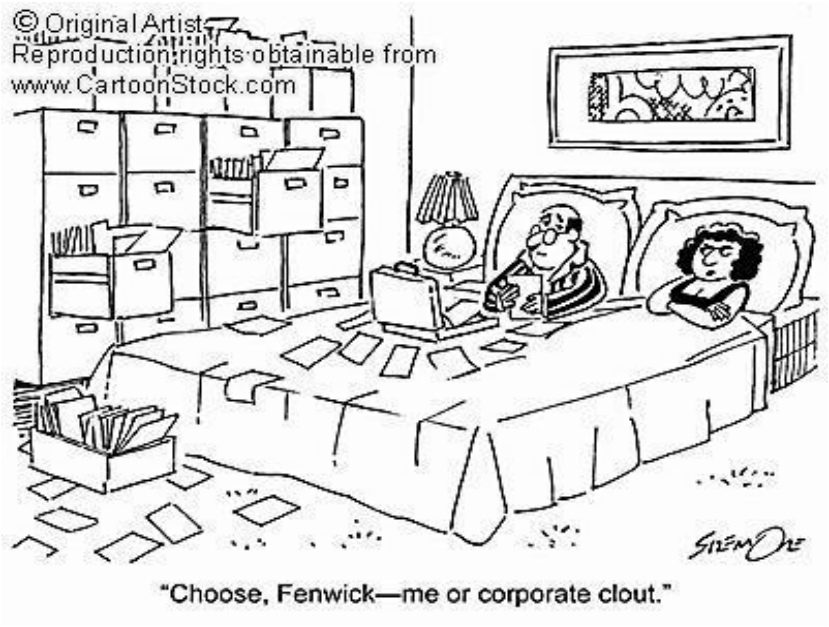
# Chapter 1

# Introduction

## 1.1. Introduction




Picture 1: Home-Work. Source: www.cartoonstock.com

Working from home brings the domains of home and work into close contact with each other. The potential for home and work to become merged and take its toll on people is significant, as shown in the cartoon. This requires home-workers to negotiate boundaries between home and work. I am interested in the kinds of boundaries that home-workers attempt to construct and why, how home-workers negotiate boundaries and how this positions them relative to home and work domains. I am also curious about whether boundary negotiation shapes the relationship between home and work as domains.

Current theorising on home-work boundaries is too individualised and tends to overlook the social context of boundary negotiation. There is a gap for a new boundary theory, which locates home-workers in their home and work practices. A new theory, which makes explicit the home-workers' positionings in their home and work domains is needed to better understand how negotiation works. I suggest that boundary negotiation occurs within a person's home and work environments. Negotiation is affected by how people participate in

their environments, e.g. whether they are influential or marginal members shapes the kinds of boundaries they can construct. At present, research is more concerned with where the boundaries of home and work are located, rather than with how they are created through negotiation. The contribution of this thesis will therefore be a reconceptualisation of boundary theory. I will move boundary theory from being rather rigid (e.g. people either integrate or segment between home and work) and individualised towards a stance that highlights processes of belonging in home and work domains as being at the root of how boundaries are negotiated.

While working from home is still an atypical arrangement, it is a reality for a significant number of people: nearly 10 per cent of the labour force in Ireland – the context in which the research is situated (Eurostat, 2010). Working from home is more current than ever before – job shortages mean that many people start up their own businesses from within their homes (Walker & Webster, 2004). Many people are also looking for changed work arrangements, such as home-work, in order to better accommodate their home and work lives (Kelliher & Richardson, 2012a). It is vital that the lived experiences of these workers receive in-depth attention in order to understand the boundary negotiations invoked by home-work.

The structure of this thesis is as follows: In chapter 2, I will review relevant literature, identify gaps and formulate my research aims and research questions. Chapter 3 documents the methodological considerations which inform my research. Chapter 4 discusses the 'what' and 'why' of boundaries. Chapter 5 aims to understand the 'how' of boundaries by analysing the strategies that people use to negotiate boundaries with others. Chapter 6 examines the positioning of home-workers within their practices. Chapter 7 addresses how home and work as domains are positioned relative to one another as a result of boundary negotiation. In chapter 8, I will devise my version of boundary theory. Chapter 9 concludes the thesis by evaluating its contributions.

# Chapter 2

# Review

## 2.1. Introduction

This thesis investigates how people who work from home negotiate the boundaries between work and home. Boundary negotiation encompasses the configuration of home and work as spheres. It also touches upon the positioning of home-workers in their home and work domains. In order to fully appreciate the context of these three issues in home-work (boundary negotiation, home-work configurations, and home-workers' positioning), the current chapter provides a review of pertinent literature. In this chapter, I will situate my thesis in the home-work conversation and highlight the gaps that necessitate my research.

The structure of this chapter is as follows: First, I discuss the larger societal discourses of 'home' and 'work', which permeate this research, and I explore the relationship between these two constructs. I will then introduce the boundary concept and evaluate the suitability of boundary theory for exploring the home-work interface. Specifically, I will review different approaches to boundary theory and explain the need for a novel approach, which this thesis offers. Based on the research focus, I continue by considering literature on boundary negotiation, which falls into the following categories: types of boundaries, boundary functions, strategies for establishing boundaries, influences on boundary negotiation, and outcomes of boundary negotiation. I proceed by proposing an analytical framework for my research: practice theory. The choice of framework will be explained and analytical concepts that are relevant to this research are presented. I will show how the framework can deepen current understanding of boundary negotiation. The chapter concludes with a description of the research aims and an overview of the research questions.

## 2.2. ‘Home’ and ‘Work’

My research investigates how people who work from home negotiate the boundaries between home and work. The concepts of ‘home’ and ‘work’ underpin my research: their meanings and the ways they are ordered need to be understood. The development over the years of how people have worked means that it has become tradition to view work and home as opposite ends of a dichotomy. Since the onset of industrialisation in the western world, paid work has become an activity that takes place outside the home (Clark, 2000; Runté & Mills, 2004). Its location and monetary rewards legitimise the work domain (Shumate & Fulk, 2004). Work is the public sphere of production. Consumption, in contrast, happens in the private domain of the home (Halford & Leonard, 2001; Shumate & Fulk, 2004). Home and work are physically separated, which has entered the ways we think about these domains (Halford & Leonard, 2001). The sharp opposition of work and home means that home has become a refuge from the harsh workplace (Greenhill & Wilson, 2006), a place where people can be themselves (Shumate & Fulk, 2004). The workplace, however, is associated with surveillance, control and monitoring (Brocklehurst, 2001). To be at work is to be present and visible at a specific workplace (Felstead et al., 2005). Accordingly, when people are not at this place, they are not working and not eligible for payment (Felstead et al., 2005). The notion of place is anything but neutral because places are always places for ‘something’ (Kompast & Wagner, 1998). This means that the workplace and the home are associated with well-defined scripts and ways of being.

Tietze (2002) asserts that the dichotomy is reflected in how we talk about home and work. The discourses of home and work involve different sets of people, norms, behaviours, practices, affect and subjectivities (Tietze, 2002; Halford, 2006). The dichotomy provides guidance on how to behave appropriately in each domain (Anderson, 2009). While the

household discourse is organised around notions of love, care and nurture (Halford & Leonard, 2001; Tietze, 2002), the industrial workplace discourse encompasses principles of money and profit, which are expressed in production systems designed to achieve maximum efficiency (Tietze, 2002). Furthermore, home and work draw on different temporal regimes, with the home domain using a task-based conceptualisation of time, and the work domain adhering to a clock-based conceptualisation of time in which the 'time is money' metaphor prevails (Tietze & Musson, 2003). The home and work discourses also evoke particular localities and identities (Tietze & Musson, 2005). According to Clark (2000), home and work are opposite ends of a dichotomy in terms of their respective cultures, e.g. formal vs. informal, distanced vs. intimate, and so on. What becomes apparent is that our ways of talking in each domain shape and are shaped by our ways of being in each domain. The last point has methodological implications, as it points towards the suitability of the discourse analytic approach adopted in this research.

However, few activities are purely 'work' or purely 'home' (Hardill, Green & Dudleston, 1997; Halford & Leonard, 2001; Burke, 1971), which means that the boundary between home and work promises to be a fruitful site for study. Considering that this research is based on people who perform home and work under one roof, the home-work interface becomes even more interesting, because the relationship between home and work is likely to be affected by their co-location. To this end, I will now review literature on the relative positioning of home and work towards one another and identify questions that remain unanswered and provide scope for this research.

### 2.2.1. The Relationship(s) between Home and Work

According to Runté & Mills (2004), the discourse of industrial production is prioritised in society, while the discourse of the private/home domain is subordinated. This is evident in the construction of the 'ideal worker' as somebody who has no demands on time other than work (Halford, 2006; Gambles, Lewis & Rapoport, 2006), or the 'disembodied worker' who must not have any *"imperatives of existence that impinge upon the job"* (Acker, 1990: 149), such as personal obligations. However, the work discourse is dependent on and can only be understood in relation to its other, the home discourse (Tietze & Musson, 2005). Accordingly, a domain is defined by what it is not (Nippert-Eng, 1996; Mirchandani, 1998b). The juxtaposition of work and home creates a power differential and serves to prioritise work:

> *"Making the distinction between work and nonwork is intrinsic to maintaining the aura around work. The construction of the spheres of work and nonwork as under perpetual threat from one another reinforces the publicness of work and the privateness of nonwork. This division, in turn, is crucial to legitimizing and attaching value to work"* (Mirchandani, 1999: 92).

Continuing to distinguish between home and work thus creates a cycle, which maintains the power inequality between home and work. Since the work-home dichotomy arose out of the industrial revolution and the separation of work from the domestic sphere (Clark, 2000), the dichotomy is socially and historically constructed rather than natural or inescapable. My research is mindful of criticism regarding the rigidity of the home-work dichotomy:

> *"Social scientists have written about 'home' and 'work' as if we all know what these terms mean, as if the territories they encompass and the ways they are related are the same for everyone."* (Nippert-Eng, 1996:4).

The idea that home and work are not pre-determined will be powerful in shaping my research, as indicated by the fact that I seek to examine the implications of boundary negotiation on the relationship between home and work, rather than taking for granted a dichotomy. My research will build on the work of others who have already begun to raise doubts over the appropriateness of a home-work dichotomy (e.g. Dart, 2006; Halford, 2006; Hardill et al., 1997).

Runté & Mills (2004) have argued that the dichotomy does not reflect how people actually live their lives. They suggest that home life is an appendage to work life, rather than its opposite. Hochschild (2008) argues that the culture of work and its associated tools have entered the home world, blurring the traditional dichotomy. Ribbens McCarthy & Edwards (2001) propose that *"it may be useful to develop a more complex, possibly layered, sense of overlapping and interpenetrating sites of social practices and orientations"* (772). Warhurst, Eikhof & Haunschild (2008) also critique the conceptualisation of home and work as distinct spheres, making the point that not only do home and work practices overlap, but that the dichotomy rests on myopic readings of work and life (e.g. work is bad - home is the haven). An interesting perspective on the relationship between work and home is offered by Golden (2009), who applied Weick's sensemaking model of organisations and their environments to the work-home interface. She views organisations as environments that employees' families must make sense of, and vice versa. Sensemaking happens in the following way:

> *"Through practice and/or discourse, an organism responds to its external environment, thus creating a version of it and acting out a relationship with it (or enacting it), which the environment responds to with enactments of its own"* (Golden, 2009: 389).

Golden (2009) observed two dynamics in this mutual enactment: 1.) Organisations and families are allies; 2.) Organisations and families are competitors who vie for the employee's time and energy. The implication of this perspective is that rather than being a conceptual dichotomy, home and work are both in cooperation and competition with each other. A nuanced relationship between home and work emerges, where different kinds of configurations are possible. A layered approach towards home and work is also favoured by Seymour (2007), who suggests that studying home-workers contributes to a better understanding of the home-work interface:

> *"Single location home/workplaces exemplify where public and private co-exist. Their value as a site of research is as spaces, not where binaries collide, but where such 'overlapping and interpenetrating' relationships and practices are starkly made manifest"* (Seymour, 2007: 1110).

Following Seymour (2007), my research utilises home-work as a site from which to launch investigations into the relationship between home and work. Based on the above debates on the work-home dichotomy, my research will explore home-workers' accounts of boundary negotiation to gain an understanding of whether the dichotomy is still relevant, whether it has been replaced by a positioning of home and work as overlapping sites, or whether new relationships between home and work emerge. In doing so, I aim to contribute to a key debate within the literature on work and home.

Boundary theory offers a helpful framework through which to explore home-work dynamics, as it concerns itself with people's strategies in managing the work-home interface. I chose boundary theory from a variety of theoretical perspectives on the relationship between home and work. The reason that boundary theory is given preference over other approaches is mainly because it allows for analysis of how people fluidly enact home and work, as opposed

to a rather static conceptualisation of home and work as spheres, evident in the following theoretical perspectives:

'Spillover' is a theoretical approach that assumes a similarity between work and home (Staines, 1980) such that experiences in one domain are transferred to or 'spill over' into the other domain (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000), e.g. stress experienced at work might affect relationships at home.

'Compensation' assumes that work and home experiences are antithetical (Staines, 1980). Dissatisfaction in one domain is offset by seeking satisfaction in another domain (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Compensation can be supplemental or reactive in nature. Supplemental compensation is prompted by insufficient positive experiences in one domain. Reactive compensation arises from negative experiences in one domain, which are dealt with by seeking contrasting positive experience in the other domain (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). For example, trouble with one's boss at work might be compensated by focusing on positive experiences at home, such as engaging in playtime with the kids.

'Work-family conflict', a narrow approach favouring family as the other of work, refers to *"a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect"* (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985: 77). Conflict between work and family manifests itself in three forms: 1.) Time-based conflict, where the time dedicated to one role acts as a constraint towards fulfilling the other role. 2.) Strain-based conflict, where the stresses of one role prevent the fulfilment of requirements for the other role. 3.) Behaviour-based conflict, where behaviour required in one role opposes that required of another role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

'Enrichment' or 'facilitation' is a perspective which assumes that positive experiences in one role improve the quality of life in the other role (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Hill et al.,

2007). There are five proposed resources that have the capacity to contribute to enrichment: skills and perspectives, psychological and physical resources, social-capital resources, flexibility and material resources (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). These resources can promote enrichment through instrumental paths – when a resource can be directly transferred from role to role – and affective paths – when a resource generates positive affect in one role and this produces high performance and affect in another role (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

The above perspectives are rather simplistic in their analysis of the work-home relationship because the nature of the relationship is pre-determined, e.g. it is assumed that when we spend too much time at work, we will not have enough time left to spend at home, which in turn will result in conflict between the home and the work role. Such an approach might tell us that conflict is a possible outcome when managing the home-work interface. However, it does not enable exploration of the actions of the individual when negotiating between two spheres. It does not emphasise the meaning that is assigned to work and home by each person; and it neglects the social constraints within which individuals operate. Using the notion of 'boundaries' as the guiding concept is more inclusive – instead of pre-determining the relationship between home and work as conflict, spillover, compensation, etc., boundaries can be negotiated in a multitude of ways. The resulting relationship between home and work depends on how a person positions work and home through their negotiations. The boundary approach means I do not quantify or assume to know the direction of the relationship between home and work. Next, I will discuss the notion of boundary in more detail and review a number of boundary theories.

## 2.3. Boundary Theory

My research investigates how people who work from home negotiate boundaries between home and work. The concept of 'boundary' lies at the core of this research because it is used as a tool to examine the home-work relationship. Boundary theory informs and will be informed by this research through the development of a new theoretical direction. The current section explores the concept of 'boundaries' and discusses the work of authors who have proposed different versions of boundary theory.

### 2.3.1. What are Boundaries?

Boundaries classify elements of our culture and help us simplify and order our environments. Boundaries are evident whenever we partition time and space (Bowker & Star, 1999; Anderson, 2009). Nippert-Eng (1996) distinguishes between mental and physical boundaries (e.g. a traditional office job provides a physical boundary between work and home because home and work are performed in different locations; a distinction between work and home frames of mind is a mental boundary). This is similar to Lamont & Molnar (2002) differentiating between symbolic and social boundaries. Boundaries are symbolic when they represent conceptual distinctions. Social boundaries operate at the level of social differences and have consequences such as unequal access to resources (Lamont &Molnar, 2002), e.g. an activity that is labelled 'work' is rewarded financially, whereas once you cross the boundary into the 'caring duties' territory, a different picture emerges.

Nippert-Eng (1996) uses the term 'boundary' to emphasise the cognitive dimension of boundaries, while Clark (2000) uses the term 'border' to place importance on behavioural aspects. Clark (2000) defines borders as *"lines of demarcation between domains, defining the*

*point at which domain-relevant behaviour begins or ends"* (Clark, 2000:756). The concept of borders implies a more tangible, visible line to be crossed, which is not explicit in the concept of the boundary. Bowker and Star (1999) use the term classification, which is cognitive in nature, by which they mean a central part of social life used to segment our worlds into separate elements. They explore how classification plays a part in, for example, racial segregation and how categories that are arbitrarily imposed have significant consequences for people's lives. Zerubavel (1997), operating from a socio-cognitive stance, emphasises that classification is *"a process of actively 'sculpting' islands of meaning rather than simply identifying already-existing natural ones"* (67). Boundaries shape the way we think about and act towards each other (Nippert-Eng, 1996), showing how powerful boundaries can be in people's experience of a phenomenon such as home-working.

> *"The greatest debates and ethical dilemmas of our time are about drawing boundaries […] because placing lines here or there has definite implications for how we treat each other and the world around us"* (Nippert-Eng, 1996:12).

The list of examples of how boundaries have shaped the way people treat each other is endless. One only has to think of the effects that boundaries between the categories of man-woman, black-white, gay-straight, etc. have had on people's lives in terms of domination and oppression and it quickly becomes apparent that boundaries have significant implications. By influencing how we treat one another, boundaries assume a central role in society. Lamont & Molnar (2002) and Bowker & Star (1999) concur that drawing boundaries around concepts (such as home & work) results in dominant groups (or domains) marginalising the 'other'. A boundary around work can marginalise the home. However, boundary setting is not necessarily a malicious activity. Rather, it is a central part of being human and something we do without thinking about the consequences:

> *"Remarkable for such a central part of our lives, we stand for the most part in formal ignorance of the social and moral order created by these invisible, potent entities"* (Bowker & Star, 1999: 3).

Note that Bowker & Star (1999) use the term 'invisible entities', indicating their emphasis on cognition, contrasting with Clark's (2000) more tangible borders. Boundaries are powerful tools for categorisation in society that have an impact on how we act towards others, even though we might not be aware of their force. This makes the concept of 'boundary' a fascinating subject to study. Boundaries help us to make sense of what something is and is not (work or non-work), and help us to align ourselves with one category or another (workers or non-workers). This confirms the suitability of the boundary concept for delving into boundary negotiation, positionings of home and work as domains, and positionings of home-workers within domains. The next section discusses different approaches to boundary theory that are specifically focused on home-work boundaries. My own approach to boundary theory will build on the gaps identified in the following theories.

### 2.3.2. **Boundary Theory** (Nippert-Eng, 1996)

Nippert-Eng's Boundary Theory is based on interview and observation data of 72 employees at one US research laboratory. She was interested in how workers (among them research scientists, machinists and personnel workers) managed the interface between home and work. Note that her boundary theory is based on people who work on site, as opposed to at home, because boundaries might well be manifested differently according to the work arrangement. Nippert-Eng's (1996) work is rooted in what she calls 'cognitive sociology' (based on the work of Zerubavel, 1997), or the study of social and cultural influences on how we think.

Fundamentally, Boundary Theory (Nippert-Eng, 1996) expresses two ideas regarding the work-home interface:

1. People's boundary development around work and home ranges from *integration* to *segmentation* strategies.
2. People engage in *boundary work* to maintain the distinction drawn between work and home.

*Integration and Segmentation*

Nippert-Eng (1996) suggests that people cope with the home-work interface by segmenting or integrating between domains. Segmenting strategies keep home and work separate from each other, whereas integrating strategies allow for work and home to overlap. Nippert-Eng analyses whether people fall into the segmentation or integration category by inspecting their use of objects, space and time. For example, if someone uses separate diaries for work and personal life, or has separate sets of keys, this person is categorised as segmenting. In contrast, if a person fuses their home and work diaries, key rings, etc. then they are integrators. Objects are only important in so far as they support mental strategies of integration and segmentation. Whether people use integration or segmentation depends on: a) internalised, cultural images of what work and home are, b) social-cultural constraints, and c) personal practices. This indicates that boundary setting is situated within a web of social and individual factors.

*Boundary Work*

Boundary work describes *"the strategies, principles, and practices we use to create, maintain, and modify cultural categories"* (Nippert-Eng, 1996:7). While being an

overwhelmingly mental process in Nippert-Eng's view, boundary work relies on physical behaviours to make the mental categories of work and home tangible. Boundary work is divided into boundary placement (the drawing of a line between work and home) and boundary transcendence (efforts to keep that line in place). Boundary work depends on the degree of similarity between work and home domains. It is furthermore embedded in social and cultural structures, meaning that personal boundary development is influenced by others (Nippert-Eng, 1996). One cultural understanding that assists people's boundary work is the previously discussed dichotomy of home and work. This understanding of home and work makes it easier for people to adopt segmentation strategies that reflect the divide (Nippert-Eng, 1996). However, with a high degree of segmentation also comes a more difficult transition between work and home. This is because home and work, when segmented, are very different from each other and significant effort may be necessary to change from one way of being to another, e.g. making the transition from the serious professional to the loving parent. Contrarily, while a high degree of integration facilitates the transition between work and home, it also makes it difficult to place a boundary between them in the first place, or as Nippert-Eng (1996) puts it, *"the easier it is to repeatedly jump across a boundary, the harder we have to work not to do so"* (283). This suggests that our constructions of home and work domains and how we set the boundaries between them are mutually dependent, which is a notion that my research seeks to develop.

Boundary work is a feature of everyday life; it *"completely surrounds us and infiltrates every aspect of our existence"* (Nippert-Eng, 1996: 289). According to Nippert-Eng, the world we construct for ourselves is made up of categories and classifications, which reflects Bowker & Star's (1999) work and highlights the cognitive roots of boundary theory. The way we view categories and the relationships between them is influenced by the boundaries we use to

separate them. Nippert-Eng (1996) claims that while boundaries are influential in how we live our lives, they are not 'real':

> *"The various distinctions we make now between home and work are artefacts, and these must be continually, institutionally supported in order to exist. Any distinction between home and work is not 'natural', therefore, except in the sense that human beings have a 'natural', hard-wired tendency to make distinctions of all sorts."* (Nippert-Eng, 1996: 268).

This view is also espoused by Zerubavel (1997), who states that distinctions are changeable, depending on culture and time. My research is influenced by this understanding of boundaries as constructed and changeable, rather than pre-determined and natural. It has definite implications for the epistemology I use (social constructionism – see chapter 3).

Overall, then, the elements of Nippert-Eng's work that influence my research are: the idea that boundaries are constructed, the concept of boundary work to describe strategies of managing the home-work interface, the acknowledgement that boundary setting occurs in a social context, and the suggestion that boundary setting creates relationships between home and work domains. However, there are considerable flaws in Nippert-Eng's approach that necessitate development of boundary theory, which is what my research seeks to do. Nippert-Eng (1996) proposes that people are segmentists or integrators depending on how they set their boundaries. This distinction gives too much weight to individual preference. I suggest instead that people make choices within their social and practical situations, that they react to the demands made on them, and that they manage their situation according to whatever is necessary on a daily basis. While Nippert-Eng acknowledges socio-cultural constraints in passing, she is not explicit enough about the influence of context in boundary work, which leaves a gap in boundary theory. She does not address whether workers align themselves with

home or work and how they do so, all of which is likely to have a bearing on boundary work. The concern about Nippert-Eng's (1996) portrayal of boundary setting as individualised endeavour and her lack of attention to external constraints is shared by Warhurst et al. (2008):

> *"Understanding how boundaries are worked requires a more comprehensive account of the complex interplay of interests, expectations and opportunities through which personal choices and material constraints shape the relationship between work and life"* (Warhurst et al., 2008: 12).

Individual boundary choices have to be contextualised, as they are produced within the person's work and home practices. I propose that the positioning of people in their home and work domains is likely to influence boundary choices, which is why it is necessary to investigate boundary negotiations with regard to levels of participation at home and work.

The segmentation-integration distinction also neglects possible ambivalences, such as using both integrating and segmenting strategies (e.g. I suggest that it is possible for people to be simultaneously segmentist in how they organise their space, while being integrating with their time use). This renders the segmentation-integration distinction too rigid. Questions also need to be raised about Nippert-Eng's analysis of how people use certain objects, resulting in their categorisation of being segmenting or integrating, as well as her analysis of how people use objects to make boundary transitions. For instance, Nippert-Eng (1996) claims that people use caffeine to help them move from their home into their work mentality and use alcohol for the reverse effect. I can very easily question this assertion by inspecting my own drink habits. I drink tea for either purpose, i.e. to get ready for work but also to help me relax. Nippert-Eng (1996) interprets the meaning of people's actions without investigating with participants what meanings they assign to their behaviours and use of objects. However, people's actions are not easily classifiable and object does not equal object. The meaning

behind one person's use of an object can vary hugely from how the next person uses it. Similarly, two people can have the same level of integration in terms of objects but experience the relationship between work and home differently. Research into how people negotiate the home-work interface ought not to interpret people's actions without exploring these in cooperation with participants, which is heeded in my research. In my analyses, I delve into *how* people use objects to help them negotiate the home-work boundary, rather than *what kind* of objects they use.

Nippert-Eng (1996) also regards physical behaviours as mere facilitators of mental happenings, while it is proposed here that action is more than a by-product of cognition. A cognitive approach neglects the possibility that people set the boundaries between home and work not so much in their heads as in the day-to-day processes of living their lives. On a methodological note, Nippert-Eng's sample, despite spanning three groups of workers, is restricted to one organisation, which limits her scope. People who work from home are a key category of workers for whom the work-home interface must be explored because of the co-location of the two domains. Boundary theory therefore needs to be expanded to include the concerns of this occupational group.

In short, flaws in Nippert-Eng's work include: the privileging of individual choice endorsed by integration-segmentation, the rigidity of integration-segmentation, assigning meaning onto people's actions, prioritising cognition, and her sample. There is therefore a gap for a new boundary theory, which focuses on how people negotiate boundaries (rather than where they draw a line) and situates people within their home and work domains by exploring how they position themselves in relation to home and work. My research aims to do just that. Next, I review other boundary theories that inform my work.

### 2.3.3. Border Theory (Clark, 2000)

Clark (2000) also theorises about how people manage the interface between home and work. She focuses on how the border between work and family contributes to work-family balance. Three things are of importance here: Firstly, note that Clark (2000) uses the 'family' concept, rather than 'home', resulting in smaller scope. Secondly, she uses the word border instead of boundary, implying a more tangible line between domains. Thirdly, Clark (2000) frames her theory around the outcome of work-family balance, rather than on features of the boundary, such as integration/segmentation or boundary work. The meanings assigned to work and home through boundary setting are not discussed, as it is a practitioner-oriented theory aimed at identifying boundary conditions that result in work-life balance.

Clark (2000) interviewed 15 individuals who she selected on the basis that they experienced challenging work-family situations (i.e. full-time employment and significant caring responsibilities). She was interested in how these people attempted to keep a balance between work and family in the face of potential cross-domain conflict. Her sample and research focus are more specific than Nippert-Eng's (1996) as she only includes people with caring responsibilities and concentrates on work-family balance. This leaves a significant gap in terms of exploring how people who do not have caring responsibilities negotiate the home-work interface, presenting an opening for my research and its deliberate sample of both parents and non-parents. Clark's border theory (2000) assumes that work and family constitute dichotomous domains and that people are *"border-crossers who make daily transitions between two worlds"* (748). The two worlds and their borders are not entirely static. Rather, they are shaped by the people who inhabit and cross them. Border theory takes into account the following elements: The work and home domains, the border between work and home, the border crosser, and border keepers and other important domain members. Clark conceptualises borders in terms of a) how permeable or flexible they are, b) the degree

of blending that occurs between domains, and c) the strength of each border. She identifies criteria under which borders are conducive to work-family balance.

Work-family balance is defined as *"satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home, with a minimum of role conflict"* (Clark, 2000: 751). This is reminiscent of the work-family theories critiqued in 2.2. on the basis of their simplistic view of the nature of the home-work relationship. How exactly balance is to be measured remains unclear, yet Clark (2000) makes the following proposition regarding balance: *"When domains are similar, weak borders will facilitate work-family balance. When domains are different, strong borders will facilitate work-family balance"* (758). This is reminiscent of Nippert-Eng's (1996) idea that boundary work depends on the similarity between domains (i.e. similar domains make for an easier transition while different domains facilitate separation between home and work). Clark (2000) further suggests that if a border is strong around one domain, but weak around the other (e.g. if work is strictly protected from interruption, but family is not), it is more conducive to balance if the person identifies with the domain that is strongly bounded. Clark (2000) borrows from Lave & Wenger (1991) and categorises border crossers as peripheral or central in a domain (which is a distinction that I will build on in my research). Centrality depends on how influential a person is in a domain and how much they identify with it. Clark (2000) suggests that those who are central will have more control over borders and better work-family balance as a result than those who are peripheral. In doing so, she acknowledges the social nature of border management:

> *"Since work and family activities are generally carried out with others, border and domain creation and management become an intersubjective activity in which several sets of actors [...] negotiate what constitutes the domains and where the borders between them lie."* (Clark, 2000: 761).

Certain people, labelled 'border keepers', such as spouses or supervisors, are especially powerful in shaping the work-family border (Clark, 2000).

A number of aspects of Clark's theory are useful for my research: her explicit acknowledgement of others in boundary setting, the discussion of centrality and peripherality, and the argument that borders vary in their strength. Her work implies that people must be situated within their home and work domains in order for us to understand their boundary negotiations. It suggests that people's positioning lies at the core of negotiations, such that people who are central have more control over boundaries than those who are peripheral. These are elements of boundary theory that I aim to develop.

However, the emphasis on the outcome of work-family balance in Clark's work sits uncomfortably with my research. Focusing on balance limits the home-work interface to one variable. I argue that boundaries are central to the entire experience of negotiating between home and work and encompass much more than balance. It is also unclear what Clark (2000) actually means by 'good balance'. Her notion of 'satisfaction and good functioning' is vague and ignores the debate surrounding the balance concept (see 2.4.). The notion of 'good balance' is reminiscent of a best practice approach, telling people how to set boundaries the 'right' way, when there probably is no such thing. Clark's narrow focus on work-*family* balance also neglects how people who do not have caring responsibilities negotiate boundaries. It results in the assumption that only parents have borders to negotiate, when in fact, boundary work is more inclusive. Clark (2000) thereby omits a large fraction of society from the scope of boundary theory. To rectify this omission, I specifically decided to include people with a variety of family situations in my sample in order to broaden the scope of boundary theory.

### 2.3.4. Other Approaches to Boundary Theory

An interesting development of boundary theory is Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate's (2000) propositional work on micro role transitions. Micro role transitions are those transitions we make every day, as compared to macro role transitions that are less frequent and more difficult to deal with, e.g. retirement. Ashforth et al. (2000) propose that the boundaries between work and home are difficult to cross because the domains are associated with conflicting roles. A role denotes *"a certain persona or role identity, with specific goals, values, beliefs, norms, interaction styles, and time horizons"* (Ashforth et al., 2000: 486). Role boundaries ensue when *"a role that is typically associated with a specific social domain [is] circumscribed in space and time"* (Ashforth et al., 2000: 486). Segmentation or integration thus does not just apply to home and work domains; it also includes associated roles. Ashforth et al. (2000) suggest that people who are highly segmenting engage in a *processual response* to their transition challenge, which is that of crossing role boundaries (i.e. crossing boundaries is a process). Highly integrating people, in contrast, face the challenge of creating and maintaining boundaries, which leads to a *structural response* (i.e. setting boundaries equals erecting a structure).

I question the ability of role theories to encapsulate boundary management between work and home (as in 2.2.). Role theories tend to view home and work as incompatible sets of roles that people struggle to switch between, rather than investigating how people enact home and work domains. The concept of micro role transitions presents a new direction for boundary theory, but it raises issues such as whether home and work are necessarily in conflict with one another. It neglects to address whether roles could be complementary, whether some roles are easier to reconcile than others, whether everyone's work role is the same, and whether home and work roles are all that different from one another. The perspective also ignores the experiential dimension of reconciling home and work. Ashforth et al.'s (2000) work does not

fit with my approach because they focus on the outcome of work-family conflict, which is a pre-determined relationship between home and work. They neglect subtle issues of how boundaries are negotiated, how home and work come to be positioned and how home-workers align themselves with domains in their accounts.

Shumate & Fulk (2004) contribute to boundary theory by elaborating on boundary transitions. They view physical transitions as not just an aid to mental transitions, but as having communicative and symbolic value. Shumate & Fulk (2004) operate from within a communication-based framework. They suggest that boundary transitions transmit information to others about which role to expect from the boundary negotiator. Their perspective is an interesting addition to boundary theory. It is however also based on propositions alone and is not supported by actual data. It is also limited in its ability to inform this research, simply because the focus on transmitting information is far removed from my approach to boundary negotiation between the practices of home and work.

Desrochers, Hilton & Larwood (2005) have attempted to move boundary theory towards measurement of work-family blurring, which they define as difficulty in distinguishing one's work role from the family role. They administered a questionnaire to a sample of 100 business professors, all with young children, in heterosexual two-parent families. They tested the following hypotheses: Blurring or integration will increase with the number of hours worked at home; the greater the integration, the more work-family transitions will be made; the greater the blurring, the more distractions will be experienced; and greater blurring will predict higher levels of work-family conflict. Desrochers et al. (2005) found moderate associations for all hypotheses and took this to mean the following:

> *"Work-family blurring can be measured directly. We feel that the time has come to move beyond using blurred boundaries as a metaphor for high levels of spillover,*

*permeability, and flexibility and to begin treating it as a related but separate variable that can be measured directly"* (Desrochers et al., 2005: 461).

Their argument is flawed on a number of dimensions. Desrochers et al. (2005) limit their sample to parents in heterosexual relationships, which excludes single people, non-parents, and parents with non-traditional family situations. They justify this choice by stating that *"both boundary theory and work-family border theory seem most relevant to salient and subjectively important roles that involve greater responsibilities"* (Desrochers et al., 2005: 452). My research explicitly questions this assumption and argues for the application of boundary theory to a wider range of people. Further, the value of being able to measure work-family blurring is not apparent to this research. Categorising people in terms of their level of work-family blurring reveals nothing about the experiential dimension of blurring, nor does it show what blurring means for people's alignment with home and work domains (e.g. if home and work are blurred, does it mean that work has taken over the home or vice versa?). I argue that blurring continues to be an important concept; however, I think a more nuanced analysis of the implications of blurring on how home and work as domains are experienced and positioned relative towards each other is needed instead of being able to categorise people on a scale.

### 2.3.5. Gaps in Current Theorising

In the following table, I summarise the boundary theories reviewed above and then proceed to list the gaps in theorising that constitute the basis for my research:

| Summary of Boundary Theories | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Theorist(s) | Terminology | Key Concepts | Approach | Main Critique |
| Nippert-Eng (1996) | Boundary | • Segmentation – integration<br>• Boundary work | Socio-cognitive | • Individual choice<br>• Rigidity of segmenta-tion – integration<br>• Cognitive emphasis |
| Clark (2000) | Border | • Balance<br>• Border crossers and keepers<br>• Border strength and flexibility<br>• Peripherality | Practitioner | • Outcome-focused (balance)<br>• Narrow focus on parents |
| Ashforth et al. (2000) | Micro role transitions | • Role boundaries | Role theory | • Outcome: role conflict<br>• Rigidity of roles |
| Shumate & Fulk (2004) | Boundary transitions | • Communica-tive value of transitions<br>• Role transitions | Communication network & symbolic interactionism | • Limited relevance to work and home practices |
| Desrochers et al. (2005) | Boundary blurring | • Variables which contribute to blurring | Measuring level of blurring | • Value of measuring blurring<br>• Narrow sample |

Table 1: Summary of Boundary Theories

Based on my reading of the above theories, the following developments of boundary theory are necessitated:

- Investigating how acts of boundary negotiation create different kinds of relationships between home and work, rather than assuming pre-determined relationships.

- Moving away from boundary work as a rigid, individualised endeavour and instead allowing for greater fluidity. Emphasising the social, practical and situational contexts that lead to various kinds of boundaries.
- Examining in particular how people position themselves in regards to home and work (Clark (2000) has shown the value of developing notions of centrality and peripherality as part of highlighting how people participate in home and work domains). Evaluating indications that levels of participation determine a person's degree of control. Following Clark's example, delving further into these kinds of concepts.
- Focusing on processes of boundary negotiation, rather than where lines are drawn, and examining with people how they use objects to manage the home-work interface, rather than forcing interpretations on their choice of objects.
- Moving away from the focus on cognition and outcomes (balance or role conflict) and towards a theory that captures the delicate interplay between the individual and social in home-work boundaries.
- Broadening the scope to include non-parents and narrowing the scope from general employee to home-worker because of the co-location of home and work.

My research attempts to achieve these developments in order to address some of the gaps in current theorising. So far, I have contextualised my research by discussing the concepts of home and work and reviewing boundary theories. In order to further situate my work, I will now consider research that has addressed how boundaries are worked and negotiated, how boundaries are created and why, the kinds of boundaries that are set, and the influences on and outcomes of boundary negotiation that are possible.

## 2.4. Boundary Negotiation

The research reviewed here is based specifically on participants who experience an interaction between home and work through either home-work or some other form of single location home-workplace (e.g. family businesses) and is thus immediately relevant to my research. The structure of this section is as follows:

1. Types of Boundaries
2. Boundary Functions
3. Strategies for Establishing Boundaries
4. Influences on Boundary Negotiation
5. Outcomes of Boundary Negotiation

### 2.4.1. Types of Boundaries

When people negotiate the home-work interface, they draw boundaries that span temporal, spatial, psychological, behavioural, and social dimensions (e.g. Tietze & Musson, 2003; Sullivan, 2000; Halford, 2006; Ahrentzen, 1990; Kylin & Karlsson, 2008).

*Temporal boundaries* are expressed in the respective allocation of time to work and family tasks (Tietze & Musson, 2003; Ahrentzen, 1990; Kylin & Karlsson, 2008). Tietze & Musson (2003), based on interviews with 25 salaried home-workers, divide temporal boundaries into clock-based versus task-based approaches. Clock-based approaches rely on a bureaucratisation of time, such as the traditional 9-5, for guidance. Task-based approaches are more flexible and guided by the task at hand. However, the flexibility and autonomy implied by task-based temporal boundaries means having to continually make choices between home and work, as opposed to following a well-known 9-5 routine. Temporal

boundaries are apparent in issues of accessibility (Halford, 2006), i.e. the availability of the worker towards the home and work domain. Tietze and Musson (2003) indicate that there is a difference between the temporal access workers grant towards work-related others and home-related others: Workers make themselves more available for work demands than for home demands, hinting at a power difference between home and work. This implies that the kinds of boundaries that home-workers construct lead to different configurations between home and work, which is a link warranting further exploration.

Sullivan (2000) discusses the importance of *spatial boundaries* in home-work. Space is a crucial type of boundary because roles (and I add norms and practices) are strongly tied to specific places (Sullivan, 2000). Spatial boundaries are expressed in decisions about where home and work ought to take place (Kylin & Karlsson, 2008), and in the management of interruptions (Halford, 2006). Having a designated workspace within the home represents a spatial boundary between home and work (Ahrentzen, 1990). Traditionally, the spatial boundary between home and work would have been more apparent than in home-work – as discussed in relation to the home-work dichotomy, home was traditionally associated with one's residence, while work was performed away from the home.

Ahrentzen (1990) introduces the dimension of *behavioural boundaries* to describe changes in behaviour as a form of boundary setting when working from home. Behavioural boundaries resonate with what Kylin & Karlsson (2008) call activity boundaries to describe how people distinguish between work and home based on the activities they engage in (some activities are clearly identifiable as 'home', others as 'work').

*Psychological boundaries* refer to mental distinctions people make between home and work (Ahrentzen, 1990; Clark, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996). They are reminiscent of Bowker & Star's (1999) work on classification. Tietze (2005) interprets people's dress codes and

routines as acts of identity. However, it could also be argued that acts such as getting dressed for work represent psychological boundaries because with the change of attire might come a change of mindset. Psychological boundaries can be a by-product of physical boundaries (Sullivan, 2000): a spatial distinction between home and work can coincide with distinct home and work mentalities. Kylin & Karlsson (2008) go as far as arguing that psychological boundaries are merely mental aspects of boundaries, and only exist in relation to physical boundaries. However, if psychological boundaries depend on physical boundaries, how does a home-worker transition from a home mindset to a work mindset, considering that home and work are performed under the same roof? Traditionally, workers relied on the commute as a 'boundary land' (Kylin & Karlsson, 2008), using a physical separation between work and home to create a psychological boundary. Replacement routines that contribute to psychological boundaries in home-work include making coffee, reading the paper, etc. (Kylin & Karlsson, 2008). According to Kylin & Karlsson (2008), psychological boundaries are asymmetrical because work tasks require greater concentration than home tasks, making the transition from home to work more difficult than the other way around. This raises questions about the direction and relative strength of boundaries.

*Social boundaries* are about the level of engagement with, for example, home-related others while in the work domain. They can also refer to changes in home and work duties between family members that move the boundaries between home and work in different directions (Ahrentzen, 1990), e.g. a home-worker might take on additional domestic duties during the workday. I argue that issues of accessibility and interruptions, as discussed in relation to temporal boundaries, are also classifiable as social boundaries because managing interruptions means managing engagement with others, demonstrating that there is potential for overlap between different types of boundaries.

Cohen (2008) indicates that boundaries can compensate for each other, such that if work has to be carried out from within a space that is not dedicated to work, temporal strategies can be relied upon to enforce a boundary. Cohen (2008) calls this the 'multidimensionality' of boundaries. This suggests that different types of boundaries overlap, interact, and compensate for one another. Felstead et al. (2005) also indicate that boundaries that are clear-cut in one context can be complicated in another context, and that boundaries of time and space often depend on who is present in the house and the domestic activities carried out at the time, again showing the interaction between social and other types of boundaries.

I wish to emphasise that the different types of boundaries described in this section are not irrevocable choices that last forever. In line with my critique of the rigidity of boundary theory (Nippert-Eng, 1996), I align my work with that of researchers who propose that boundaries are inherently fluid and constantly renegotiated (e.g. Musson & Tietze, 2004; Golden & Geisler, 2007). In order to delve into subtle practices of negotiation, which this research aims to do, one must first understand the kinds of boundaries that are possible. However, I suggest that it is also necessary to understand the contexts in which boundaries are constructed. Rather than merely listing the kinds of boundaries that are available, I am interested in why people construct strong and weak boundaries. How do people arrive at a certain kind of boundary? What constraints operate that determine how weak or strong a boundary is? Could the crux of the issue be the home-workers' positioning as central or peripheral, as indicated by Clark (2000)? In order to answer these questions, a new approach to boundaries that facilitates investigation of social constraints and positionings is required. In 2.5., my approach will be clarified. After exploring literature on the boundaries that are available to people, the next section reviews why people draw boundaries between home and work, when theoretically, home-work offers the opportunity to merge the two domains.

### 2.4.2. Boundary Functions

Boundaries serve purposes ranging from protecting home and work from each other, legitimising the home-worker's work, allowing the home-worker to maintain order between home and work, to coping with a number of threats posed by home-work. It is necessary to review boundary functions because it moves us beyond the kinds of boundaries that are constructed and towards delving into some of the psychological needs that are fulfilled by setting boundaries. This helps us to understand why boundaries are negotiated.

*Protect home and work from each other*

Boundaries aid the uninterrupted pursuit of work and protect the domestic sphere from being invaded by work concerns (Tietze & Musson, 2003; Sullivan, 2000). Mirchandani (1998a) observed a tendency among home-workers (based on interviews with 30 female Canadian home-workers) to draw strict boundaries around the concept of work. She found that workers were reluctant to loosen the boundary around even the definition of work because their narrow definition controlled the extent to which work can invade family time. The boundary upholds a separation between work and home and protects home from becoming an extension of organisational life, where home concerns are subordinated (Mirchandani, 1998a; Sullivan, 2000; Dart, 2006). The boundary guards against becoming all too available for work. The maintenance of a strong boundary challenges the assumption that caring and working can be performed at the same time (Mirchandani, 1998a). Mirchandani (2000) indicates that even those home-workers who at times loosen the boundary around home and work continue to carefully monitor the threat that comes with blurred boundaries, hinting at the unease created by loose boundaries. This raises questions over what happens when the boundaries between

work and home become eroded. I am particularly interested in the implications of blurring on home-workers' participation in the domains of home and work.

*Maintain order and protect the integrity of both spheres*

Boundaries around work and home clearly define the parameters of both spheres and provide order, regularity and the psychological security of knowing what is appropriate and how to act in each sphere (Tietze & Musson, 2003; Cohen, Duberley & Musson, 2009). Boundaries help home-workers cope with the threat of being caught in an *"ontological limbo of being neither here nor there"* (Tietze & Musson, 2005: 1344). Without boundaries, working from home can result in ambiguity as to whether one belongs in the home or work domain. It is these processes of belonging and aligning oneself with home and work that I wish to explore. Boundaries also protect the integrity of home and work by highlighting the unique features of each domain (Mirchandani, 1998a; Kompast & Wagner, 1998). Boundaries help maintain a distinction between people's work and private lives (Baruch, 2000) and attach meaning to spaces (Dart, 2006). By defining the limits of the home and work domains, boundaries help people maintain order in their lives. If boundaries indeed maintain order and protect both work and home, it seems that strong boundaries would make home-work easier. However, the previous section on the types of boundaries showed that both strong and flexible boundaries are used by home-workers. This raises questions about when blurring occurs and when it does not, as well as the kinds of relationships that people aim to construct between home and work, which my research will address.

*Legitimacy*

Another boundary function is that of legitimising home-work. By emphasising the differences between paid and caring work, boundaries reinforce the legitimacy of home-workers as workers because they do not mix work and play (Mirchandani, 1998a). Mirchandani (1998b) proposes that concern for family de-legitimises paid work, so family duties have to almost be denied. Strict boundaries ensure that the home-worker's job remains in the category of 'proper work'. According to Halford (2005), the home-workers' legitimacy is threatened because of the meanings attached to places, and to the concepts of absence and presence:

> *"These individuals [home-workers] were acutely aware of the symbolism that the domestic carries – as a place of rest, pleasure and private activities – and have readily responded to a perceived need to prove themselves far more than they would do within organisational space. In organisational space, bodily presence implies a working body. Bodily absence, and especially location in the domestic, is intrinsically subject to suspicion"* (Halford, 2005: 26).

This highlights the importance of boundaries in legitimising the home-worker's endeavours and the role of boundaries in coping with absence and invisibility. In order to prove that they still belong in the world of work, home-workers emphasise the boundaries between their home and work lives (Kylin & Karlsson, 2008). One of the reasons why legitimacy is an issue in home-work is the complication of identity creation. Working from home disturbs the spatial and temporal context of identity formation in the traditional workplace and can pose a threat to identity construction (Tietze, 2005; Marsh & Musson, 2008; Cohen et al., 2009; Brocklehurst, 2001). People do not have clear markers that help them create a work and a home identity, which contributes to legitimacy struggles. Strict boundaries that maintain the person's legitimacy as a worker can circumvent this risk.

The research reviewed in this section portrays boundaries as creating order in a world of home-work where blurring is a threat. Home-workers are delegitimised because they belong to the home domain while working and are absent from the 'real' workplace. This raises a number of important questions to be explored by my research: How do home-workers construct their own positioning in the practices of home and work? Do they align themselves with the home or do they align themselves with work in order to prove their legitimacy? At what level do they belong in each practice? How do boundaries feed into the positioning process? In order to address these issues, it is necessary to approach boundaries from a new framework, which foregrounds issues of belonging and positioning. The next section considers how people negotiate boundaries.

### 2.4.3. Strategies for Establishing Boundaries

This section discusses how people draw boundaries around home and work. Much of the research in the area uses the notion of segmentation/integration (Nippert-Eng, 1996) as a starting point. A new direction is to explore how people position themselves in regards to home and work. Existing research raises interesting questions about the level of control that home-workers exercise over their boundaries. I will review these issues and suggest ways in which my research contributes to current debates. The importance of boundary negotiation strategies is illuminated by Felstead et al. (2005), who propose that the need to draw boundaries emerges out of the changing relationship between home and work:

> *"The boundaries between home and work are no longer given but have to be constructed, negotiated and defended by individuals for themselves. Solutions are likely to differ according to individual relationships, circumstances, resources,*

*personalities and experiences – and will shift as situations change over time" (Felstead et al., 2005: 8).*

This emphasises that boundary negotiation is a social endeavour and that home-work relationships and boundary negotiation attempts are interdependent. The current section reviews some of the strategies that individuals use for negotiating the home-work interface.

*Integration-Segmentation*

Much of the research into boundary setting is still informed by the integration-segmentation distinction introduced by Nippert-Eng (1996), e.g. Tietze (2002) suggests that home-workers cope with the introduction of work into the home by adopting segmentation or integration strategies in regards to how time and space are allocated. Interestingly, Tietze (2002) comments that segmentation strategies represent a paradox: boundaries in home-work are drawn to protect the family, yet they reinforce the industrial work discourse and the traditional dichotomy of home and work, which privileges work. This further drives the need for investigations into the relationship between home and work.

Cohen et al. (2009), drawing on autoethnographic conversations about each of their own home-work dynamics, propose a new conceptualisation of integration and segmentation. Identifying control (i.e. the feeling of being in control) as the underlying issue in boundary work, they introduce a framework of three strategies that help people maintain order in their lives and three circumstances in which disorder is experienced. The strategies to maintain order are: segmenting, integrating and importing (the last strategy refers to bringing home concerns or knowledge into work and vice versa). Segmenting and integrating, despite resulting in alternative boundary scenarios, are viewed as similar strategies because both are a conscious choice. All three strategies actively control the boundaries between home and work

and operate on a performative and discursive level (Cohen et al., 2009), i.e. the strategies are expressed in people's words and actions, hinting at methodological possibilities of using discourse analysis. People experience disorder when their sense of control over home-work boundaries is challenged. There are three ways in which this happens: seeping (work or home seep into the other domain), invading (when unforeseen micro-transitions from one sphere into the other are necessary), and overwhelming (the emotional dimension of losing control of the boundary). Cohen et al. (2009) offer a way of thinking about integration and segmentation as not just arbitrary decisions about where to draw the line between home and work (as in Nippert-Eng, 1996), but as strategies that help people assert control over the home-work interface. I suggest that if positioning in home and work practices is foregrounded in boundary research, it becomes possible to situate people as being central or peripheral (as in Clark, 2000), which gives further insight into how influential and in control people are. Control is then approached as occurring through processes of positioning in social practices, which builds on Cohen et al. (2009).

Golden & Geisler (2007) suggest a classification of strategies to control the work-life boundary, based on an investigation of the PDA (personal digital assistant) use of 42 knowledge workers who worked at home and at an office away from the home. Four interpretative repertoires were identified amongst participants when managing the work-life boundary: containing work, integrating the self, transitioning work, and protecting the private. Each interpretative repertoire is aligned with associated discursive moves (e.g. the language people might use when containing work), PDA use practices (e.g. how somebody containing work might use their device), and forms of boundary management (segmentation or integration). Golden & Geisler (2007) have not moved far from integration-segmentation in their analysis of the strategies people use to negotiate the home-work boundary. However, the alignment of practices and discourses, and their connection of technology use and

boundary work is insightful. On a more critical note, the value of Golden & Geisler's (2007) emphasis on counting interpretative repertoires and measuring work-life integration is questioned because it does not explore people's interpretations of their work-life practices. Besseyre des Horts, Dery & MacCormick (2012) add to our understanding of how ICT's mediate boundary work: they demonstrate that Blackberrys can increase exposure to work demands, but also increase people's sense of control over these demands, which adds to debate over control by showing how paradoxical experiences co-exist.

Anderson (2009) adds to segmentation and integration by exploring how adaptable or consistent people's boundaries are. Through interviewing 34 managerial employees from four organisations (all of whom spend time working flexibly, i.e. exercise choice over when, where and how they work), she identified four clusters of adaptability and consistency: 1.) fixed demands, adaptable towards work domain, 2.) fixed demands, adaptable towards work and non-work, 3.) no fixed demands, integrated approach to work and life, 4.) consistent approach, no changing demands. Her work shows that home and work demands and their nature (whether demands change often or remain stable) contribute to integration and segmentation strategies. It also highlights that the boundaries around work and home can be asymmetrically adaptable. Anderson's (2009) findings need to be qualified, though, since the category of workers she studied (managerial employees) have a relatively high degree of autonomy over their boundaries. However, the acknowledgement of demands in boundary setting means that Anderson (2009) offers a contextualised approach. My research will build on this by not just investigating demands, but taking into consideration other factors relating to the work and home contexts of home-workers.

Felstead et al. (2005), based on an extensive data set including quantitative data collected in 128 organisations, 23 organisational case studies and interviews with 120 workers and their

partners, suggest that the boundary strategies of integration-segmentation can be turned into a continuum, along which they identified five spatial configurations of home and work:

1. Detachment (clear division of home and work),
2. Juxtaposition (home and work are separated but in close proximity, such as a work desk in a bedroom),
3. Assimilation (work is disguised – the home is preserved, such as a temporal work setup that is packed away at night),
4. Collision (home and work mingle and compete, but are not merged),
5. Synthesis (genuine blending of home and work into a new entity).

This classification indicates that home-work configurations are not opposite ends of a dichotomy. Instead, workers construct a variety of configurations, the differences between which are subtle. However, more so than categorising home and work as, for example, synthesis or collision, I will explore with home-workers how they position themselves relative towards home and work and also how home-work configurations are arrived at and experienced by the person, rather than focusing on the location of spatial objects.

Kreiner, Hollensbe & Sheep (2009), based on 220 written responses to open-ended questions and 60 interviews with Episcopal priests (who they categorised as experiencing interaction between home and work), assert that individual boundary preferences and environmental influences come together to determine the degree of integration or segmentation between work and home. If there is a mismatch between individual preferences and what is possible in the environment, an experience termed 'boundary incongruence' ensues. Boundary incongruence can lead to temporary boundary violations or a more permanent state of work-home conflict (Kreiner et al., 2009). In order to reduce boundary incongruence, boundary violations and work-home conflict, people engage in boundary work tactics. Kreiner et al.

(2009) propose the following categorisation of boundary work tactics: behavioural tactics, temporal tactics, physical tactics and communicative tactics. The boundary work tactics are congruent with the different types of boundaries discussed earlier, except for the new addition of communicative boundary work tactics. I disagree with Kreiner et al. (2009) in their assumption that boundary work serves only the remedial purpose of minimising work-home conflict. In line with Nippert-Eng (1996), I argue that boundary work is the process of negotiating the work-home interface in general, referring to all acts and discourses that aid in the management of these two domains. However, the notion of boundary incongruence adds a new development to the integration-segmentation literature because it acknowledges that individual preferences are constrained by environmental influences.

The studies reviewed in this section represent some new directions that are inspired by integration/segmentation. The following insights gained by these studies are relevant to my research: Boundary strategies shape the relationship between home and work. Home-work configurations are various and go beyond integration or segmentation. Demands and environmental influences contribute to boundaries. Control is an important notion in the drawing of home-work boundaries, and the concept of boundary incongruence demonstrates that people are not always in charge of their boundaries.

Based on the research reviewed so far, the debate regarding whether home-workers are in control of their boundaries promises to be important. Earlier I criticised Nippert-Eng's (1996) integration-segmentation distinction on the basis that she overemphasises individual choice, making it sound like people integrate or segment based on individual preference alone. Cohen et al. (2009) portray both integration and segmentation as conscious choices used to control the home-work boundary. However, they do admit that

> *"although people might have a tendency toward strategies of either segmentation or integration, the dynamic contingencies of our daily lives mean that we frequently move between these poles as befits particular situations"* (Cohen et al., 2009: 232).

This means that boundary strategies change according to whatever is necessary based on demands and specific situations. Accordingly, my research will pay attention to the home-workers' contexts and to the situations that prompt more or less challenging negotiations. Seymour (2007) concurs that people have individual agency in determining the relationship between home and work, but that there are constraints of a structural nature that cannot be evaded. Clark (2000) portrays boundary setting as both a proactive endeavour by individuals, as well as an intersubjective activity that is shared by border crossers and border keepers. Brannen (2005) asserts that it is possible for people to feel both in charge of boundaries, while at times being unable to control the home-work interface. The boundary strategies that people adopt are informed by individual preference, yet shaped by what is possible in the person's social and structural circumstances.

The finding that people experience control, yet feel constrained, warrants further investigation. I suggest that a helpful way of doing so is by examining how people position themselves at home and work because positioning indicates how central/in charge of a domain a person is, which in turn illuminates their level of control over boundaries. The next section explores existing research into positioning as a way of negotiating boundaries. Existing positioning research in home-work uses the concept to delve into issues of identity, rather than control and influence, which leaves a gap for my research.

*Positioning*

In addition to drawing on integration-segmentation strategies, home-workers also arrive at boundary configurations by positioning themselves clearly in either the home or the work discourse. Working from home brings home and work discourses into close proximity and as a result, home-workers may be constantly drawing on two discourses (Tietze, 2005). Discourses can clash if, for example, objects that had clear definitions become ambiguous through home-work (Tietze, 2005), such as a dinner table becoming an object for both family and work purposes through the introduction of home-work. This leads to an ongoing struggle between home and work (Tietze, 2002). Privileging one discourse over the other counteracts this. In particular, taking up the subject position of the worker anchors home-workers in the world of paid work, granting them authority and bargaining power in the household and legitimises their work (Tietze, 2005; Brocklehurst, 2001). Wilkinson & Jarvis (2012) propose that the identity of remote workers is shaped by the emotions they experience, which are in turn influenced by their perceptions of agency, which brings us back to issues of control and positioning. Marsh & Musson (2008), adopting an identity stance, observed that home-working men positioned themselves in three ways: 1.) privileging professional issues, 2.) privileging parental issues, 3.) attempting to have it all. In line with Tietze (2005), Marsh & Musson (2008) suggest that prioritising one sphere is less emotionally demanding than trying to have it all. The finding that it is beneficial for home-workers to position themselves clearly in either the home or the work sphere casts doubts over the popular portrayal of home-work as the golden opportunity to combine home and work demands. Tietze & Musson (2010) suggest that telework success is related to issues of identity, such that if teleworkers continue to align themselves with the office work identity, their home-work arrangement will fail. This implies that it is important to achieve a positioning within the spheres of home and work that accommodates home-work, rather than fights it. Most of the studies reviewed here show that

home-workers draw on discourse in order to align themselves with the home or the work domain. This is significant methodologically, because it points out the value of analysing discourse for delving into positioning. In order to build on these useful studies, I suggest that issues of alignment and positioning should not just be used to explore individual identity, but also to examine how this situates home-workers relative to others in their home and work domains. When home-workers take up subject positions in the worlds of work and home, they create practices where they locate themselves relative to others and construct relationships that imply dynamics of control. This section has highlighted that debates around control are unresolved in the home-work literature and that the positioning of home-workers promises to be a useful line of enquiry. Positioning implies situating home-workers in their context. For that reason, the next section provides a brief overview of the contextual influences that shape home-workers' boundary negotiations.

### 2.4.4. Influences on Boundary Negotiation

Boundaries are not created by individuals in a vacuum. Establishing boundaries between home and work implicates the people involved in the home and work domains, as well as other aspects of these domains. The home-worker's family has been highlighted as being particularly important in the boundary setting process (Tietze, 2002, 2005; Sullivan, 2000; Halford, 2006; Felstead et al., 2005; Clark, 2000). In negotiations, the home-worker may have authority to shape boundaries because the subject position locates him or her in the world of paid work (Tietze, 2005; Seymour, 2007; Felstead et al., 2005). However, family members are not necessarily passive recipients. They can bring their own expectations into the process, contest boundaries and even become active in policing them (Tietze, 2005; Halford, 2006). Kylin & Karlsson (2008) add to family-related factors the *"type of activity*

*[that is to be bounded], the character of the relationship (for example emotions, dependency, power) towards whom it is created, and the situation given"* (185). This includes issues of gender relations and economic and family factors, such as who the primary source of income is.

Boundary negotiations between family members are bound by the respective values attached to work and family life, as decisions about when and where to work imply a moral choice that prioritises one sphere (Tietze, 2002). Golden & Geisler (2007) make related points about boundary setting being influenced by the construction of work and home, such that, if work is defined as utopian (i.e. a vehicle for self-expression and identity), work and home will be freely integrated. In contrast, if work is associated with the 'greedy institution' that demands workers' singular attention and commitment (Golden & Geisler, 2007), boundaries will be drawn more strongly. It is also likely that boundary negotiations will be fraught with conflict if different negotiators diverge in their understandings of whether work is utopian or a reflection of the 'greedy institution'.

Also of importance are the resources and material conditions available to the home-worker (Ahrentzen, 1990; Dart, 2006; Warhurst et al., 2008). Financial resources often mean living in a larger house that enables the home-worker to have a separate office. Similarly, resources mean that a home-worker can afford childcare, as opposed to having to care and work at the same time. Therefore, the economic situation and household culture of a home-working family is important (Seymour, 2007). Family processes, such as children leaving home, families growing older, elderly parents moving in, new properties being purchased, etc. must not be forgotten either in their significance in shaping home-work boundaries (Felstead et al., 2005). These are structural factors beyond the limits of individual preference.

Family-related factors are undoubtedly important, particularly because of the co-location of work and family in the home. However, job-related factors, such as the type of occupation (Warhurst et al., 2008; Henninger & Papouschek, 2008; Cohen, 2008; Hislop & Axtell, 2007), work relations (Cohen, 2008) and the demands of a job (Felstead et al., 2005) also play a part in boundary setting. In regards to occupational type, many home-workers belong in the category of professional work, which tends to be rather intangible, meaning it can be performed anywhere (Warhurst et al., 2008). Boundary setting is probably more relevant to intangible work than to work that is bound to a specific location and time. Freelancing is also an example of how an occupational category can exert particular pressures on boundaries because of its volatile employment patterns (Warhurst et al., 2008). All of the participants in this study belong in the professional worker category, and some are freelancers, which is likely to shape boundary negotiations.

The implication of the research reviewed here on my work is that I deliberately provide as much context as possible for each participant (see chapter 3) on their work and home circumstances and make interpretations that consider the role of structural home and work factors. This is consistent with my aim to move boundary theory beyond notions of individual preference.

### 2.4.5. Outcomes of Boundary Negotiation

Above I reviewed literature on the types of boundaries people draw, why they do so, how they do so and commented on the influences that shape the boundary negotiation process. This section reviews some of the outcomes, divided into positive, negative, and ambiguous, that occur when people manage the home-work interface. Some of these outcomes are applicable to home-work in general rather than being a result of boundary negotiation

specifically. However, they are still relevant and will be discussed here because they inform and frame my analysis of home-work.

*Positive Consequences / Drivers*

Positive home-work outcomes are not just consequences of working from home; they also act as drivers, motivating those considering the opportunity to work from home to take the leap. Positive consequences double as home-work incentives (Sheehy, 2008). Home-work results in a number of positive consequences: for companies and societies it can lead to reduced estate costs and overheads, compliance with disability policies, increased efficiency and productivity, higher morale among the workforce, higher job retention, lower absenteeism and reduced air pollution and traffic congestion (Armstrong-Stassen, 1998; Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Collins, 2005; Furnham, 2006; Hill, Ferris & Märtinson, 2003; Sheehy, 2008).

For individuals, working from home can increase autonomy over how work is carried out, save cost and time on commuting, lead to a rise in motivation, commitment, job satisfaction and quality (Armstrong-Stassen, 1998; Kelliher & Anderson, 2008; Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Collins, 2005; Furnham, 2006; Sheehy, 2008; Tietze, 2002; Tietze, 2005; Tietze & Musson, 2003). The elimination of workplace distractions in particular can improve work effectiveness (Baruch, 2000; Sheehy, 2008). Measures of productivity can be flawed, however, because of self-report data and because workers confuse the increase in hours worked (through the lack of commuting) when working from home with increased productivity (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Baruch, 2000). Variables such as job satisfaction might also be mediated by the level of choice available to the employee and only hold true for employees who deliberately sought to work from home (Hunton, 2005; Anderson &

Kelliher, 2009). This hints once again at the importance of context and the role of home-workers' levels of control.

It has also been suggested that working from home contributes to better work-life balance (e.g. Felstead et al., 2002; Furnham, 2006), partly through autonomy over how time is scheduled (Hill et al., 2003) and by increasing control over work demands (Russell et al., 2009). Then there are those who praise the potential of home-work to enable women's participation in the labour market, such as Kinsman (1987) who believes that teleworking enables mothers to organise their dual role, or Baruch (2000), who states:

> *"From the legal and equal opportunity view point, teleworking enables fulfilling, quality employment for a significant group of people – disabled, single parents and women – to participate in the labour market"* (45).

This statement presents telework as a wonderful opportunity for those who are disadvantaged; though perhaps the authors do not realise that they actually perpetuate the exclusion of these groups. My research marks a departure from the cheerleading approach (e.g. Baruch, 2000; Kinsman, 1987), in which working from home is regarded as a panacea. My research is couched in a strand of literature (e.g. Hill et al., 2003) that cautions against the treatment of home-work as the cure for all ailments, resulting in attention being paid to the ambiguities that arise through working from home. Nonetheless, the positive portrayal of home-work prevails and drives people to take up this working arrangement (Sheehy, 2008).

*Negative Consequences*

Some of the negative outcomes of home-working include loneliness, worry, guilt, isolation, stress and alienation from office-based workers (Collins, 2005; Haddon & Lewis, 1994;

Mann & Holdsworth, 2003). It has also been proposed that home-workers may be disadvantaged financially when compared to office-based workers (Haddon & Lewis, 1994; Felstead et al., 2001). Impaired career progression due to low visibility in the organisation has been named as another disadvantage (Tietze, 2002; Kelliher & Anderson, 2008). Home-workers become outsiders in the organisation and can struggle to be taken seriously as a worker (Haddon & Lewis, 1994; Mirchandani, 1998a). Some home-workers also suffer from a loss of professional identity, as they constantly have to convince themselves and others that they are working even though they are not physically at the office (Tietze, 2005). Home-workers also report that they experience a lack of support from the company and that they miss informal opportunities to learn (Mann & Holdsworth, 2003; Furnham, 2006). These themes hint at issues of being located at the periphery of the work community and of legitimacy struggles. If disadvantages and legitimacy struggles are partly due to becoming an outsider in the work community, then this justifies my decision to investigate how home-workers perceive their own positioning relative to the worlds of work and home.

*Ambiguous Outcomes*

*Blurred Boundaries?*

Working from home can blur the boundaries between home and work (Tietze, 2002). Hill et al. (2003) claim that people who work without externally imposed boundaries experience problems in balancing work and life, including difficulties in distinguishing between the two spheres. Russell et al.'s (2009) study of over 5,000 Irish employees claims that blurring is *"due to the breaking down of boundaries between work and home, so that those who do work from home find that work encroaches upon family time"* (86). Russell et al. (2009) view home-work as a form of work intensification and argue that it leads to people being 'always

on', always available for work. In this way, working from home results in the intrusion of work into family time. Work intensification is also discussed by Kelliher & Anderson (2010) who studied remote workers (i.e. home-workers) and workers with reduced hours in three organisations. Flexible workers reported higher levels of job satisfaction and organisational commitment than non-flexible workers, yet also reported work intensification. Kelliher & Anderson (2010) interpreted this paradox as arising out of the fact that flexibility means being able to exercise control over work. For the privilege of increased control, people exert additional effort, which manifests itself in work intensification. This suggests that the positives of home-work come with a price to be paid – in this case working all the time. Again, questions over the home-workers' positioning emerge: How in charge of their work are home-workers really if they feel obliged to overwork?

The constant presence of work is likely to be felt in the home domain. Sullivan (2000) argues that family conflict ensues when people work from home, particularly when family members feel they are losing home space to work. Wapshott & Mallett (2012) propose that while home-working gives rise to dominated spaces, where work invades the home and influences how the home space is experienced by family members, home-workers also guard against work domination by appropriating spaces. This means that home-workers resist the colonisation of their home space by, for example, using work objects for domestic purposes. Home-work blurring is therefore a possibility, but can be resisted as well. Haddon & Lewis (1994) also claim that working from home brings work concerns into the home and decreases the separation of two previously distinct domains. Role conflict, workaholism and the inability to take time off even when sick are some of the consequences that ensue (Haddon & Lewis, 1994). In contrast, Ahrentzen (1990) suggests that blurred boundaries are not necessarily experienced as disruptive because far from creating conflict, they allow for multiple roles to be maintained. Ahrentzen's (1990) work raises the question whether

multiple roles can actually be performed at the same time. Is it possible to work and care simultaneously? If so, how is this experienced by home-workers? Does it reduce conflict, or indeed increase it? Felstead et al. (2005) discuss how work and home interweave through home-working:

> *"The times and places of employment can now weave their way into and through the nooks and crannies of our lives. The relationship between spaces and times of work and non-work are no longer sequential, linear and chronological but, instead, are becoming a dispersed mosaic of ubiquitous connections that are always available"* (Felstead et al., 2005: 5).

This suggests a blurring of work and home spaces and times. Halford (2006) suggests that boundaries do not necessarily collapse. Instead, boundaries shift in new directions, thereby recasting the relationship between home and work (Halford, 2006; Brocklehurst, 2001). I have already indicated that there is growing debate regarding the relationship between home and work: Traditionally, home and work were conceptualised dichotomously, while more recent perspectives suggest that home and work are layered, e.g. Warhurst et al. (2008). I will now build on the debate by appraising literature that goes beyond the general concepts of 'home' and 'work' and has specifically examined how working from home affects the relationship between work and home. My research seeks to contribute to this particular debate.

*Rethinking the Dichotomy between Home and Work?*

Halford (2006) claims that home-workers continue to draw on the traditional home versus work dichotomy, but that they establish the meanings of home and work contextually and

continually negotiate the dichotomy. Mirchandani (1998b) also states that home-work can challenge definitions of work and home, not least because the physical distance between the domains is reduced. Yet the dichotomy continues to be a frame of reference that is recreated persistently (Mirchandani, 1998b). Home-work can upset the dichotomy because home-workers inhabit a space that does not fit with the activity they engage in. This causes deep insecurity (Halford, 2006). Home-work also brings conflicting norms, behaviours, practices, discourses, etc. that are tied to their respective domains into contact with each other (Sullivan, 2000; Tietze, 2002; Felstead et al., 2005). The temporal and spatial split that is associated with the dichotomy is called into question, as is the notion of home as haven (Sullivan, 2000; Mirchandani, 1998b). In fact, through working from home, people can arrive at new ideas of what constitutes work (e.g. location or time might not be as important any longer) (Mirchandani, 1998b). Musson & Tietze (2004) concur that working from home can liberate workers from the status quo of separate spheres because it disrupts the spatial and temporal division between work and home. Internalised norms about home and work can be re-evaluated, leading to new ways of using the temporal flexibility provided by home-work. The meeting of home and work can thus destabilise the dichotomy in a way that is life-enhancing (Musson & Tietze, 2004).

On a more critical note, when home and work meet under one roof, there is potential for the work domain to take over the home domain and dominate the home with features of industrial production (Tietze & Musson, 2003). Tietze & Musson (2002) observed *"both the re-enactment of traditional (temporal) routines as well as degrees of freedom to experience and play with new or reworked routines"* (328), concluding that *"always, they co-existed. Frequently, they made for uneasy bedfellows"* (Tietze & Musson, 2002: 328). This demonstrates that there is ambiguity in regards to whether home-work liberates workers from the dichotomy or whether it binds them to it. Butler & Modaff (2008), in their study of 24 in-

home day care providers, found that participants attempted to assert control over their work and family life by drawing boundaries. In doing so, they actually re-created the organisational structures that they had been looking to escape through their work arrangements. This means that the home-work dichotomy was upheld rather than upturned. Richardson (2012) observed a similar paradox, where remote workers wanted to deconstruct boundaries, but experienced 'dis-ease' through the proximity of home and work selves. They coped by re-drawing the boundaries around home and work. Brocklehurst (2001), based on case study research of a computer manufacturing company before and after the implementation of home-work, is doubtful about the potential of home-work to liberate workers. He links traditional forms of work to the Weberian 'iron cage' of bureaucracy, which traps us in capitalistic systems, where we work in the pursuit of material goods (Weber, 1930). The 'iron cage' neatly divided home and work and gave meaning to workers (Brocklehurst, 2001). Home-workers, despite being freed from traditional office structures, try to recreate these at home (Brocklehurst, 2001). The traditional separation of home and work gives security to workers, while freedom is a threat. Felstead et al. (2005) concur that working from home *"is likely to generate a traditional type of personal office that is being eroded elsewhere"* (112). Mirchandani (2000) suggests that when people work from home, the status quo of work as the dominant domain is maintained because home-workers see their work arrangement as privileged. Their position of the home-worker is vulnerable and they are grateful for the privilege, so they try not to upset the status quo (Mirchandani, 2000).

These studies demonstrate the ambiguous effects of home-work on the dichotomy. Many home-workers continue to operate within the dichotomy and prioritise work, while others use home-work as an opportunity to create new relationships between home and work. I aim to delve into the ambiguity and contribute to the debate by examining the positionings of home and work that home-workers construct when negotiating boundaries. I suggest that the debate

can be developed by looking at home and work in a more nuanced way: much of the research still uses 'home' and 'work' as large-scale concepts, irrespective of how these domains are understood and inhabited by home-workers. Therefore, when exploring the relationships between work and home, the micro-domains that home-workers refer to when they talk about work and home should be taken into account, because home and work probably do not mean the same thing for everyone.

*Work-Life Balance?*

A concept that frequently crops up in the discussion of home and work is that of work-life balance. Earlier I mentioned a suggested link between home-work and positive work-life balance outcomes (Felstead et al., 2002; Furnham, 2006). However, other researchers are more critical about the link. In this section, I discuss work-life balance as an ambiguous outcome. Work-life balance is inherent in home-work because it

> *"brings the two constituent parts 'work' and 'home/life' into direct contact and therefore homeworking can be taken as the most immediate platform from which to launch investigations into the dynamics of work-life balance"* (Tietze, Musson & Scurry, 2009: 589-590).

The assumption that home-work leads to work-life balance arises from the belief that balance problems will be resolved if home and work can be performed simultaneously and at the same location. Mirchandani (2000) suggests that this kind of thinking is due to the stress that many people experience in meeting family and work demands. Many people assume that their stress is due to an unnatural separation between home and work, so if they can only be combined, then stress will be eliminated (Mirchandani, 2000). Certain benefits of home-work

intensify this view, such as the ability to convert commuting time into family time, seeing more of the family, being more available for children, and having more flexibility (Mirchandani, 2000).

Recently, many authors have become critical about this 'win-win- perspective (e.g. Crompton, 2006; Russell et al., 2009). Mirchandani (1998b) claims that working from home *"does not address the organisational devaluation of household responsibilities which is at the root of the cause of work-family conflict"* (132). If the cause of the problem is an organisational culture which neglects the reality of demands outside of work (Crompton, 2006), then working from home as a solution is like putting a plaster on a broken leg. Brannen (2005) adds that this view treats work-life balance as a technical issue which merely requires the right tools to fix it. There are also reservations about the ability of flexible working policies to address larger societal issues, such as the gendered nature of work, the priority assigned to work, and the 'ideal worker' discourse (Lewis et al., 2007; Gambles et al., 2006). The suggestion that home-work fixes balance problems renders work-life balance an individual problem to which an individual solution can be found. Similarly to criticism of the individual preference perspective in boundary theory, I argue that balance is not an individualised endeavour, either. This would ignore the societal issues at hand.

One of the main reasons working from home came to be associated with work-life balance is the flexibility it offers. However, it is uncertain whether flexibility contributes to balance or indeed undermines it. Flexibility is defined as *"the ability of workers to make choices influencing when, where, and for how long they engage in work-related tasks"* (Hill et al., 2008). Anderson & Kelliher (2009) report a link between flexibility and employee engagement. Crompton (2006) argues that flexibility can have a positive impact on work-life balance, but only if the worker actively sought flexibility and uses it to better control their home and work demands. Hill et al. (2007) and Hill et al. (2008) argue that flexibility is

central to positive work-family experiences and that flexibility leads to work-life fit, i.e. the ability to successfully integrate work and family life. In turn, work-life fit leads to vitality, or the capacity to live and develop (Hill et al., 2008). Both the notions of work-life fit and vitality are vague and the process by which flexibility produces these positive outcomes is not specified.

In contrast, others have raised the possibility that flexibility leads to being available at all times, for both home and work demands (Greenhill & Wilson, 2006; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010; Russell et al., 2009). Sullivan & Lewis (2001; 2006) acknowledge both positive and negative possibilities, and suggest that flexibility can be especially exploitative for women because it adds to their double burden. Mirchandani (2000) proposes that flexibility means having to be available during main office hours, as well as working at any hour, resulting in an overly long workday. Yet, home-workers still find flexibility beneficial and see it as contributing to their balance. Mirchandani (2000) reasons that this view emerges because home-workers focus on the repercussions of inflexibility – e.g. if they were to return to a traditional job, their workday might be shorter, but they would have to commute and would not see as much of their family, and they would not be based at home. Hilbrecht et al. (2008) also comment on the contradictory relationship between home-work and work-life balance. They suggest that while feelings of control and autonomy reduce feelings of time pressure and as such paint a positive picture of home-work, the flexibility in home-workers' schedules is not used to facilitate time for the self and thus does not contribute to work-life balance. Kossek, Lautsch & Eaton (2006) caution that we ought to distinguish between objective descriptions of flexibility (e.g. the conditions of a working arrangement) and psychological experiences of it. Objective descriptions cannot indicate whether flexibility contributes to work-life balance; experiences, however, are associated with well-being (Kossek et al., 2006). This suggests that it is not the objective circumstances of flexibility per se, e.g.

whether one works from home, for how many hours, and so on, but the individual experience and perception of flexibility that determine whether flexibility contributes to or undermines work-life balance. If this is the case, then it becomes impossible to make generalised statements about the association between flexibility and work-life balance. Whittle & Mueller (2009) further propose that seemingly 'neutral' representations of flexibility require critical examination, because these public representations do not mirror private experiences of flexibility as isolation, disconnection, disaffectation and cynicism. This undermines notions of flexibility as a pathway to balance. Sullivan & Smithson (2007) raise fundamental questions about the direction of causality between working from home and flexibility. They discuss the possibility that working from home might lead to flexibility, but that home-work may also be the result of a job that is already flexible. This ambiguity highlights that the relationship between working from home and flexibility is complex, which makes it difficult to speculate about the potential of home-work to contribute to work-life balance.

Another criticism surrounding the notion of work-life balance is the concept itself (e.g. Warhurst et al., 2008). Guest (2002) considers the issue of how work-life balance is defined. He suggests that work-life balance can refer to sufficient time to meet commitments in both domains, it can refer to a perceived sense of balance, and it can be defined by its absence because people have increased awareness of the balance concept if they experience an imbalance between home and work (Guest, 2002). Runté & Mills (2004) argue that since discussion of work-life balance remains positioned within the separate spheres discourse, the idea of 'balance' reinforces the imbalance that it supposedly addresses. Family-friendly policies are aimed at ensuring that the employee can continue to function as the 'good worker'. They ease the transition between spheres, rather than reviewing the relationship between home and work, which lies at the core of the issue (Runté & Mills, 2004). Mirchandani (2000) states that the language of work-life balance implies that work and life

are separate spheres because it does not acknowledge the 'work' performed in caring for a family or maintaining one's personal life. Guest (2002) asks why there is an implicit normative assumption that balance is 'good'. Crompton (2006: 78) argues that the term work-life balance itself is misleading because it *"suggests that some kind of harmony has been achieved between the competing demands of employment and family life"*. Guest (2002) concurs that balance does not necessarily mean equal amounts on both sides. Brannen (2005) agrees that the 'settled accommodation' view does not reflect lived experience. If the balance concept implies a state that has been achieved, then it is incompatible with the view adopted in this research of the boundaries between home and work as fluid. In similar vein, Medved (2004) suggests that the balance idea should be re-conceptualised as everyday accomplishments and daily practice. Ransome (2007) and Warhurst et al. (2008) take issue with the prioritisation of the family unit in the work-life balance concept, and criticise that it excludes people who do not have caring duties. This relates to my critique of the narrow focus on the family unit in border theory. Ransome (2007) also indicates that balance is too quantitative in its focus and that *"notions of negotiation, cooperation and compromise, of reciprocity and complementarity might be better terms for what goes on here than 'balance'"* (Ransome, 2007: 380). Cohen et al. (2009) raise similar points and propose that there is value in a more dynamic and less reductionist view of work-life balance. The overall gist of this line of argument is that there is a need for a more appropriate conceptualisation of work-life balance. Adopting a perspective of home and work as practices that overlap and interact could serve this purpose:

> *"A practice-theory approach to discern work-life balance patterns not only extends analysis of the boundaries between work and life but also reveals that there is more to the work-life relationship than either boundary or balance"* (Warhurst et al., 2008: 16).

I take up this suggestion by applying concepts associated with practice theory to the study of home-work boundaries. Practice theory offers a way of addressing the emerging questions that I find interesting: it will enable me to delve into boundary negotiation, positionings of home and work, and positionings of home-workers in home and work domains. The next section discusses the specific practice approach I chose for the purposes of this research. Practice theory is applied to this research as its analytical framework. Before moving on to practice theory, however, the issues presented in the current 'boundary negotiation' section are summarised and the emerging directions for research are brought together.

### 2.4.6. Boundary Negotiation: Summary and Future Directions

The following table shows the five aspects of boundary negotiation that have been reviewed and reiterates their sub-categories.

**Summary of boundary negotiation**

1. Types of boundaries
    a. Temporal
    b. Spatial
    c. Behavioural/Activity
    d. Psychological
    e. Social

2. Boundary functions
    a. Protect home and work from each other
    b. Maintain order and protect integrity of both spheres
    c. Legitimacy

3. Strategies for establishing boundaries
    a. Integration-Segmentation
    b. Positioning

4. Influences on boundary negotiation
    a. Family relationships
    b. Resources and structural factors
    c. Work characteristics

5. Outcomes of boundary negotiation

| |
|---|
| a. Positive consequences (e.g. job satisfaction)<br>b. Negative consequences (e.g. isolation)<br>c. Ambiguous outcomes: blurred boundaries, rethinking the home-work dichotomy, work-life balance |

Table 2: Summary of Boundary Negotiation

Based on the literature discussed in regards to boundary negotiation, the following directions for future research emerge:

- Boundary negotiations consist of a number of elements, e.g. types of boundaries, boundary functions, strategies, influences, etc. Our understanding of the relationships between different elements would benefit from a coherent framework, bringing the elements together.
- Boundary negotiations shape and are shaped by relationships between home and work. The association between negotiations and home-work relationships needs closer examination.
- The positioning of home and work relative towards each other is subject to debate and would benefit from fresh insights. I propose to approach their positioning from a practice stance, which offers a more nuanced way of looking at the large-scale concepts of home and work. I will explore the kinds of home and work practices that participants construct through their accounts (because home and work may not mean the same for everyone).
- The positioning of home-workers within their home and work domains promises to be a useful line of inquiry. By investigating how home-workers position themselves in a domain, e.g. as central or peripheral, we might gain insights into their level of control over boundaries. Boundaries might also depend on whether somebody aligns themselves strongly with work or home. The notion of positioning might help to better understand some of the ambiguities in home-work, e.g. why home-workers

experience control and disorder, and why they feel in charge of their work, yet succumb to pressure to overwork.

- Methodologically, the suitability of discourse analysis has been suggested. Discourse is important in processes of positioning because it is through discourse that people align themselves with home or work.

These future directions are usefully approached through a practice theory framework, which I outline next.

## 2.5. Analytical Framework: Practice Theory

### 2.5.1. Why Practice?

A novel way of approaching the analysis of home-work boundaries is through practice theory concepts. Based on my review of existing boundary theories and boundary literature, the key issues that have not been explored sufficiently are how negotiation positions work and home relative towards each other and how home-workers position themselves in their accounts of negotiation. Existing research has made useful contributions to debates about the relationship between home and work and about the level of control that home-workers have over their boundaries. However, existing research approached home and work as rigid concepts that only apply to a narrow sample and viewed home-workers' negotiations as an individualised endeavour, lacking a sense of participation in domains. A practice approach, in contrast, aims to:

> *"present pluralistic and flexible pictures of the constitution of social life that generally oppose hypostatized unities, root order in local contexts, and/or successfully accommodate complexities, differences, and particularities"* (Schatzki, 1996: 12).

By adopting this perspective, it becomes clear that 'home' and 'work' are not a natural order and that their relationship is not pre-determined. Home and work are socially constructed, but also enacted in particularised ways by individuals. The practice approach adopted here thus operates at the cusp of the individual and the social. Boundary negotiations are partly individual experiences, but also rooted in home-workers' positionings relative towards others. Practice theory, by *"accommodating complexities"* (Schatzki, 1996: 12), facilitates exploration of the ambiguities in existing debates.

The particular version of practice theory chosen as a framework for this research is Wenger's (1998) 'communities of practice'. Wenger's approach lends itself to my research because it theorises about the interaction of different practices and the boundaries between practices, which is in line with the research focus. Alternative approaches were those of, for example, Bourdieu, Giddens, and Schatzki. Bourdieu (1990) unfortunately does not offer a well-defined account of practice. Practice is linked generically with activity or performance, but it does not receive as much attention as other concepts, such as 'habitus' or 'structure'. Structure in Bourdieusian theory is too static. It describes material conditions of the world that appear to be viewed as unchangeable, external reality. In contrast, I argue for a socially situated perspective on structures, where structures are interpreted differently by people according to their social surroundings. Further, the concept of 'habitus' or inner dispositions does not fit with the anti-essentialist view of this research (chapter 3). Giddens (1984) offers important contributions to issues of routine and power. However, his separation of different levels of knowledge – discursive consciousness, practical consciousness, and the unconscious

– is at odds with the view endorsed here that practice and discourse complement each other and need not be separated. Schatzki (1996) makes interesting points regarding practice as the site where meaning is created, which resonates with Wenger's approach. Objects acquire meaning through the practices in which they are used (Schatzki, 1996), e.g. a kitchen table becomes a work desk through the practice of working. However, Schatzki's perspective on discourse (that practice can at times be outside the limits of language) renders his approach unsuitable for this research. Wenger's (1998) communities of practice approach was therefore chosen because of its detailed explanation of what constitutes practice, its acknowledgement of the importance of language in practice, and its exploration of practice boundaries. Practice in my research, based on Wenger, refers to a social site where several actors engage with one another, have similar objectives, and draw on shared repertoires. However, this does not mean that I investigate every participant in the home and work practices inhabited by my sample. I consider home-workers to be an access point to a practice. By constructing accounts of their boundary negotiation, they draw on other people's opinions, create practices, and position themselves relative towards other actors. Chapter 3 explains methodological considerations in detail.

### 2.5.2. Wengerian Practice Framework

Two Wengerian concepts guide the analysis of my research on boundary negotiation between home and work: 1.) Practice, and 2.) Boundaries. I will explain each concept, elaborate on the associated dimensions, clarify how they apply to this research and offer visual sketches that map out the relationships between concepts.

*Practice*

Wenger (1998) emphasises practice as the fundamental unit of social life through which we understand and experience our world as meaningful. Our actions become practices through the following aspects:

a) Mutual engagement (engaging in actions together, the meaning of which arises from interaction)
b) Joint enterprise (having similar aims)
c) Shared repertoires (shared resources and skills).

Practice is implicated in matters such as learning, identity, meaning, and community. Participation in practices shapes our future actions and influences learning. It shapes who we are (identity), how we interpret our actions (meaning), and acts as a source of coherence in communities. Practice is the nexus where the individual and the social meet. Our individual actions are of a social nature, even if there are no explicit interactions with others, because the meaning of our actions is determined socially (Wenger, 1998). Wenger (1998) proposes an analysis of the social and the individual as a duality, or *"a single conceptual unit that is formed by two inseparable and mutually constitutive elements whose inherent tension and complementarity give the concept richness and dynamism"* (66). Based on the duality, it becomes possible to investigate practices through the account of one member.

Using Wenger's ideas, I will consider whether it is possible to view 'home' and 'work' as practices, each characterised by specific actors, engaging with one another towards a shared aim, whilst drawing on a common repertoire. Participation in a practice, such as 'home', has implications for what we do, who we are, and how we interpret the world. If home and work are practices that we participate in, our construction of boundaries between these practices is based on social participation, not individual preferences. The practice perspective endorsed

here is therefore in stark contrast to previous boundary theory, e.g. Nippert-Eng (1996). The following diagram specifies the relationships between the concepts described above. It situates practice between the social and the individual, demonstrates that practice influences identity, learning, community and meaning, and clarifies that our actions become practices through mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoires.

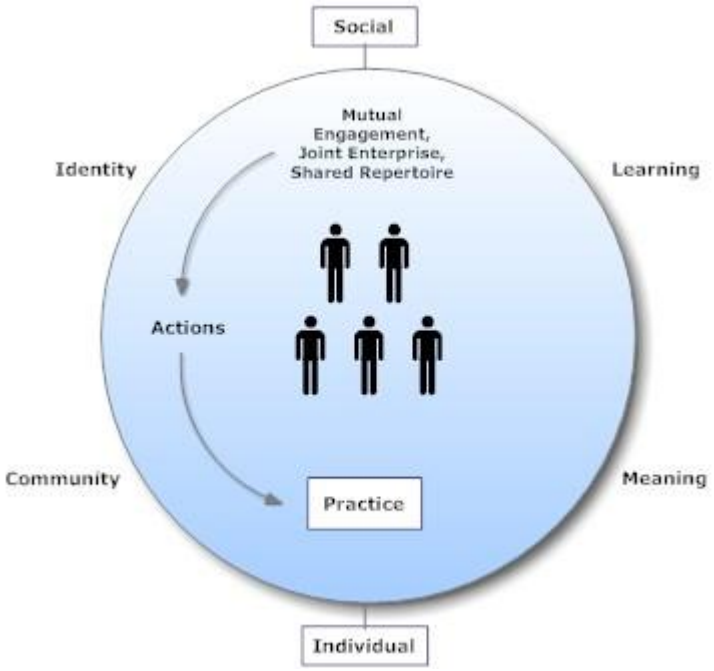



Figure 1: Practice

This diagram underpins the understanding of the 'practice' concept in my research. In order to contribute to debate on the relationship between home and work, I will investigate whether home-workers construct home and work as practices, using the criteria of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire. By considering the evidence, I will move away from treating home and work as pre-determined entities and allow for more flexibility because home and work practices may be constructed differently by different participants.

Another facet of Wengerian theory that is vital to the practice concept is the *duality of participation and reification*. Practice is the site where meaning is negotiated. This is done through two processes: participation and reification. Participation implies action and engagement with the social world. It comprises our experience of living in the world. Reification, on the other hand, refers to the material world and to things that we have made into objects, symbols, and concepts (Wenger, 1998). Participation and reification are an inseparable duality, located in between the social-individual divide. In regards to home and work as practices, participation refers to our ways of being, acting, and interacting in each practice, while reification describes the objects and concepts we draw on in each practice. The following diagram summarises the participation-reification duality:

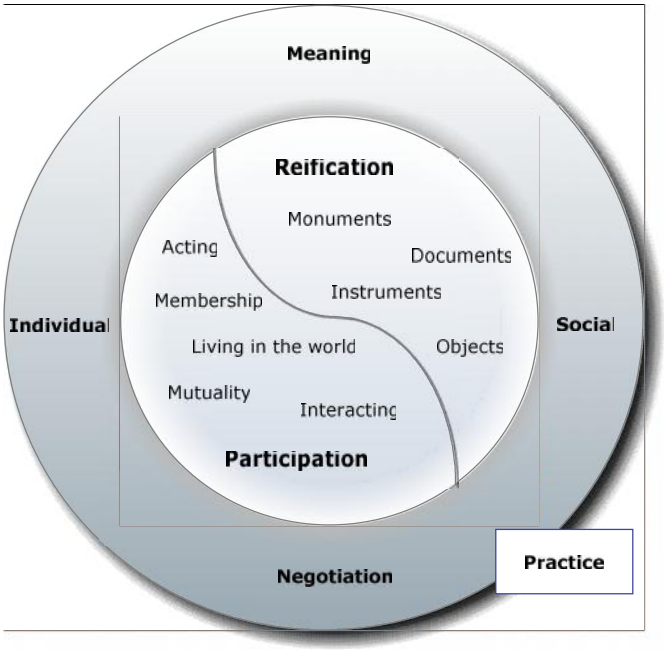



Figure 2: The Duality of Participation and Reification

The importance of participation and reification will become especially apparent in the discussion of how boundaries are negotiated, as home-workers rely on both action and objects (as shown by Nippert-Eng, 1996). Another way of thinking about this duality is to view practice as the site where our experiential and material worlds overlap. Thus if home

and work are viewed as practices and the research focus is on the boundaries between them, it is necessary to explore both the material context as well as the experiences of participants – something that has been neglected by previous research. As mentioned above, I will situate interpretations of participants' negotiations in their material home and work contexts. Parallels exist between Wenger's duality of participation and reification and what Bowker & Star (1999) coin membership and naturalisation (where objects are naturalised into practice). At several points, Wenger's work feeds into theirs and vice versa – however, Wenger's social approach is more suited to this research than Bowker & Star's (1999) cognitive perspective, which is why the former was selected as the framework for my thesis.

*Boundaries*

As much as practices create membership and participation through mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoires, they can exclude people by the very same processes (Wenger, 1998; 2000). Practices create boundaries between insiders and outsiders through:

a) Mutual engagement: Participants of a practice form close relationships and develop ways of engaging with one another that outsiders cannot easily enter.
b) Joint enterprise: Participants have a complex understanding of their enterprise, which outsiders may not share.
c) Shared repertoire: Participants develop repertoires for which outsiders miss shared references.

By creating divisions and disconnections, the boundaries of a practice keep outsiders out and insiders in (Wenger, 2000). Boundaries in Wengerian theory are defined as *"discontinuities, [...] lines of distinction between inside and outside, membership and non-membership,*

*inclusion and exclusion"* (Wenger, 1998: 120). This definition is adopted in my research because it adds a new understanding of boundaries. Existing theory conceptualises boundaries as a means of classifying the world into categories (e.g. Nippert-Eng, 1996), or as providing guidance for domain-relevant behaviour (Clark, 2000). Wenger's rich definition of boundaries shows that boundaries operate at the level of membership and non-membership. In line with my earlier suggestions, this portrays home-work boundaries as being created through membership in social practices. This moves the boundary literature away from cognition and behaviour, and instead towards a new focus on participation and positioning.

Wenger's understanding of boundaries also offers a way of analysing the relationship between home and work practices, as he specifies ways in which connections across practices are established. Wenger (1998) proposes that connections are made through *participation and reification*, i.e. through people and artefacts. Connections based on participation are described by the concept of 'brokering'. This refers to the behaviour of people who are members in multiple practices and who can bring elements of one practice into another practice with them. An example of brokering would be the home-worker transferring elements from one practice into another, e.g. efficiency norms learned at work might be transferred into the home practice. Brokers, according to Wenger (2000), prefer to stay at the boundaries of many practices rather than move to the core of any one practice.

Practices connect through reification when objects are used by multiple practices (Wenger, 1998). This is described by the term 'boundary objects'. Boundary objects can connect us to practices to which we do not belong. An example of a boundary object would be the house in which a home-worker works and lives, and which also provides the site for the family's home practice. The house is used in different ways by different practices. The physical objects contained in it, such as a work desk, can possibly connect family members to a work practice to which they do not belong. Wenger (2000) later added the possibility that boundary objects

are not only artefacts, but can also be discourses, processes or routines. The following diagram shows how connections across practice boundaries are achieved through brokering and boundary objects.

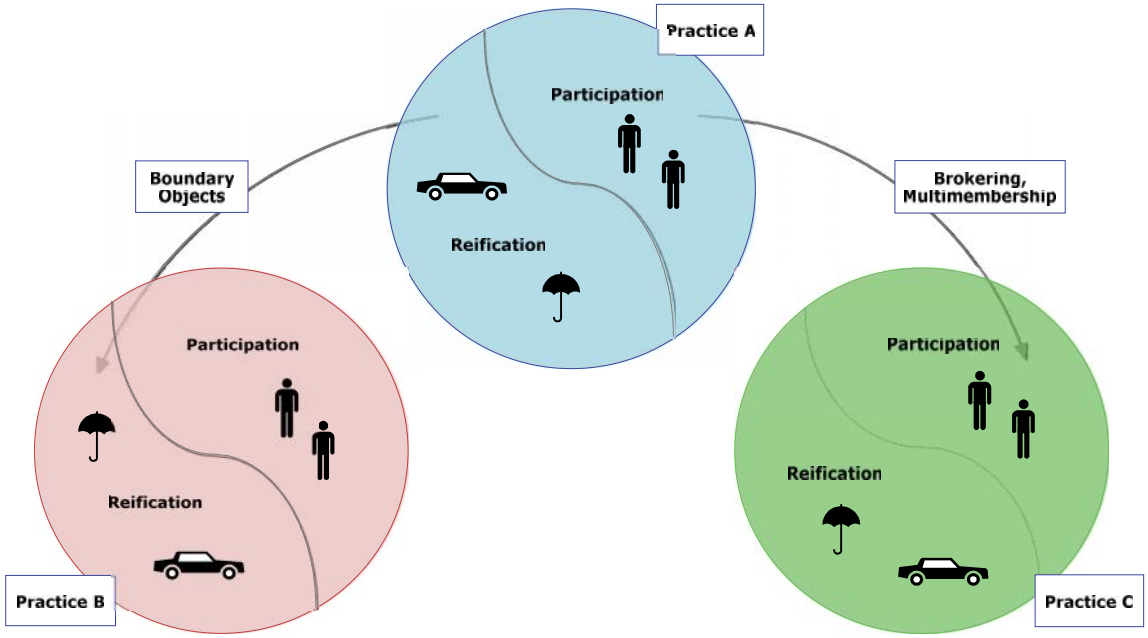



Figure 3: Boundary Connections

The term 'boundary object' was introduced by Star and Griesemer (1989) to demonstrate that people can talk about the same object, but have very different understandings of it. Boundary objects serve cooperation purposes across social worlds.

The concept of 'brokering' requires further discussion because of its implications for participation in practices. People who have membership in different practices can transfer elements of one practice into another. However, this does not happen automatically. One can have multimembership, but keep elements of the different practices separate (as would be the case if a home-worker insisted on strong boundaries between home and work). The concept of brokering thus seems to offer potential to develop the integration-segmentation notion.

One may also wish to engage in brokering and transfer elements of a practice, but may be unsuccessful. According to Wenger (1998), brokering requires a degree of legitimacy to influence the development of a practice. A broker needs to be powerful in a practice in order to shape it. This means that the concept of brokering promises to be useful in contributing to the debate regarding whether home-workers are able to exercise control over their boundary negotiations. Brokering requires membership in multiple practices in order to transfer elements between them. However, the experience of multimembership is quite complex. It can lead to people being caught between practices, as shown by the following diagram.

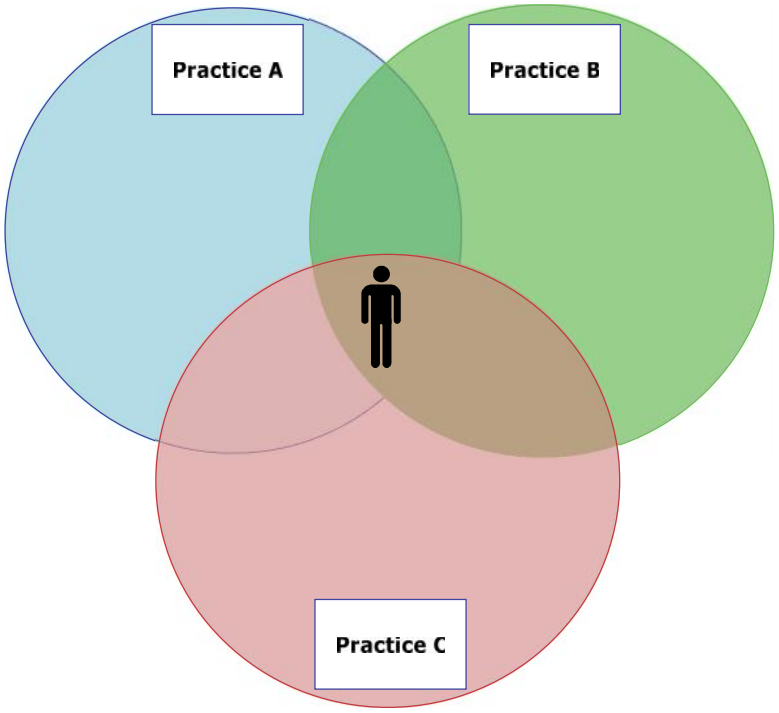



Figure 4: Multimembership

Multimembership means being a member of many practices at once and according to Wenger (1998: 161) is *"the living experience of boundaries"*. Multimembership is quite possible for a home-worker: because of the co-location of work and home, one can be a member of a multitude of home and work-related practice at once. The multimembership concept can therefore help to analyse not just how home and work practices are positioned towards each

other, but also how home-workers participate in each practice, and how influential they are in their brokering attempts.

Multimembership, while facilitating brokering between practices, can lead to the ambivalent experience of belonging to many practices at once, but not really belonging to any of them. Wenger (1998) terms this experience 'uprootedness'. Along with marginalisation and organisational invisibility, uprootedness is one of the hazards of brokering (Wenger, 2000). It is easy to see how a home-worker may well feel like she is a worker, but not part of the office community any more, while at the same time being part of her family, but being different because her experience of being in the house is one of being at work. The experience of belonging, but not really belonging, highlights the fact that there are different levels of participation in a practice. It would be foolish to unequivocally treat members of a practice as belonging at the same level. In fact, it is much more likely that we belong at the core of some practices, while being at the edge of others. In their accounts, home-workers construct subject positions for themselves in relation to others. This means that home-workers situate practice members somewhere between core and periphery, inside and outside, as the following diagram shows:

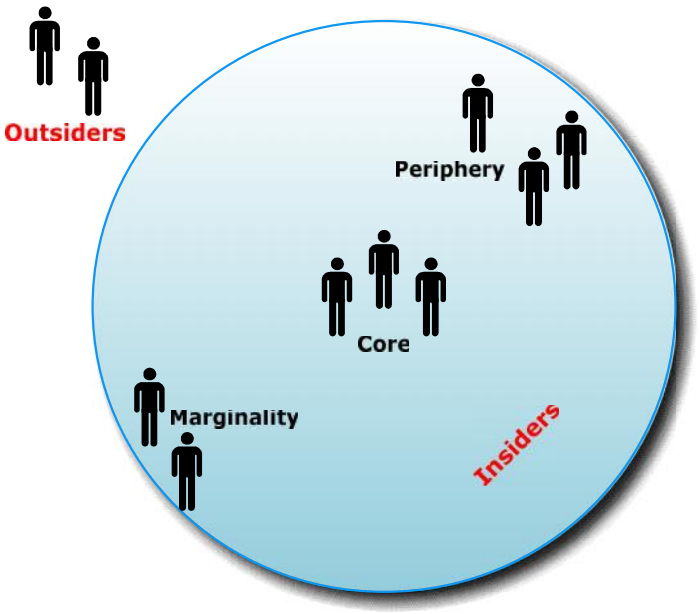


Figure 5: Different Levels of Participation

Participants situated at the core of a practice are characterised by mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoires (Wenger, 1998). Those on the periphery are neither fully inside nor fully outside of the practice, emphasising the fluidity of practice boundaries. Being at the periphery means that engagement with the practice is looser, but that there are opportunities for casual participation or observation. Peripheral participation also implies possibilities for full participation in the future and a trajectory inwards.

Marginality, in contrast, is conceptualised by Wenger (1998) as a form of non-participation or as there being no possibility of full participation in the future. Marginal members, then, are members who are kept at the very edge of a practice and who are not allowed to participate, as opposed to peripheral members who may participate casually. The difference between peripherality and marginality is one of being enabled by non-participation (peripherality) and being restricted by it (marginality). For example, a home-worker who is employed and works within the organisation's office every now and then may be a peripheral participant if this situation is seen as enabling. She might appreciate not being part of office politics all the time and like the casual social interaction. In contrast, if this situation is forced upon a worker who would prefer to be part of the office community, it may well be a marginal experience. The notion of different levels of participation will be important in this research, as I examine whether boundary negotiations are informed by how home-workers position themselves in their home and work practices.

In addition to explaining how practice boundaries can be crossed through brokering and boundary objects, Wenger (1998) discusses different types of boundary encounters, some of which can become practices in their own right. The following provide opportunities for connections across practice boundaries:

a) One-on-one: Two members of two different practices have a conversation about their practices.
b) Immersion: One visits a practice one is not part of.
c) Delegations: A number of participants from different practices engage with each other.

These boundary encounters are limited in their relevance to the boundary between home and work practices because home-workers are already familiar with both their home and their work practices. It is unlikely that the home-worker needs to visit either the home or the work practice or have conversations with members of these practices in order to learn about a foreign practice. She is already a member of both. However, more interesting is Wenger's suggestion that encounters between practices can turn into full-blown boundary practices if delegates from different practices engage with each other on a continuous basis and this interaction becomes characterised by mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoires. There is an argument to be made for viewing home-work as boundary practice. According to Wenger the enterprise of a boundary practice is *"to deal with boundaries and sustain a connection between a number of other practices by addressing conflicts, reconciling perspectives, and finding resolutions"* (Wenger, 1998: 114). That does indeed sound very much like the boundary work that home-workers engage in on a daily basis in order to reconcile the demands of work and home. Thus it could be conceptually useful to explore whether home-work acts as a boundary practice. Other people experience what Wenger calls an overlap between practices, e.g. home and work may overlap spatially as both are carried out within the house, but this does not lead to merging of any kind. Connections between practices are not established. The distinction between overlap and boundary practice, while reminiscent of segmentation and integration, does not endorse a focus on individual

choice. Instead, the emphasis remains firmly on the merging or overlap of practices, which always implies a social surrounding.

At this point, it is useful to summarise how practice concepts relate to one another. Practice is a social site, where actors engage with one another and have similar aims and repertoires. The analysis of practice is closely associated with issues of identity, learning, community and meaning. Meaning is negotiated in practice through the duality of participation and reification. Practice is the nexus where the social and the individual meet. Practices both create boundaries (by distinguishing participants from non-participants) and establish connections across boundaries (through boundary objects and brokering). Brokering relies on multimembership in several practices, which can give rise to uprootedness. Uprootedness highlights that there are different levels of participation in a practice, spanning core, periphery, and marginality. Connections across boundaries can also be created through boundary encounters, where practices meet, sometimes overlap, and sometimes even merge into a new boundary practice. I will apply these Wengerian practice and boundary concepts to my analysis of the home-work interface. I expect that the concepts will enable fresh insights into boundary negotiations, home-work configurations, and the positioning of home-workers. The next section, research aims, specifies how I will use Wengerian concepts to examine issues of interest.

## 2.6. Research Aims

This research investigates how people who work from home negotiate the boundaries between work and home and is broken down into three areas:

1. Boundary negotiations
2. Relationships between home and work
3. Positioning of home-workers

In the first area (boundary negotiations) I aim to develop a framework that connects the 'what' (types of boundaries), 'why' (boundary functions), and 'how' (negotiations) of the boundary setting process with the contexts in which it occurs. Existing research has contributed to each of these boundary dimensions; however, a coherent framework that connects the different elements is lacking. I will utilise Wenger's practice concepts, e.g. levels of participation, to explore the kinds of boundaries that are available to home-workers in their negotiations. Practice concepts will allow for investigation of how much control home-workers exercise over their boundaries, which is an unresolved debate. I will draw on the concepts of reification and participation in exploring how boundaries are constructed through ways of being and material objects. In line with Wenger, I will consider whether boundary negotiations operate at the cusp of the social and the individual.

When people negotiate boundaries between work and home, they construct a relationship between these domains. The second area of interest, relationships between home and work, has received plenty of attention in existing literature, with debates considering whether home and work are a dichotomy or overlapping spheres. I aim to move the debate forward by viewing home and work as fluid practices. I will use the concepts of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoires to assess whether home and work can indeed qualify as practices. If this is the case, I will propose a more flexible relationship between home and

work as practices that are inhabited and enacted in different ways by individuals, which moves away from the narrow focus on two-parent families. I will analyse the kinds of home-work relationships that are relevant to participants, rather than theoretically arguing for either a dichotomy or a layered approach. I will examine the different home and work-related practices that home-workers construct and deliberately broaden the scope of boundary theory by including people who are single, co-habiting, and childless. In order to investigate how home-workers arrive at configurations between home and work, I will apply the Wengerian concepts of brokering, boundary objects, multimembership and boundary practice, in order to understand how connections and distinctions are established between domains.

The third area of interest, the positioning of home-workers, needs to be understood because it underpins the first and second areas. The level at which home-workers participate in each practice, e.g. core, peripheral or marginal participation, is likely to shape how home-workers negotiate boundaries and construct relationships between domains. Core participation implies greater control over boundaries, whereas peripherality diminishes control. I will therefore explore how home-workers position themselves in their home and work practices and how their positioning shapes their experiences of home-work. The concept of uprootedness might also be useful for this purpose, as it explains what happens when home-workers do not experience a sense of belonging at home or at work. The levels of participation concept promises to be an interesting contribution to the home-work literature because working from home brings previously separate domains into close contact and disrupts our sense of belonging at home and at work. The three areas of interest are reflected below in the research questions.

## 2.7. Research Questions

**Guiding question:**

**How do people who work from home negotiate the boundaries between their home and work practices?**

Sub-questions:

What home-work configurations are constructed by participants as they negotiate the boundaries between work and home?

How are home-workers positioned in each domain? At what level do they participate? How influential/peripheral are home-workers?

# Chapter 3

# Methodology

## 3.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodological implications of the research aims raised in the previous chapter. The question 'How do home-workers negotiate the boundaries between their work and home practices?' demands a particular set of methods to answer it, and makes assumptions about the nature of knowledge, which will be discussed here. The review also identified a number of sub-questions that arise from the guiding research question. These include: What home-work configurations are constructed by participants as they negotiate the boundaries between work and home? How are home-workers positioned in each domain? These questions necessitate a methodology that is suitable for issues of construction, negotiation, and positioning. The questions were kept in mind when making the methodological choices discussed below.

This chapter begins by situating the research site, discussing home-work definitions, numbers and demographics. I then explain the process of data gathering and specify the sample I selected for my research. I continue by describing how the data was interpreted using discourse analysis. I then discuss the underpinning epistemology by considering how my findings are to be evaluated and conclude by reflecting on the relationship between researcher and researched.

## 3.2. Situating the Research Site

Home-work offers a fruitful site for exploring what happens when two practices come into contact with one another because of the co-location of home and work. This section situates home-work as the research site by providing information on the home-work context.

### 3.2.1. Definition of 'Working from Home'

In this research, working from home is defined as the practice of engaging in paid work while at home, regardless of whether this is a full-time arrangement or an occasional pursuit, and irrespective of whether the home-worker is an employee or self-employed. For people to be categorised as home-workers in this research, they have to perform work at home, away from a traditional office. This definition reflects the research focus on work-home boundaries, as opposed to more specific concerns with, for example, technology use. For this reason, the inclusive terms of 'home-worker' and 'working from home' are adopted throughout the research.

The terminology used by researchers in the working from home area mirrors the concerns of their research. The term 'telework' is widely used and is especially common when research focuses on technology use. Reiterating this, Sullivan (2003) defines telework as remote work enabled through the use of information and communication technologies (ICT). The focus on ICT is appropriate if research addresses communication between teleworker and organisation or the role of technology in driving organisational change. It is unsuited for this research, however, because I explore how boundaries between the practices of work and home are constructed by the home-worker, while organisational and technological aspects are not of immediate interest; yet I am open to the possibility that ICT's could be conceptualised as boundary objects and that ICT's might mediate boundary work in interesting ways.

Other researchers have used the term 'telecommuting' to emphasise the potential of this form of work to eliminate the daily commute. Such studies were often American and approached home-work from a perspective of urban planning or geography (Jackson & Van der Wielen, 1998). Telecommuting research was enthusiastic about the possibilities to invoke radical change. The argument was that less commuting means fewer cars on the road, fewer emissions and fewer road accidents, etc. (Jackson & Van der Wielen, 1998). My research on

home-work boundaries is a complete departure from this, because my stance is not geographic and I do not explore measurable outcomes, such as road accidents, which renders the telecommuting term unsuitable for this research.

My research is closer to a strand of home-work research that has focused on the location of the workers and the effects that different types of working away from the main office have on workers (e.g. Hill et al., 2003; Hislop & Axtell, 2007). Jackson & Van der Wielen (1998) make category distinctions between workers who have a fixed central workplace at home, those who are hybrid workers with a workplace at home and at the traditional office, and those who are nomads with no fixed workplace, such as sales people who are 'on the go'. While location is not the primary concern in my research (boundaries are), I acknowledge the importance of each home-worker's context in shaping their home-work boundaries, which includes where they work.

The different terminologies, of which there are plenty, tell of the breadth of research foci possible in the working from home area, e.g.: teleworkers, telecommuters, flexiworkers, distance workers, electronic home-workers, home-based nomads, mobile teleworkers, home-workers and telecottage workers (Qvortrup, 1998). Terminology does not only influence what is studied (Jackson & Van der Wielen, 1998), it also has implications for estimates of how many people work from home. For a more detailed discussion on terminology, see Sullivan (2003). The term chosen in this research, home-workers, reflects the research focus on the boundaries between the practices of home and work. Home-workers represent a particularly interesting category from which we can gain insights into boundary negotiation because their home and work domains are co-located.

### 3.2.2. Home-Working Numbers and Demographics

This section provides information about the context in which the home-workers of this study are situated. Because of the differing terminology used when describing people who work from home, it is difficult to measure how many people actually do so. Estimates vary based on the definition used, or as Qvortrup (1998:21) puts it: *"Counting teleworkers is like measuring a rubber band. The result depends on how far you stretch your definition."* Jackson & Van der Wielen (1998) even go so far as suggesting that the lack of conceptual clarity renders comparison across studies meaningless. Furthermore, adopting the view that home-working numbers can be identified, counted and analysed leads to the assumption that home-work is an objective phenomenon (Jackson & Van der Wielen, 1998), which may not reflect the lived experience. I suggest that home-working numbers be interpreted with these cautions in mind. Russell et al. (2009) report ESRI data of over 5,000 Irish employees collected in 2003, which indicated that home-working was available in 14% of respondents' workplaces, with 8% of those surveyed taking up the opportunity to work from home. This data is restricted to employees, so while it is useful for locating participants who are employed, it does not provide information about the freelancers or self-employed home-workers that represent a part of this research. Similarly, a Eurostat (2010) report claims that 7.6% of the Irish workforce worked from home in 2008, which is higher than the European average of 4.8%. The work from home numbers for Ireland's neighbour, the UK, are lower: based on Eurostat (2010), 3.1% of the British workforce worked from home in 2008. In the US, predictions about the uptake of working from home were initially very optimistic when telework became a popular idea in the 1970's, e.g. Nilles et al. (1976) claimed that teleworking could be a feasible way of working for half the American workforce. This optimism has not materialised; yet home-work appears more popular in the US than on our shores. A report by WorldatWork (2011) claims that 20 per cent of the entire US workforce

engage in some form of telework. In the ESRI data analysed by Russell et al. (2009), it emerged that roughly ten per cent of male employees engaged in home-work, while only five per cent of female employees worked from home, highlighting a gender divide. This trend is repeated in other estimates (WorldatWork, 2011; European Telework, 2000), while Bailey & Kurland (2002) suggest that males tend to be professional home-workers, while females are more likely to be clerical home workers. The overall picture painted of a home-worker continues to be that of a male professional, who is highly educated, in their 30's or 40's, tends to be married and tends to have a high household income (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; European Telework, 2000; WorldatWork, 2011). This is likely to be reflected in the research sample and provides the context in which the participants of this study are located.

## 3.3. The Research Process

In this section, I describe what was involved in attempting to answer the research questions and explain why I collected different types of data that complement each other. Working from home in this research is defined as 'the practice of engaging in paid work while at home, regardless of whether this is a full-time arrangement or an occasional pursuit, and irrespective of whether the home-worker is an employee or self-employed'. The definition informs the research process and has implications for the participants and the types of data selected. The inclusive definition of home-work means that the people studied in this research vary in terms of their exact working arrangements and family situations, but have the practice of home-work in common. The sample is discussed in more detail below.

### 3.3.1. Data Gathering

The research process began with the collection of unsolicited data (newspaper columns and online forum discussions), followed by semi-structured interviews. A personal diary completed the process of data collection. The rationale for these different types of data and how they contribute to the research question is offered here.

*Unsolicited Data*

In order to investigate the negotiation of boundaries in home-work, I began by collecting data in the form of a newspaper column published in an Irish broadsheet. The weekly column is written by a home-working father. In it, he reflects on the experience of working from home and parenthood. I used the online archives of the newspaper to gain access to a total of 195 columns, written between January 2007 and January 2011. I analysed all columns for references to home-working. I excluded the columns that dealt with parenthood only and focused on those columns that explicitly address the boundaries between home and work, as experienced by somebody who works from home. In the end, I decided to include six columns in my research sample, on the basis that these columns were specifically relevant to my research interests of negotiation, home-work configurations and positioning of home-workers. Each column is about 800 words in length.

I decided to begin by collecting naturally occurring, unsolicited text that would have happened without intervention by my research because it highlights the concerns that are of importance to home-workers, as opposed to researchers. Even though I shape the research process by selecting the columns that were most pertinent to my research, the issues addressed in the columns are important to the writer first. Solicited data carries the risk of the

researcher identifying issues that seem to be pertinent to home-work prior to data collection (Potter & Hepburn, 2005) and then merely looking for statements that confirm her or his hunches. Unsolicited data allows home-workers to raise their own issues, though of course with a newspaper column and its wide audience there are questions about whether the author actually relates his own issues, whether he writes stories for the benefit of the audience, or whether he tries to endorse a particular viewpoint. Amer (2009) states that columns are opinion pieces in which the writer attempts to endorse a particular ideology by means of various linguistic and discursive strategies. The objective of columns is to persuade an audience of the validity of a particular opinion. This has implications for how the home-work columns selected for this research are interpreted. Firstly, I keep in mind that while the columns are not solicited by this research, they are produced for a particular purpose and for a wide audience. The author is probably trying to convince the audience of a particular viewpoint regarding home-work. However, because of the carefully considered and crafted nature of a written piece like a column, it is likely that an abundance of discursive and rhetorical strategies will be found, leading to the rich kind of data that is required for my research question.

Column data has much to offer, in particular the careful construction of home-work for a purpose, but because of its public nature I might not learn enough about more intimate negotiations that home-workers engage in. Different types of data allow for boundary negotiations to be considered from a variety of angles. I decided to utilise a popular online forum for Irish home-working mothers as a source of data. The forum I selected has been online since 2005 and has 4578 registered members. The forum is divided into 27 strands, such as ‘Networking’, ‘Marketing and Selling’, ‘Tax and Legal Stuff’, ‘People Issues’, ‘Balancing Work and Life’, etc. Within each strand, registered members can raise topics that they find relevant. The responses of members within each topic are known as posts. In total,

there are 9907 topics and 65470 posts spread across the 27 strands (numbers accurate as of 20th February 2012). I selected the strand 'Balancing Work and Life' for my research, because I expected that this strand would offer insights into home-work boundaries. Within this strand, 67 separate topics were raised by members and 509 posts were written to respond to the topics. I analysed all topics and associated posts for references to home-work boundary negotiation and decided to include 3 topics, comprising 69 posts, in my sample. Topic 1 is labelled 'Working from home' and consists of 18 posts. This topic was active in July 2008 (from here on, this topic will be referred to as 'online discussion 1'). Topic 2, active in August 2009, is called 'I'm a WAHM [work-at-home-mum] and proud', consisting of 30 posts (this topic will be referred to as 'online discussion 2'). Topic 3, called 'Finding working from home difficult', was active in November 2008 and comprises 21 posts (this topic will be referred to as 'online discussion 3'). I selected the three topics and their posts because direct references to work-home boundaries and the relationship between home and work were made. These topics are therefore expected to help me address my research questions. Most of the forum members are mothers and run their own home-based businesses, ranging in nature from freelance services to confectionery production and sales. They can be classified as 'mumpreneurs' (Ekinsmyth, 2011; Duberley & Carrigan, 2012). Mumpreneurship is a form of entrepreneurship that is driven by the motive to bridge family and business concerns. Mumpreneurs tend to arrive at the decision to operate a home-based business through aspects of motherhood, e.g. they identify new market niches when caring for children, and they change their priorities or re-assess their working futures when realising the impossibility of previous working arrangements (Ekinsmyth, 2011). The notion that mumpreneurs start home-based businesses out of concerns for work-family balance indicates that these women are an interesting site for the study of the work-home interface.

Internet forum data has the advantage of being a conversation between registered members on a website. The website that was consulted for this research provides a medium for women who are in similar situations (all work from home and many are mothers) to share their stories. Many of them have regular contact with each other, so the discussions benefit from familiarity and a certain level of trust for one another. This results in members of the discussion expressing feelings more openly than they might in a formal situation, such as an interview (Morton Robinson, 2001). However, the elements of trust and shared stories mean that as a researcher I have a responsibility to protect the anonymity of discussants, despite the fact that they voice opinions in a public forum. Prentice (2010) deals with this conundrum in internet data by clearing his analysis of any information that could identify discussants. Others claim that internet forums are designed for public perusal; hence entries can be used by whomever for whatever purpose (e.g. Garcia Gomez, 2010; Del-Tesco-Craviotto, 2009). I dealt with the issue by ensuring that discussants cannot be identified in the analysis, giving them pseudonyms, not naming the website and deleting any links which contained identifying information.

Forum discussions, similar to columns, have the advantage of not being solicited by this research. They offer a means of gaining insight into everyday constructions of boundaries and people discussing the issues that are pertinent to them. However, the analysis of unsolicited data leaves no room for clarification or questions to be asked, which helps me as a researcher to understand boundary negotiations better. Interviews have the definite benefit of immediacy and the ability to ask questions, whereas written text can be reviewed and revised by the author to achieve a purpose (Van Dijk, 1997b). The inclusion of both unsolicited data and interviewing allows me to reap the benefits of both methods, as well as counteracting their respective limitations.

*Semi-Structured Interview Data*

The unsolicited texts allowed for insight into the home-workers' constructions of home-work boundaries, but they also left questions unanswered, which is why I decided to engage in semi-structured interviews with home-workers. Interviews have the benefit of enabling the researcher to actively intervene, ask for more detail and seek clarification if necessary (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This is exactly what was needed at that stage – being able to ask for more detail and get a sense of how boundaries are negotiated. Having this specific rationale for using interviews circumvents criticism levelled at the over-use of interviews without careful consideration of whether they are suitable for the research focus (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). The suitability of interviewing for the research focus on boundaries is confirmed by the fact that similar in-depth studies of home-work have reported its usefulness (e.g. Marsh & Musson, 2008; Tietze, 2002; Mirchandani, 1998a; Sullivan, 2000; Anderson, 2009).

The style of interviewing chosen was semi-structured interviewing. Unlike structured interviewing, which shares much of its aims with positivistic experiments, semi-structured interviewing is guided by a loose schedule, but not dictated by it (Smith, 1995). It is characterised by flexibility and openness. Based on the home-work issues that were discussed in the columns and forum discussions, a number of open-ended questions and topics that would frame the interviews were developed. They served as a loose guide and were not adhered to in a strict order (see appendix 2.3., vol. II, for details of interview questions). The aim was to allow the interviewee to steer the conversation and raise the issues that were most important to them (Smith, 1995; Willig, 2008), before I probed for more detail.

The interview questions were used to guide conversations with a total of seven home-workers, each of whom was interviewed once. Specifics of the sample and the rationale for the sample size are discussed below. Most of the interviewees were personal contacts; some

were recommended by mutual acquaintances. One interviewee was actually the columnist, as his opinion pieces had raised questions over home-work that necessitated further investigation. Luckily, he agreed to be interviewed. I established communication with participants either by email or telephone, disclosing the objectives of this research and letting them know what the interview would entail. Interview participants consented to being involved in the research and agreed to being recorded and quoted, but were also made aware of their right to request that their interview data be withdrawn. Their anonymity is protected by using pseudonyms and deleting identifying information, such as the name of their employer, from transcripts. The interviews, ranging in length between one and two hours, were spread out over a period of a year (from March 2009 to March 2010) to allow for interviews to be analysed before moving on to the next person, allowing for insights gained in one interview to inform the next one. At one participant's interview (Simon), the spouse was present and offered occasional comments. The conundrum of whether to include family members in data collection or not is discussed later in the chapter.

Some other dilemmas arose during the interviewing stage. When probing for detail I had to make decisions as to whether it was appropriate to ask for more information. There is potential for conflict between curiosity and ethical sensitivity (Flick, 1998). For instance, in one interview, I would have liked to ask for more information on how boundary negotiations affected the participant's marriage, but I refrained from doing so because the person did not seem comfortable talking about the issue. The first priority in these situations always has to be the participant's dignity. It follows that the success of the interviews depended crucially on the rapport I established with the interviewees. I reasoned that this would not be an issue with the participants I already knew. With the others, I did try to have an entry point, such as an acquaintance in common. I tried my best to make participants feel at ease. I did find the interviews challenging at times because the personal interactions with the participants had to

be navigated carefully; however interviews were indispensable to this research because of the level of detail they allowed for and the opportunity to follow up on issues raised by participants. Unfortunately, interviews are also a work-intensive type of data because they need to be transcribed before analysis can take place. The process of transcription is anything but neutral and needs to be discussed briefly.

*Transcription*

All of the interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder and transcribed in a fashion that includes some basic non-linguistic features, such as pauses and laughter. The decision to refrain from extremely detailed non-linguistic transcription in the form of e.g. the Jefferson transcript notation (1984), as is common in content analysis, was taken in light of the research focus. This research is concerned with the negotiation of boundaries, rather than with examining minute details of language use for its own sake. The level of transcription was chosen accordingly. A very 'full' transcript with lots of extra-linguistic detail would not be practical for this research - it would in fact be too hard to read (Taylor, 2001). It is important to discuss transcription as an activity that has strong implications for the course that research takes, rather than seeing it as a value-free activity. Transcription requires decisions regarding what to include and what to leave out in transcripts (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; O'Connell & Kowal, 1995) and thus constructs a particular version of events. Hence, a transcript can never fully mirror the spoken interview (Willig, 2008). Moreover, since this research does not treat language as neutral and transparent, the *"transcript as a form of language cannot neutrally reflect the talk or interaction which it purports to report"* (Taylor, 2001: 37). As a result, the transcripts here cannot be an objective reflection of what took place in the interview situation; instead, they are a construction.

As discussed, the interviews presented a valuable opportunity to engage with home-workers and ask for as much detail as possible. However, in some cases I refrained from probing as much as I would have liked because ethical considerations took priority. The final type of data collected, a diary, therefore provides a good way of gaining a no-holds-barred insight into boundary negotiation.

*Personal Diary*

I work from home occasionally, as is common for academics. My partner works for a company that is located in a different part of Ireland, covering his assigned region from home. He balances home-work and travel. We both work from the kitchen table when we work from home. Sometimes our home-working days coincide. This brings with it particular negotiations over space, sound, and other distractions. The diary offers data that is otherwise hard to obtain – it is an intimate account of negotiations as they happen – something that does not emerge in an interview (Willig, 2008). The diary as a first hand insight also offers not just understanding, but *"an experience of 'feeling with'"* (Gergen & Gergen, 2003: 62). It is a temporally ordered account that records each event as it unfolds, unlike an interview where participants might give a global account of a phenomenon or recall one or two unique negotiations (Willig, 2008). I also mentioned earlier that I had to refrain from probing further in some of the interviews. My diary overcomes this limitation, as it is a personal, honest reflection of our attempts to work from home. The diary covers a period of one year (December 2009 – December 2010), starting just before my other half (whom I anonymised as 'BF' in the diary) and I moved in together. It consists of 20 entries. I also interviewed my partner six months before we moved in together. He represents interview participant David. My diary captures the negotiations that took place as we adjusted to combining our home and

work lives. One drawback in this regard is that the diary might sensitise me, the keeper, to certain experiences (Willig, 2008). For instance, I have to ask myself whether I deliberately picked fights so that I could record negotiations in my diary. Constant critical reflection ought to counteract this risk because a carefully considered diary actually provides a means of practising reflexivity and keeping my own assumptions about home-work in check. I acknowledge that my role is that of a researcher, home-working spouse, and home-worker, which means I am thoroughly immersed in the home-work setting.

*Triangulation*

Overall, the combination of diary, interview and written data offers rich and varied accounts of boundary negotiation. Each type of data highlights different angles and allows for a thorough exploration of boundary setting in home-work. Each kind of data counteracts limitations of another type. The different methods of data collection are used as a form of triangulation, or an attempt to gain a better understanding of boundary negotiation, adding "*rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth"* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005: 5). The strategy of triangulation is encouraged by Potter & Wetherell (1987), who claim that,

> *"By collecting documents from many sources, recording interactions, and then combining this with more directive interviewing, it is possible to build up a much fuller idea of the way participants' linguistic practices are organized compared to one source alone"* (162).

The combination of sources offers access to a wider range of constructions of the home-work boundary and to more varied accounts of negotiation. The different types of data are analysed with respect to their contexts, due to the fact that they differ in form, audience, and intention

(Parker & Burman, 1993). A newspaper column might have as its aim to convince readers of an opinion, whereas my diary is an attempt to reflect on personal negotiations with my partner. However, while the different types of data vary in many ways, they still address the same issue, the work-home boundary, allowing them to be used together to answer my research questions. Later in the chapter, I will outline how I collated the different types of data to arrive at my findings as presented in the proceeding chapters. In the next section, sample considerations will be discussed.

### 3.3.2. Sample

Sampling refers to decisions about which persons to study, from which groups they should come and how many people to study overall (Flick, 1998). Sampling ought to be approached carefully, because:

> *"In sampling decisions, the reality under study is constructed in a specific way: certain parts and aspects are highlighted, others are phased out. Sampling decisions determine substantially what becomes empirical material in the form of text and what is taken from available texts concretely and how it is used"* (Flick, 1998: 73).

Sampling has implications for the direction of this study and for how its findings can be interpreted. It therefore becomes imperative to disclose the specifics of my sample. I will now describe the two main issues faced in the sampling process: sample size and the question of who to study.

*Sample Size*

The sample size in this research, despite relying on different forms of data, is kept deliberately small, based on the research focus. Sample size is often a trade-off between wanting to create depth and width (Flick, 1998). The usefulness of research is often judged by its ability to explain a phenomenon beyond the immediate limits of the study. However, Haug (1987) states on the issue of representativeness, that if a given experience is possible, it is also subject to universalisation. Thus I can address wider issues with my relatively small sample because *"even though we do not know who or how many people share a particular experience, once we have identified it through qualitative research, we do know that it is available within a culture or society"* (Willig, 2008: 17). For example, Linehan (2012) achieves unique insights into the construction of identity necessitated by a changing work practice, based on one participant. Potter & Wetherell (1987) propose that the key consideration must be whether the sample size is appropriate for the specific research question. The research question 'How do people who work from home negotiate the boundaries between their home and work practices?' requires a small sample size in order to produce in-depth analysis of the subtleties involved in boundary negotiation. In the review, I mentioned some studies that have relied on large sample sizes to study measurable home-work outcomes, such as productivity, motivation, job satisfaction, etc. They have extensively covered the quantifiable effects of working from home. Some of these studies (e.g. Russell et al., 2009) blame the lack of boundaries in home-work for negative outcomes. However, these studies fail to capture the complexity of boundary processes in home-work, particularly in regards to how boundaries are created and how this positions work and home practices and the home-worker. This gap necessitates in-depth research to investigate the intricacies of boundary negotiation, which is best achieved with a small sample size, justifying the sampling decision taken in this research. My research is concerned with depth, rather than

width; however, I suggest that the negotiations reported by participants here are possible for a larger number of people, provided their context is similar. The reasons for arriving at my sample of six newspaper columns, 69 posts in an online discussion forum, seven interviews, and one diary consisting of 20 entries need to be made transparent. Potter & Wetherell (1987) claim that there is no definitive cut-off point at which sampling can be said to be complete. Hence, I abide by their suggestion that an honest and detailed description of how material was sampled and where it came from suffices. Indeed, it would be pompous to state that we can ever know for sure six columns are better than five, because we do not know whether more data necessarily equals increased insight. However, guidance is taken from the theoretical sampling and saturation approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this tradition, sampling decisions represent an iterative process – each case is chosen based on its expected level of new insight for emerging theory. Theoretical saturation is the criterion for when to stop integrating additional cases. It describes a state of theory where nothing new emerges and no additional data are being found whereby properties of the theory can be developed (Flick, 1998). This form of sampling also provides a form of triangulation because various different cases are sought. The process of sampling in my research was iterative. Each form of data was chosen for its ability to bring light to new angles of boundary negotiation. Similarly, each interview participant was chosen iteratively, based on the expectation that with their differing contexts, they would bring new insights to the analysis. The cut-off point for when to stop integrating new data was however a little fuzzy. As the same aspects of boundary negotiation continued to be raised repeatedly, data collection was ceased. Still, it is hard to be completely confident that more data would not reveal anything new. However, the sampling decision in my research is consistent with the methodological and epistemological considerations (more on this below). The sample chosen for this research offers sufficiently rich data to provide insights into boundary negotiation, as well as being manageable in size.

*Who to Study*

Sampling includes not just decisions about depth versus width; one also needs to make choices about who to include as participants. In line with the research question, the definition of working from home was 'to engage in paid work while at home, regardless of whether this is a full-time arrangement or an occasional pursuit, and irrespective of whether the home-worker is an employee or self-employed'. The relatively broad definition of home-work is mirrored by the inclusion criteria for participants. I expect that all home-workers have to negotiate boundaries, resulting in an inclusive sample and tolerance of difference. Once potential participants fulfilled the criterion of engaging in paid work while at home, they were selected to be as different from each other as possible in order to bring varying aspects of boundary negotiation to the table. This was done iteratively. It was expected that exploring a diverse range of boundary negotiations would be more worthwhile than being able to make a consistent claim about one specific type of person or worker. The decision to use a heterogeneous sample is supported by Musson & Tietze (2004) and Wilkinson & Jarvis (2012), who also used small and uneven samples to explore home-work issues. Participants might be as diverse as possible, yet if they work from home then they all have to cope with the arrival of work at home. This confirms the appropriateness of a heterogeneous sample.

Many of the participants reflect the demographics of home-workers as discussed above. The profile painted of home-workers was that of a male professional in his 30s or 40s, highly educated, married and earning a high income. The interview sample was predominantly male (five men, two women) and more or less fit this profile. The columnist is a male professional, as is the home-working boyfriend that I refer to in my diary. The forum discussants however were mostly female because the website specifically targets home-working mothers. The choice to include both males and females was made in order to balance the sample, because I did not want to focus specifically on one gender. Gender issues in home-work are an

important issue outside of the bounds of this research and have been addressed elsewhere (Sullivan & Lewis, 2001; Marsh & Musson, 2008; Mirchandani, 1999). The research aims also informed decisions on who to study. Aside from the working from home definition, demographics and indeed participant availability, at the back of my mind was the fact that I critiqued existing boundary theory and work-home debates based on their narrow focus on parents. For this reason, the sample selected here deliberately includes non-parents. I expect that parents and non-parents alike will negotiate boundaries between work and home. The columnist and online participants are parents. The interview participants who are non-parents however outweigh the parents (4 to 3 ratio). The diary participants (my partner and I) are non-parents. I suggest that this balanced sample will allow for theoretical contribution and an exploration of whether work-home boundaries are or are not exclusive to parents. In the next section, I present tables offering a brief overview of the participants selected for this research and their backgrounds.

*Specifics of the Sample*

*Newspaper Column Participant*

| | |
|---|---|
| Participant | Author of newspaper columns |
| Job | Columnist, editor, writer |
| Employment Status | Freelancer, self-employed |
| Family Situation | Married with 2 children |
| Living situation | Co-habiting |
| No. of years worked from home | 7 (at beginning of data collection in Jan. 2009) |
| Extent of home-work | Full-time |
| Spatial setup | Dedicated office |
| Nationality | Irish |
| Whose choice? | His |
| Partner's job | PR |
| Age | Late 30s |
| Gender | Male |

Table 3: Newspaper Column Participant

*Online Forum Participants*

| | |
|---|---|
| Participant(s) | Discussants in popular online forum for Irish home-working mothers |
| Job(s) | Range of jobs that are possible from home: e.g. virtual assistants, wedding businesses, coaching, etc. |
| Employment Status | Most are entrepreneurs/ self-employed |
| Family Situation | Many are married with children |
| Living situation | Many are co-habiting |
| No. of years worked from home | N/A |
| Extent of home-work | Most work from home full-time |
| Spatial setup | Varies from kitchen table, couch, garden shed to office |
| Nationality | Mostly Irish |
| Whose choice? | Mostly theirs |
| Partner's job | Often in full-time employment |
| Age | N/A |
| Gender | Female, with a few male exceptions |

Table 4: Online Forum Participants

*Interview Participants*

| Participant | Malcolm | Jake | Lisa | David | Simon | Mark | Dee |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Job | Editorial services; Columnist ; Writer | Multi-level marketer | Web content editor | Sales executive | Account manager | Academic researcher | Policy develop-ment |
| Employ-ment status | Freelance r/ Self-employed | Self-employed | Employed but freelance-like conditions | Employed | Employed | Employed | Employed |
| Family situation | Married with 2 children | Single | Single | In relation-ship | Married with 1 child | Engaged | Married with 3 children |
| Living situation | Co-habiting | House share | House share | Living alone (at time of interview) | Co-habiting | Co-habiting | Co-habiting |
| No. of years worked from home | 7 years | 1; quit before interview | 1; quit a few months after interview | 1 + 1 in previous job | 6 months | 1 year | 9 years |
| Extent of home-work | Full-time | Full-time | Full-time | Mixing home-work & travel | 1 day a week | Full-time | 3 days a week |
| Spatial setup | Dedicated office | Dedicated office | Kitchen table | Kitchen table | Anywhere | Dedicated office | Dedicated office |

| Nationality | Irish | Irish | Italian | Irish | German | Irish | Irish |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Whose choice? | His | Felt forced | Not hers | Company ’s | His | His | Hers |
| Partner’s job | PR | N/A | N/A | Academic | Food science | Teacher | N/A |
| Age | Late 30s | Late 20s | 30s | Early 30s | Late 20s | Late 20s | 40s |
| Gender | Male | Male | Female | Male | Male | Male | Female |

Table 5: Interview Participants

*Diary Participants*

| Participant | Researcher | BF (Boyfriend) |
|---|---|---|
| Job | Academic | Sales executive |
| Employment Status | Employed | Employed |
| Family Situation | In relationship with BF | In relationship with researcher |
| Living situation | Co-habiting with BF | Co-habiting with researcher |
| No. of years worked from home | 4 | 1 + 1 in previous job |
| Extent of home-work | Mix between office and home-work | Mix between travel and home-work |
| Spatial setup | Shared kitchen table | Shared kitchen table |
| Nationality | German | Irish |
| Whose choice? | Hers | Company’s |
| Partner’s job | Sales executive | Academic |
| Age | 20s | Early 30s |
| Gender | Female | Male |

Table 6: Diary Participants

I propose that the participants’ backgrounds need to be considered when analysing their accounts of home-work, because their boundary negotiations are likely to be dependent on home and work-related factors. After outlining the types of data and the sample that I selected for the purposes of my research, I will now proceed to discuss how the data were interpreted.

## 3.4. Interpretation of Data

The choice of which method to use for analysing data was informed by the research question and the gaps identified in the literature review. The research interests of negotiation, construction and positioning strongly point in the direction of discourse analysis, though of course there are always options. Options taken into account were Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Grounded Theory and Discourse Analysis. All three lend itself to the kind of in-depth data I have gathered and are potentially useful for exploring boundaries; however, the decision to approach data from a discourse analytic stance was taken because of its suitability for addressing the specific research question. Next, I will outline the alternative options and reasons why they were dismissed, and then move on to introduce assumptions underpinning discourse analysis, explain its fit with my research, and discuss different discourse analytic traditions along with the rationale for the tradition chosen in this research. Lastly, I present the analytic steps involved in this method of data analysis and offer an example of how data analysis was carried out on a practical level.

*Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)*

In IPA, the aim is to explore how participants make sense of their social world (Smith, 2003). The focus in this method is on meaning and the participant's perception of an event. IPA is phenomenological because it involves examination of detailed descriptions of personal experiences of the phenomenon under study in order to learn something about its nature (Coyle, 2007). Goulding (2005) states that the goal of phenomenological approaches is to deepen understanding of mundane, everyday experience. Description of experience is analysed without considering the psychological origins of experience – i.e. why an experience occurs is not of interest (Goulding, 2005; Lyons & Coyle, 2007).

Epistemologically, phenomenological approaches are underpinned by the assumption that language acts as a conduit for experience and that language reflects the meanings people attach to things (Lyons & Coyle, 2007). The researcher makes a connection between someone's talk, their thinking and their emotional state, but is aware that the connection is complicated by factors such as someone's social world (Smith, 2003). If I was interested in detailed accounts of working from home in general, as opposed to boundary negotiation, IPA would lend itself to this research. However, especially considering the perspective adopted regarding language in my research (that it constructs, rather than reflects reality), IPA becomes unsuitable as a method.

*Grounded Theory*

Glaser & Strauss (1967) developed Grounded Theory because they perceived a need for an inductive method that would enable them to do more than to test existing theories. Grounded Theory allows for theory building that is grounded in the words of the individuals under study (Goulding, 2005). Unlike IPA, where the aim is to gain insight into detailed experiences, Grounded Theory seeks to develop theory that explains the phenomenon under study and is particularly useful for research areas that are not well-understood (Lyons & Coyle, 2007). Grounded Theory provides researchers with a concrete guide of how to analyse data. Data analysis moves in small steps from initial coding, where data is summarised, to focused coding and categorising (Charmaz, 2006), progressing to a more theoretical level with each step. Grounded Theory initially adopted a positivist stance towards research as Glaser & Strauss (1967) believed that there was a straightforward relationship between objects and our perceptions of them. They viewed data as separate from the scientific observer. More recently, Grounded Theory has been approached from interpretivist stances,

e.g. Charmaz's (2006) constructivist Grounded Theory, where the researcher plays a more active role in shaping the data. However, the strict steps involved in Grounded Theory research still echo its positivistic roots (Greckhamer & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005). I decided not to rely on Grounded Theory for the purposes of this research primarily because of the rigidity of the method and its assumption that there is a straightforward relationship between language and experience. In Grounded Theory, data is summarised nearly mindlessly, until one ends up with a condensed version of a participant's account. At no point does this method allow for questioning of why people said what they said, what the functions of pieces of text and talk are, how this positions people in regards to home and work, how this fits in with broader discourses in society, and so on. In short, Grounded Theory is rejected because it does not adopt a critical stance towards language, because it remains too closely at the level of immediate data, and because it puts the researcher in the position to summarise rather than interpret data.

### 3.4.1. Discourse Analysis

This research seeks to explore how home-work boundaries are negotiated, and in line with this, the kinds of home-work relationships that home-workers construct and how they position themselves in regards to home and work. I propose that negotiation, construction and positioning are achieved through language, necessitating a corresponding approach to data analysis. At the core of discourse analytic approaches lies the premise that language has the power to affect how people experience and act in the world (Burman & Parker, 1993). Discourse analysis, with its attention to language, rejects the idea that language reflects reality – instead language is seen as a 'framing device', through which we construct social reality (Tietze, Cohen & Musson, 2003; Lyons & Coyle, 2007). Such an approach has

implications for how the findings of this research can be interpreted (more on this below). Discourse analytic research aims to understand the workings of language and the constructions of accounts, hoping to identify new ways of understanding social phenomena, such as boundary negotiation, this way (Burr, 1995). Unlike many traditional approaches to research, discourse analysis assumes that language is constitutive of what happens in the social world, rather than only being a medium of communication.

### 3.4.2. Application of Discourse Analysis to this Research

The suitability of discursive approaches to the research question has been mentioned in the review. I dedicated attention to the concepts of 'home' and 'work' and described how their meanings have emerged over time. Home and work are portrayed as being characterised by separate discourses, thus introducing the idea that language provides an angle from which to explore the home-work boundary. I painted a picture of home-work boundaries as contested and subject to change – the same applies to language and its fluidity, leading to a match between boundary studies and language. In this research, discourses are viewed as constitutive of how people construct and negotiate the boundaries between home and work, making discourse analysis the obvious choice of method for data analysis. The appropriateness of discourse analysis for studying boundaries is confirmed by Taylor (2001) who states that,

> *"It is through language [...] that certain things or people are either categorized together or separated out as different, and through language that value is attributed or denied"* (Taylor, 2001: 9).

We use language to construct boundaries between domains. It is through language that we prioritise one concept and devalue the other, reflecting the power differential between work and home discussed in the review. It is through language that we define what something is and is not (Tietze et al., 2003). It becomes evident that language is imperative in how society is ordered (de Beaugrande, 1997; Taylor, 2001). The fact that other in-depth studies in the area of working from home have also used discourse analytic approaches further points to the suitability of this method (e.g. Tietze, 2002; Tietze, 2005; Marsh & Musson, 2008). Discourse analysis fits with other decisions made during the research process, such as the decision to limit the sample size. Potter & Wetherell (1987) contend that even a small sample will yield a large number of linguistic constructions, which shed light on the research focus. From a discourse analytic perspective, larger samples simply add to the researcher's workload without contributing to the analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Discourse comprises all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal, and written texts of all kind (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Burr (1995) stretches this definition:

> *"Given that there is virtually no aspect of human life that is exempt from meaning, everything around us can be considered as 'textual', and 'life as text' could be said to be the underlying metaphor of the discourse approach"* (Burr, 1995: 51).

Considering this, the different types of data used in my research are all textual and can be subjected to discourse analysis. However, it should briefly be mentioned that not all types of text are equally favoured in the discourse analytic tradition. The relationship between discourse analysis and interview data has been uneasy to say the least (Potter & Hepburn, 2005), with many discourse analysts stating a preference for unsolicited data that is free of social science agenda. Interviews can suffer from being an inquisition into issues that are pertinent to the researcher's agenda, as opposed to the participant's (Potter & Hepburn,

2005). In this research, I resolve the problem by attending to the interview context and viewing interview data as the result of carefully negotiated interaction between interviewer and respondent – the respondent only said what they said and how they said it because of the interview situation. The researcher's role in the production of the data is acknowledged. After introducing discourse analysis and providing a rationale for its suitability for the research question, I will discuss different versions of discourse analysis and locate my work.

### 3.4.3. Versions of Discourse Analysis

The discourse analytic perspective within which my research is grounded is Foucauldian-inspired. The decision is based on the review, where I raised debates surrounding the relationship of home and work. Home was traditionally the dominant sphere, with home being its other. This implies a power relationship. However, the debate considers whether this relationship is changing. I also identified debates about the level of control that home-workers have over their boundary negotiation and argued that the debate could be explored through Wenger's concept of 'levels of participation'. Discourse analysis as a method for data analysis lends itself to debates over control and power because it explores how differences in power are created and maintained through language. This is especially true of Foucauldian-inspired strands. Next, I will introduce the different strands and give a more detailed rationale for the strand chosen here. I will draw on debates between perspectives and situate my research therein.

Generally speaking, discourse analysis falls into two broad categories: the first one is focused on language itself, while the second one is concerned with language in a social context; the latter being consistent with my research. Some authors in the discourse analytic tradition would probably disagree, e.g. Taylor (2001) distinguishes between four strands of discourse

analysis, and Burman & Parker (1993) list three distinct perspectives. On a conceptual level, though, even Taylor's (2001) four strands can be classified under two perspectives, loosely following Van Dijk's (1997a; 1997b) suggestion of differentiating between 'discourse as structure and process' and 'discourse as social interaction'.

#### 3.4.3.1. Discourse as Structure and Process

Within the traditions located under this umbrella of discourse analysis, attention is paid to the specifics of language, such as the rules of language use. Perspectives under this umbrella are concerned with language as a system (its regularities and variations, and its structure and vocabulary) and language as a process, where patterns in language use are studied (Taylor, 2001; Van Dijk, 1997a). This strand is constrained by the immediate setting of language use, rendering it unsuitable for this research because I draw on larger societal discourses of work and home. My research incorporates participants' contexts as much as possible, as opposed to being restricted to the specific text in question.

#### 3.4.3.2. Discourse as Social Interaction

At the core of this perspective lies the assumption that people do more with their talk than just transmit information (Burman & Parker, 1993), which is in line with the assumptions made in this research, that people use language to negotiate home-work boundaries, construct relationships between home and work, and position themselves in regards to the domains. Approaches under the 'social interaction' umbrella share features such as the emphasis on language in the construction of reality, and the conceptualisation of the researcher as the author of a study, rather than an impartial witness or discoverer (Willig, 2008). Van Dijk

(1997b) claims that when we discuss the links between discourse and society, we rely on four concepts: action (in the sense that discourse performs actions), context (discourse is contextual rather than abstract), power (discourse is used to control, influence and persuade people), and ideology (as the cognitive counterpart of power). The first three concepts inform my work; the fourth concept 'ideology' however sits uneasily with the objective of critiquing the cognitive emphasis of boundary theory. Therefore, the 'action', 'context', and 'power' aspects of discourse analysis are prioritised. The umbrella of 'discourse as social interaction' can be further divided into 'interpretative repertoires/ discursive psychology' vs. 'deconstruction/ Foucauldian discourse analysis/ critical discourse analysis', with deconstruction and its focus on power being the choice for this research.

*1.) Interpretative Repertoires and Discursive Psychology*

This perspective is primarily concerned with functions of talk. Researchers in this tradition look at how people use language to do things. Texts *"actively construct a version of […] things. They do not just describe things; they do things. And being active, they have social and political implications"* (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 6). This perspective assumes that people have at their disposal a variety of linguistic resources, upon which they draw in their constructions. Linguistic resources, or repertoires, are not something we create from scratch every time we speak, but are something we *"borrow and refashion for our own purposes"* (Burman & Parker, 1993: 4). Our accounts have potent consequences - they construct reality (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Discursive psychology is an approach to discourse analysis that is associated with Potter & Wetherell (1987) and their concept of interpretative repertoires; however the term 'discursive psychology' was only introduced later by Edwards and Potter (1992). Discursive psychology assumes an action orientation to talk and views people as

discourse users who are active agents and have linguistic resources (or interpretative repertoires) available to them that they use flexibly to achieve certain purposes (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Language is intentionally selected to perform social functions. Interpretative repertoires are like a tool-kit from which the language user picks the materials most suitable for what he or she wants to achieve (Burr, 1995).

The view of people as active agents selecting their linguistic repertoires does not sit comfortably with my research. In the literature review, I referred to debates about whether people do or do not have control over their boundary negotiations. I highlighted that both options are possible, which means that I refrain from adopting a view of people as active agents from the outset. I therefore decided not to situate my research in the corner of discursive psychology. However, I acknowledged the role of home and work-related contexts in shaping people's boundary choices, which is why I am more comfortable using a discourse analytic approach that acknowledges the constraints within which speakers operate.

*2.) Deconstruction, Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, and Critical Discourse Analysis*

The terms deconstruction and Foucauldian discourse analysis are often used interchangeably to describe similar approaches, while critical discourse analysis differs slightly. Critical discourse analysis was developed by Fairclough (2001) and has become very popular recently (as a quick browse in the Journal 'Discourse and Society' shows). While critical discourse analysis is situated under the umbrella of deconstruction, it is unsuitable for my research because it takes as its starting point social problems and critique (Fairclough, 2001). It concerns itself with issues and ideology rather than theory development (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Van Dijk, 1997b), whereas my research seeks to understand boundary negotiation and in doing so aims to contribute to boundary theory. Critical discourse analysis

is inspired by Marxist theories, which is perhaps not surprising given its focus on social critique. It is carried out along the following lines: Identify a social problem, identify obstacles to the problem being tackled, consider whether the social order 'needs' the problem, identify ways past the obstacles, and reflect critically on the analysis (Fairclough, 2001). This kind of approach would have been suitable had I started off with a problem such as 'home-workers are being discriminated against by receiving lower pay than office workers'. However, the focus is on the negotiation of boundaries, which has social implications for sure, but I did not want to impose a problem to begin with. Rather, any issues that emerged did so over the course of the research process. Discourse analysis from within the critical discourse analysis perspective becomes a political and moral pursuit (Van Dijk, 1997b); this was not the motive when embarking on my research.

Foucauldian approaches to discourse analysis see language as situated within a social and cultural context (Taylor, 2001). They are inspired by Foucault's work on issues of power and truth (not in the sense of what 'truth' is, but how it comes to be). Deconstruction *"refers to attempts to take apart texts and see how they are constructed in such a way as to present particular images of people and their actions"* (Burr, 1995: 164). Foucault's (1972) 'archaeology of knowledge' is one example of deconstruction because he was interested in showing how 'truths' are accepted and maintained, as well as exposing the power relations inherent in 'truth'. Power is implied in discourses because discourses have the ability to privilege or marginalise, as is the case in the relationship between home and work. The analysis of discourses should then yield interesting insights into the home-workers' positionings. Carabine (2001) explains the relationship between discourses, power, and truth in this way:

> *"Discourses are historically variable ways of specifying knowledges and truths, whereby knowledges are socially constructed and produced by effects of power and spoken of in terms of 'truths'"* (275).

The idea is that discourses are not removed from the real world – instead they are deeply connected to the running of society. The status of a discourse as 'truth' has consequences for what we can and cannot do and say in our society (Carabine, 2001). Alarmingly, dominant discourses that are accepted as 'truth' are passed off as natural and inevitable (Burr, 1995), which is where deconstruction comes in by trying to determine the origins of a discourse and pointing out alternative constructions that will open up new possibilities for action (this is also known as genealogical analysis). However, dominant discourses such as the work discourse are difficult to challenge because they privilege the version of social life that reinforces existing power relations. Since the deconstruction approach views discourses as connected to the running of society, researchers analyse discourses in light of their respective contexts (Carabine, 2001), which is what I seek to do. Context informs and defines the limits of discourse analysis because it *"[establishes] certain expectations for the kind of talk that is appropriate"* (Taylor, 2001: 26). In my research, as much context as possible is included for each participant. The overall profile of home-workers in Ireland is also taken into account, and texts are located within the forum in which they are published.

Discourses have implications for how we act, and therefore offer each of us *subject positions* or ways of being within a discourse (Davies & Harré, 1999; Willig, 2008). Subject positions influence how we experience and feel about our lives. Burman & Parker (1993) theorise that our subjectivity is always textual, in that we construct narrative accounts about our sense of self. Foucauldian approaches to discourse analysis facilitate exploration of subject positions; below I will explain how this is done. While the decision to adopt a Foucauldian-inspired approach to discourse analysis enables me to address issues that are important in boundary

negotiation, such as the home-workers' positionings, there is a risk of turning discourses into objects which have an existence independent of the people who use them (Burr, 1995). The risk arises because we refer to 'home' and 'work' as if they were reified, and also because I pay attention to the material world through, for example, boundary objects. I address this dilemma below in the section 'language and practice' in more detail, by arguing that discourse and the material world are not opposites, but complement each other.

*3.) Bridging Deconstruction and Interpretative Repertoires*

At the border between discursive psychology and deconstruction lies Critical Discursive Psychology (CDP) (Edley, 2001). This perspective is similar to discursive psychology in its action orientation and its focus on interactions. However, what it borrows from deconstruction is the assumption that interactions must be analysed with regard to their historical context (Edley, 2001). It also carries with it Foucauldian connotations of language not being equally available to all and of dominant discourses. The approach sees the traditional distinction between words and deeds as unnecessary, since language is a form of practice (based on Wittgenstein and Austin and the idea that words perform actions). The connection between language and practice positions this method as a contender for my data analysis. However, it becomes unsuitable in its insistence that speakers have agency in their selection of language, while Foucauldian approaches recognise that language use is tied to power relationships, which gives greater insight into the debate about control over boundaries. Edley (2001) suggests that 'interpretative repertoires', the units critical discursive psychologists analyse, are smaller, more flexible entities in comparison to the larger societal discourses analysed by researchers in the deconstruction perspective. CDP and deconstruction also differ in their take on subjectivity. CDP assumes that subject positions are

created through ideological beliefs (Edley, 2001). In contrast, the view of subject positions in my research is that they emerge through discourses in the way that people position themselves, rather than out of beliefs. Each text offers a number of positionings for the people involved; whether they accept positions due to their ideologies is an issue beyond the limits of this work. Ideologies are too cognitive a concept for this research. The decision to remain in the deconstruction corner is therefore confirmed.

### 3.4.4. Analytic Process

A problem that arises when engaging in Foucauldian-inspired deconstruction approaches is that it is not clear how to perform this kind of analysis. Unlike more structured approaches to data analysis, such as grounded theory, discourse analysis does not follow an agreed 'how to' guideline. Foucault (1972) never provided a structure for analysis – in fact, he did not develop Foucauldian discourse analysis. Researchers have simply adopted his idea that 'truth' can be deconstructed and have labelled this Foucauldian discourse analysis. I would therefore like to stress that my analysis is not Foucauldian, but Foucauldian-inspired. Because different writers interpret Foucault differently, their methods vary. Carabine (2001) and Willig (2008) offer guidelines on how to perform Foucauldian-inspired discourse analysis that are apt for the concerns of this research. Their approaches are quite similar, but in the end the Willig's was chosen because, unlike Carabine's, it allows for exploration of subject positions, which is important to this research. Willig (2008) proposes a six-stage approach to the Foucauldian-inspired analysis of discourse: Stage 1 – 'discursive constructions' – aims to identify all references to the discursive object (i.e. references to negotiations of the home-work boundary). Stage 2 – 'discourses' – has as its objective to locate the various discursive constructions within wider discourses. Stage 3 – 'action orientation' – is used to gain an

understanding of the purposes the various constructions achieve. Stage 4 – 'positionings' - explores the subject positions that are offered by the different constructions. Based on Davies & Harré (1999), a subject position describes a location for persons within a discourse. This is in line with my understanding of positionings. Stage 5 – 'practice' – outlines the possibilities for action that are opened up and closed down by discursive constructions and their subject positions. Stage 6 – 'subjectivity' – attempts to express what can be felt, thought, and experienced from within a subject position. The idea here is that once we take up a subject position, we experience the world through this position. The following diagram summarises Willig's steps:

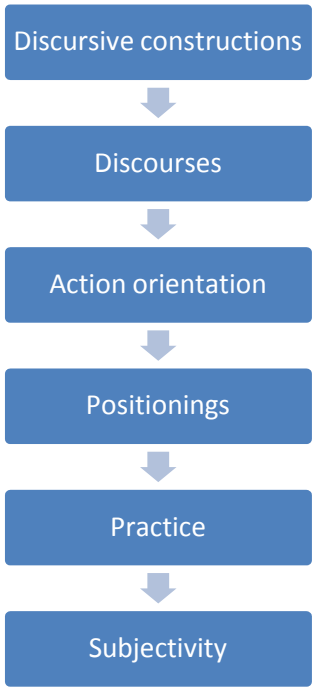



Figure 6: Overview of Steps in Foucauldian-Inspired Discourse Analysis by Willig (2008)

Below is an example of how the steps of Willig's (2008) discourse analysis have been applied to my research. It is an extract from an interview with David, one of the participants. In this extract, I follow up his account of working exclusively from the kitchen table and keeping that space free of any non-work artefacts. I will present the raw data first and then

offer my Foucauldian-inspired discourse analysis of it. 'I' stands for interviewer, 'P' for participant.

| | **Raw data:** |
|---|---|
| 489 | "I: Ahm, how come you've that kitchen table kinda dedicated to work? |
| 490 | How come you don't use it for anything else? |
| 491 | P: Mm, for the reason that psychologically, when I sit down at that chair |
| 492 | that I'm sitting there to do work. So that I don't switch on the |
| 493 | television. Mistake I made the last time I was working from home. |
| 494 | The same position that I sat in to watch television in the evening time |
| 495 | when I was relaxed was almost the same position that I was sitting in |
| 496 | when I was sitting down with my laptop in front of me, doing work. |
| 497 | I: And why is that necessary? |
| 498 | P: Ah, I find psychologically it flicks a switch inside in your brain, that |
| 499 | you're either at work or that you're relaxing and it's essential to flick |
| 500 | that switch. So that your body kicks into either work mode or into |
| 501 | relaxation mode. Ahm, if you're in an environment where you're |
| 502 | used to relaxing and you try to do work in it, your body isn't |
| 503 | prepared to do the work. It's like "What are you doing? We're in |
| 504 | relax mode! I don't want to work. I'm not going to work" and you're |
| 505 | sitting there, "I really want to work", you know in your mind you're |
| 506 | thinking, "I really want to work", but your body is going, "No, we're |
| 507 | not. Forget that. Not gonna do work. This is where we come to relax |
| 508 | and chill"…So it's important to have that…" |

Table 7: Raw Data

**Example of a Foucauldian discourse analysis:**

The object of interest in this excerpt is David's account of the 'home-work boundary'. For the first stage of analysis, 'discursive constructions', I have identified the following constructions of the research focus: The boundary is constructed as serving the function of protecting David from the danger of being seduced into distraction (l. 491/492). This happens through the strict physical distinction of space as either work or home space. If he places himself in the appropriate place, he avoids the temptation of distraction. The boundary is portrayed as contributing to a strict mental separation between work and home activity. David's boundary setting is a physical activity, yet it serves the purpose of creating a psychological distinction. This is evident in the use of the words "psychologically" and "flicks a switch inside your brain". The boundary is constructed as an effective tool, the use of which he has acquired through trial and error. He describes how he previously made the mistake of not setting a boundary, resulting in the sameness of home and work (l. 494). He has since learned that the separation of work and home is "essential". David heavily draws on the 'switch' metaphor to describe the preferred relationship between home and work. For him, work and home should have an 'either…or' relationship (l. 499). They ought to be mutually exclusive. The boundary helps to achieve that relationship. The boundary further creates a stimulus-response association between space and his behaviour. Because of the strict boundary, a certain place can act as a stimulus and cause him to behave in a work or a home manner: "If you're in an environment where you're used to relaxing and you try to do work in it, your body isn't prepared to do the work" (l. 501/502). The boundary therefore attaches meaning to places. This meaning is insurmountable, as shown by the last quote. Once the stimulus-response association has taken hold, he can do nothing to change it. Once the boundary has led to a place becoming a place for relaxation, it becomes impossible to work in this space.

Willig's (2008) next step is that of 'discourses', where the aim is to locate the discursive constructions in wider discourses. I propose that David situates his constructions in three discourses. Firstly, he draws on the discourse of 'work' and 'home' as a dichotomy. Work and home are separate entities and it is expected to differentiate between them. David uses this discourse when he talks about a "work mode" and a "relaxation mode", implying that the home-work dichotomy necessitates different ways of being. He also draws on the discourse of the mind-body dichotomy. In the extract, he simulates a conversation between his body and mind, arguing over whether to do work. The body-mind dichotomy is related to the home-work boundary. His mind may attempt to overcome the home-work boundary and carry out work duties in a non-designated space. However, because the body refuses to break the boundary and is more powerful than the mind, his mind fails. Another discourse David relies on in his constructions is the psychological discourse of behaviourism. This is evident in his portrayal of space as a stimulus to which he simply responds by engaging in the appropriate activity (either work or relaxation).

The next step according to Willig (2008) is called 'action orientation' and aims to understand the functions of the various constructions. One purpose that David's construction of the boundary as an insurmountable dichotomy fulfils is to shift blame away from himself. If he is unable to carry out work, then that is to do with his body not being in the appropriate space – it has nothing to do with him as a person. It also serves to create an image of the body as beyond his control. This becomes especially apparent towards the end of the extract, where he simulates a conversation between his mind and body. His mind battles with the will of the body. The body is a powerful agent in the battle and takes on a life of its own. Sometimes the body also steers the conversation with the personal pronoun "we", implying that the body and the mind are seen as the two sides of the person, but that the body is in charge of the entity:

"Your body isn't prepared to do the work. It's like "What are you doing? We're in relax mode! I don't want to work. I'm not going to work" (l. 502 ff.). He loses against the more powerful body. Another function could also be to reinforce the dichotomy between home and work and justifying the need for a strict boundary between them.

The fourth stage in the analysis is to outline the subject positionings offered by the constructions. This follows on from the previous paragraph, in which David positioned himself as powerless. He takes up the subject position of a person who merely responds, like a puppet, to the appropriate stimulus. He is governed by his bodily responses to the psychological meaning attached to places, as shown by him stating "that your body kicks into either work mode or into relaxation mode" (l. 500). It was not him who decided to be in work or relaxation mode, instead the body just 'kicked' into its mode.

The fifth stage is that of 'practice' or possibilities for action. If David construes his subject positioning as that of the respondent, then this opens up few possibilities for action. Clearly, it was he who assigned meanings to space in the first place, so that is one action he is responsible for. Other than that, all he needs to do is to locate himself in the appropriate place in order to achieve a certain mode. This construction closes off the possibility of him working wherever he wants, because he cannot override the meanings he attached to space.

The last stage of this type of analysis is to speculate what can be felt or experienced as a result of taking up a subject position. In this case, on the positive side, David might offset feelings of guilt for not working when he is supposed to. It is not his fault; he was simply in the wrong spot. On the negative side, he might feel powerless and like a victim to the boundary.

Table 8: Example of Discourse Analytic Process

Willig's six steps provided a useful introduction and guide into how discourse analysis can be approached. However, after performing the steps on a number of texts, I realised that my research aims would be better met by adapting the steps to suit my specific questions. I found that two of Willig's steps in particular needed reworking. Firstly, the step 'subjectivity', which Willig (2008) uses to explore the feelings and thoughts that can be experienced from within a subject position, was not consistent with my research interests of boundary negotiation, home-work configurations and positionings. I believe the emotional side of home-work is an important issue in itself and deserves detailed attention beyond a speculation made in passing (see e.g. Marsh & Musson, 2008; Wilkinson & Jarvis, 2012). As such, 'subjectivities' goes beyond the limits of my research, which is why I decided to omit this step from my analysis.

Secondly, I slightly modified the step 'practice', which Willig (2008) considers to mean 'possibilities for action', or what people can and cannot do as a result of being situated in a particular subject position. Future action is not really of interest to my research. I decided to change the step 'practice' into 'practices', which I use as a category to identify examples of participation in social practices in the data. This was more relevant to my research question. I also felt that it was necessary to understand the practices that home-workers construct, before exploring their positioning, which is why I changed the order of these two steps. In Willig's work, 'positioning' refers to a subject position within discourse. However, I suggest that this definition can be extended. Home-workers not only position themselves within the discourses that they draw on when negotiating boundaries, but also within the practices of home and work that they engage in. This is because discourse and practice are a duality, as I will explain in 3.5.1. Accordingly, I extended the label for this category into 'positioning/ levels of participation'. Based on these adaptations of Willig's work, the following are the steps I used in my analysis:

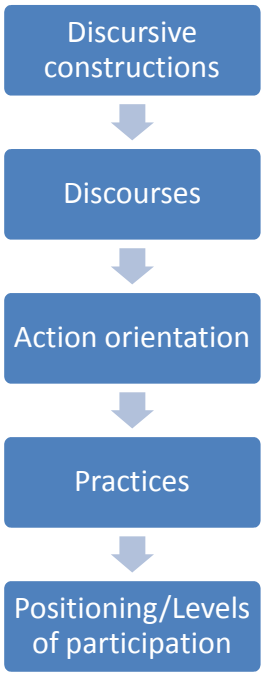



Figure 7: Researcher's Version of Discourse Analysis

When these adaptations were made, the five steps were very useful in addressing my research questions. The first step, discursive constructions of home-work boundaries, gives insight into the kinds of boundaries that home-workers construct. This step facilitates the application of Wengerian boundary concepts, such as brokering and boundary objects. The second step, discourses, locates the home-workers' accounts in larger societal discourses, such as 'home' and 'work', and begins to indicate how home and work as practices are positioned relative towards each other. The third step, action orientation, highlights the functions of constructing boundaries in a particular way, which tells us about why people draw boundaries and how they do so. Step four, practices, identifies the social practices that home-workers locate themselves in and yields information about how home and work are constructed. The Wengerian practice criteria of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire are applied in this step. The fifth step, positioning/ levels of participation, helps to explore how home-workers position themselves in regards to work and home discourses and practices. The different levels of participation, e.g. core, periphery and marginality, are explored during

this step. The concepts of multimembership, uprootedness and boundary practice are also relevant here in cases where home-workers align themselves as belonging in multiple practices at once. In this way, the five discourse analytic steps are expected to lead to interesting insights that help answer the research questions 'How do people who work from home negotiate the boundaries between their home and work practices?', 'What home-work configurations are constructed by participants as they negotiate the boundaries between work and home?', and 'How are home-workers positioned in each domain?'.

I analysed each piece of data according to the five steps. I found that the easiest way of doing this was by creating a table that allowed me to align the different steps in the analysis because they follow on from each other:

| Raw data | Discursive constructions | Discourses | Action orientation | Practices | Positioning/Levels of participation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | |

Table 9: Data Analysis Template

Please consult appendix 2.2. (Vol. II) for an example of a completed discourse analysis table. After using this process with each piece of data, I drew out common constructions across different types of data of the home-work boundary, wider discourses, positionings, and so on. Before reporting the findings that emerged from this process, I will discuss how a reading of my findings is to be warranted. The next section reflects on issues such as how to identify a discursive construction, how to assess the value of this research, and how the findings can be interpreted.

## 3.5. How is a Reading to be Warranted?

### 3.5.1. Language and Practice

In this research, one of the aims is to make a contribution to theory by proposing a new boundary theory of practice. Boundary negotiation is conceptualised as occurring in home and work practices. Practices consist of a duality of reification and participation, i.e. material objects and ways of being. However, because of the discourse analytic approach, my research is heavily reliant on language as a vehicle for investigation. I would like to explain how I view the relationship between discourse and the material world, in order to show that the two are not incompatible with each other.

Some might argue that by using discourse analysis, I merely examine words and disregard 'real', material things, favouring the abstract over the practical. However, I propose that language constructs our experience of the world and that it is key to the actions we can and cannot perform, thus having real consequences. In a related point, Potter & Wetherell (1987) contend*, "it is important to remember that virtually the entirety of anyone's understanding of the social world is mediated by discourse"* (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 174). Therefore, because this research uses discourse to investigate home and work practices, it is not abstract and removed from the practical. I suggest that practice and discourse complement each other. Wenger (1998) adopts a stance towards language that acknowledges its importance in how we experience our world. He argues that the concepts we use to make sense of our world (i.e. language) determine how we perceive the world and how we act. This stance fits with the assumption made regarding the role of language in my research. However, it does stand in contrast to how other practice theorists, such as Schatzki, have conceptualised the relationship between language and practice. Schatzki (1996) maintains that there are ways in which we understand the world, in particular those that are classified as practical know-how,

which cannot be articulated in language. I argue instead that the concept of practical know-how is hard to separate from language. We are unable to make sense of practical know-how or even conceive of this term outside of the boundaries of language. Zerubavel (1997) argues that the act of classifying would not be possible without discourse: *"Breaking up the world into discrete, quasi-insular mental chunks is accomplished largely through language"* (Zerubavel, 1997: 66). My research focuses on boundary negotiation, the relationship between work and home, and positionings of home-workers in their home and work practices. All three elements are constructed by home-workers in their discursive accounts, through language. The same language is derived from the home-workers' participation in social practices, where they learn how to construct experiences. Without language, home-workers would not be able to make sense of their actions.

An example that illustrates how practical know-how is intimately related to language is the act of tying shoelaces. Most of us tie laces without thinking about it and without verbalising the act every time. However, even an act that becomes part of our practical know-how is initially passed on through discourse and interaction; an example being the following story which is commonly used to teach kids how to tie their shoelaces:

> *"Once there was a rabbit that was very sad because his ears were so long and narrow that he stepped on them all the time. One day a fairy landed on the bunny's head. She lifted up the bunny's ears and crossed them over like an x. Then she put one ear through the bottom of the x and pulled. Next, she made each long ear into a loop and made another x like before. She put an ear under that x and pulled again. From then on the bunny remembered how to tie his ears into a bow, and he lived happily ever after."*

This example shows that even acts that we think of as fundamentally practical and non-verbal are understood through language and reliant on the discourses we use to make sense of our world. Adopting this perspective towards discourse and practice enables me to see them as complementary, rather than contradicting each other.

### 3.5.2. Practice and the Individual

I propose that boundary negotiation occurs within home-workers' practices. Practice implies a site where actors engage with one another. Intuitively, it would therefore make sense to base my research on the entire cast of actors in every participant's social practices. This was not feasible within the practical constraints of the project, and as outlined above, the sample I recruited consists predominantly of home-workers, rather than others in a home-worker's home and work practices.

However, I suggest that from within a discourse analytic perspective, it is sufficient to draw on the home-worker's *account* of their practices, e.g. who participates, what the relationships between actors are, how everyone is positioned, etc. Based on the social constructionist underpinnings of my research (more on this below), no account is more truthful than the next (Burr, 1995). This means that if the entire cast of social actors were involved, I would simply be provided with a multitude of subjective accounts, all of which might very well offer contradicting reports on a practice, and I would be left with dilemmas as to whose account to prioritise.

I decided instead to focus mainly on the home-worker as the protagonist who is situated at the cusp of home and work practices and to occasionally address the perspective of others in the setting, where feasible. This was the case in the researcher's reflective diary, where I offer an

account of being the spouse of a home-worker. In one interview, the home-worker's spouse was also present and offered occasional comments that highlighted her perspective of home-work. Further, in the online forum, one member who is a home-working mother had been subjected to being the child of a home-worker years before and she drew on that experience in her accounts. While these three instances of gaining insight into others' experiences of home-work were useful, they did in fact not change the emerging analysis significantly, which means that I still maintain that for the purposes of this research, it suffices to draw on the home-worker's account of their boundary negotiations. According to Wenger (1998), the individual and the social constitute a duality, not a dichotomy, which suggests that the meaning of individual action is determined socially, because it is only through our social knowledge of the world that we can make sense of individual experiences. This means that it is indeed feasible to investigate a social practice through individual accounts because individuals voice the opinions of others and drawn on their social environment when making sense of the world.

### 3.5.3. Subjective Interpretation of Data

Another issue regarding how my research is evaluated is the subjectivity inherent in discourse analysis. Despite the fact that in my data analysis I followed and adapted Willig's (2008) guidelines for a Foucauldian-inspired discourse analysis, there is no way of knowing exactly what constitutes a discursive construction or a discourse. There are no formal criteria that confirm whether one has actually spotted a discourse, making discourse analysis a rather intuitive type of data analysis (Lyons & Coyle, 2007). It is also debatable whether it is possible to 'spot' a discourse at all. Parker & Burman (1993) argue that discourses come to exist through our analysis as much as through the text itself, thereby refuting the ideas that

we can scan a text for discourses and that they are distinct entities in the text waiting to be discovered. Potter & Wetherell (1987) judge discourse analysis as successful if it manages to challenge our taken-for-granted beliefs about a practice, so my research tries to do just that in regards to working from home. Discourse analysis is valid if it is transparent and gives the reader a chance to follow the stages of the analytic process (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), which I have done in this chapter. It is recommended that discourse analysts adopt a critical frame of mind when reading texts, constantly questioning what the text is trying to achieve, how people are positioned, and so on (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This requires a suspension of belief in what we normally take for granted. However, a critical frame of mind differs from person to person. My reading of the data will likely be different from that of the next person. Of course, whether the subjectivity of my data analysis is an issue depends on how this research conceptualises valid knowledge, i.e. its epistemology.

This research adopts a **social constructionist epistemology** and views knowledge as a construction, not a direct perception of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gergen, 1999; Gergen & Gergen, 2003; Shotter, 1993). A social constructionist epistemology is apt because of the research question, which asks how home-workers negotiate the boundaries between home and work practices. I have also hinted at social constructionism in the discussion of how 'home' and 'work' as concepts are not natural or inevitable, but socially constructed. Social constructionist writers are not a homogeneous bunch in terms of what their emphases are – however at the root of most social constructionist writing lies the assumption that what we understand as 'knowledge' is created through social interaction. Social interaction relies fundamentally on language; hence, knowledge is constructed through language. Variations become apparent in e.g. Berger & Luckmann's (1966) focus on the process of how reality is created, Shotter's (1993) emphasis on messy, everyday conversational realities, and Gergen's (1999) and Gergen & Gergen's (2003) dedication to the social construction of the self. Rather

than aligning myself with one of the perspectives, my research follows Burr's (1995) understanding that the different perspectives make up a family of social constructionism. This research utilises the grander premises that underpin the entire family, as opposed to engaging in specifics about the self or conversation.

Regarding knowledge, my research rejects the view that knowledge is based on objective, unbiased observation of the world. In this way, the subjective interpretation of data discussed above becomes not a problem, but a necessity, because objective interpretation is impossible. If knowledge is a construction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), subjectivity is inevitable. I also acknowledge that the knowledge produced by this research is a product of its time, the culture in which I am embedded, the paradigms under which research is carried out, and the social interactions I engage in. (Burr, 1995). In other words, there are no objective facts that are eternally true regardless of context. This research therefore does not claim to produce knowledge that is a direct reflection of reality, which needs to be highlighted when discussing how to evaluate the merits of this research. Instead, the knowledge created in this research is constructed and serves vested interests in the boundaries between home and work. The approach adopted regarding reality and knowledge is in stark contrast to positivistic viewpoints, where reality is seen as inherently knowable (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Esterberg, 2002). The merits of this research should be evaluated based on how knowledge and reality are conceptualised. Because I have proposed a view of knowledge and reality as constructed through language, the discourse analytic findings, subjective though they may be, are a contribution to the conversation on home-work boundaries.

### 3.5.4. Is it Possible to Establish the Merits of this Research?

Establishing the merits of this research can become a difficult pursuit because of its epistemological foundations. Social constructionism is built on a philosophy of relativism (Burr, 1995; Parker & Burman, 1993), where no claim is more valid than another. Language is a self-referent system in that any concept can only be described in relation to another concept (Burr, 1995; Tietze et al., 2003). So for example, we understand the concept of a tree only in relation to other concepts, such as that of a plant or a shrub. If you had to explain to somebody what a tree was, you could not do it without relying on other concepts. Therefore, social constructionism is bound by relativism, where all concepts and discourses are simply relative to each other (Burr, 1995). No discourse is closer to the truth than the next and no statement can be said to be true or false when compared to reality, because reality is only a construction. Theoretically, then, my interpretation of the data does not carry the status of truth and any alternative interpretations would be equally as valid (Burr, 1995). However, in trying to resolve the problem of relativism, it can be argued that whether my discourse analysis is more accurate than somebody else's interpretation is not really the point. My research seeks to be a piece in the puzzle of home-work boundary research, offering new insights from a particular angle, highlighting new possibilities. I never set out to find the 'ultimate truth' about work-home boundaries.

A similar issue regarding the value of this research is the fact that by choosing discourse analysis, priority has been awarded to language over other aspects of human existence, such as cognitive processes (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Considering the relativist stance of this research, it actually becomes difficult to maintain that one angle, such as language, is more important than the other. However, this issue can be resolved quite easily by reverting to the aims of this research. I sought to explore the negotiation of home-work boundaries, the configurations of home and work, and home-workers' positionings in practices. Language

constitutes a suitable vehicle for exploring these issues. This was not to say that another angle, such as cognitivism, would be less valid; it would simply be addressing different research aims. Discourse analysis allows for a focus on aspects that other approaches would miss, such as the idea that discourses of home and work shape and are shaped by home-work boundaries.

It is understandable that for some the relativist foundations of social constructionism may seem crippling, because no statement is closer to the truth than the next. This idea may leave some feeling hopeless about the value of research, because definitive statements cannot be made. On the subject of relativism, Parker (1998) has suggested that the relativist problems of social constructionism can be overcome by adopting a realist epistemology; in the sense that there is a world out there that exists independently of our perception of it, but that we socially construct whatever knowledge we have about this world. Parker's (1998) stance is untenable from the perspective of this research. I argue that we are unable to separate our perception of the world from an 'external reality' and even more so, we have no means of knowing about that reality without viewing it through a socially constructed lens. In fact, my research takes relativism to be quite a liberating thing. It means I do not expect to deliver the ultimate truth. Instead, I seek to contribute to the conversation about home-work boundaries, which, according to Gergen (1999), is more important than the actual outcome of theorising processes.

The decision to use discourse analysis fits with the social constructionist epistemology adopted in my research. Both perspectives concur that language has the power to construct our lives. Both discourse analysis and social constructionism view language as constitutive of who we are and how we act (Burr, 1995). Language is constructed and reconstructed constantly; it is a site of disagreement where power relations are acted out. Language is a social phenomenon, but also has individual implications. The match between social

constructionism and discourse analysis is reiterated by researchers such as Tietze (2002) and Marsh & Musson (2008), who have used them in conjunction with each other. The social constructionist stance adopted here allows for a view of boundary negotiation as a changeable, social, and situational endeavour. It enables exploration of how people co-create the home-work relationship through their boundary work, and how they position themselves and other actors within their home and work practices. The next section addresses issues of how this research is shaped by the relationship between researcher and researched, as well as personal preconceptions that feed into my research.

## 3.6. Reflexivity: Researcher and Researched

The idea that we construct reality through our research processes has been presented. A person's worldview and situation influence the reality that is constructed. Because my research is a construction and I reject the possibility of objective knowledge, it becomes necessary to reflect on the role that I as the researcher play in grafting the data.

The view adopted here is that I as the researcher construct an account of the data, which implies issues of power between researcher and researched. The question arises whether my analysis is etic (using my own imposed frame of reference) or emic (working with the framework of participants) (Stake, 2005). Realistically, my analysis of participants' accounts is going to be the report that other people will read. Regardless of whether interpretations are justified with reference to raw data, my interpretations are still presented as the findings of this research (Burr, 1995). Being in a position to impose meaning on other people's text is to have power and therefore presents an ethical issue. Parker & Burman (1993) see this issue as

particularly salient in discourse analysis, because discourse analysis is a methodology that rejects the dehumanising methods of traditional positivistic research. In my research, I attempt to overcome such issues by practising reflexivity through reflecting on biases in my diary. My research also deals with issues of power by attaching the status of 'one puzzle piece in the conversation surrounding home-work boundaries' to the findings, as opposed to claiming to have found the truth.

Because research is constructed through a lens, it is necessary to reflect on how the worldviews of the researcher affect the outcome of this research. This involves an honest account of the researcher's background because *"any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity"* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005: 21), meaning that research is not a value-free and objective endeavour. From within a social constructionist stance, it is impossible to be distanced from the social and moral values that guide us in our lives. When we do research, we are not detached from normal life – therefore our guiding frameworks remain the same and continue to influence how we conduct ourselves. This is in stark contrast to positivistic approaches, where the researcher is supposed to be impartial, detached, and ought not to bring their own agenda into the process (Coyle, 2007; Esterberg, 2002). Because we bring our feelings and opinions into research, it becomes important for me to clarify my 'speaking position', or the personal frameworks that shape this research (Coyle, 2007; Lyons, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005):

As a researcher, I would summarise myself as female, German, middle-class, feminist, and psychology graduate. Two bits of information are important in regards to how my personal life affects my research. To begin with, my personal investment in this research is high. I am a 'home-working spouse', as reported above. My partner's home-working affects our daily life and our relationship in many subtle ways. Naturally, any feelings about home-work arising of out my own situation accompany me as I conduct my research. My own investment

in the situation must also be one of the reasons I started studying home-work in the first place. I am endlessly fascinated by the subtle negotiations that go on and by how we define standards for when it is ok for work and home to mix (or not). Furthermore, I occasionally work from home myself, which alerted me to the complexities of this working arrangement and leads to thorough embeddedness in the research setting.

The process of reflexivity, or reflecting on one's biases, beliefs, and frameworks is an important part of the research process. Kleinsasser (2000) views reflexivity as

> *"a methodical process of learning about self as researcher, which, in turn, illuminates deeper, richer meanings about personal, theoretical, ethical, and epistemological aspects of the research question"* (155).

In line with openness about my involvement in the research process, I acknowledge my own role as that of the 'author', rather than the unbiased discoverer (Kleinsasser, 2000; Willig, 2008; Burr, 1995). Seeing myself as the author means that I attempt transparency about how data and associated interpretations were produced, as I have done in this chapter. However, I propose that the findings of this research are not purely the result of the researcher's grafting. Instead, interpretations emerge out of the interactions between researcher and researched, giving participants the power to shape the outcome of research: "*There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of – and between – the observer and the observed"* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005: 21). Research is viewed as an interaction (Burr, 1995). My research findings are a product of participants' accounts and my interpretations. In this section, I have clarified the personal preconceptions that have lead to the findings of this research.

Overall, this chapter has situated the participants in the larger context by providing information on home-work numbers, definitions, and demographics. I have outlined the kinds

of data that I chose to collect in order to answer the research questions and discussed the sample of participants. I explained why I decided to use discourse analysis, and specifically a Foucauldian-inspired version, to interpret the data. The analytic process was outlined. I discussed how the findings of my research might be evaluated, which offered insight into the underpinning epistemology, and lastly made explicit my own position in the research. Having clarified methodological concerns, I will now present the findings of my research.

# Chapter 4

## Home-Work Boundaries: The ‘Why’ and ‘What’

## 4.1. Introduction

The overarching research question was 'How do people who work from home negotiate the boundaries between their home and work practices?'. During the process of data analysis, I realised that I could not address the 'how' element of the research question without first exploring the kinds of boundaries that are set between home and work. It also became apparent that my research interests (the negotiation of boundaries, home-work configurations, and home-workers' positionings) were framed around participants' accounts of what drove them to engage in home-work in the first place. This chapter therefore explores the 'why' and the 'what' of boundaries, which need to be understood before delving deeper into the research questions. The first part of this chapter is titled 'Home-Work Drivers' and the second part addresses 'Types of Home-Work Boundaries'. At the end of the chapter, I will discuss what has been achieved, and the questions that are raised by it, warranting further exploration.

## 4.2. Home-Work Drivers

This section explores the drivers that influence participants to work from home. It is necessary to understand the reasons for working from home because they frame the home-work experience and colour participants' constructions of their arrangements. Drivers are grouped into the following categories: 1.) childcare, 2.) escape from the office and its associated nuisances (e.g. commuting), 3.) work-related cost-saving, and 4.) avoiding unemployment. The notion of choice/control is of crucial importance in the home-work decision. Some drivers, such cost saving or avoiding unemployment, result in participants feeling like they have no choice but to work from home (= push factors). Others, such as

childcare or escape from the office, lead to home-work becoming a sought-after way of working that participants actively choose (= pull factors). When participants actively choose to work from home, this type of work is constructed as a privilege. The opposite, being forced to work from home, coincides with some participants eventually abandoning their home-working jobs. This demonstrates the importance of home-work drivers and the participants' background stories; backgrounds were presented in 3.3.2.

### 4.2.1. Childcare

Working from home is constructed by some participants as a strategy that helps them to cope with the demands of work and caring duties. Parenthood leads to some participants re-evaluating their working arrangements and looking for a solution that better accommodates their parenting role. The idea behind this is that being at home while working will allow participants to be more available for childcare. What becomes apparent in each of the following examples is that participants position themselves strongly as parents. The first example demonstrates the portrayal of home-work as a privilege, which enables participants to look after children while working. However, that privilege comes with the price of being in the lower ranks of the work hierarchy and having to "smile and take it" at work:

> "But for the sake of being able to work at home within earshot of a sick kid on the days she can't get to school I've learned to smile and take it. Instead, I walk away from the computer without pressing "send" on the furious response I've just composed. I make some toast and sit spreading crumbs all over the floor while enjoying an episode of Peppa Pig with my giggling, suddenly not-so-sick daughter. For that privilege, I'll allow someone else vent a little at me. What you've got in that scenario is something that's necessary, the job, and something else that's important, the kid. Until the hand of lottery strikes, work will always be required." (Newspaper column 5)

Here, participating in innocent childhood routines (watching Peppa Pig, spreading crumbs) is a privilege and is prioritised, while work is a necessary nuisance. Though positioning is not the focus of this chapter, already we begin to see that when people construct childcare as the driving factor of their home-work, they position themselves as a core participant at home, while being low in the ranks of the work hierarchy. The portrayal of work as necessary and childcare as important hints at an uneasy relationship between home and work, which is reflected in the next two extracts. Work and parenting are constructed as mutually exclusive. It is only through home-work that participants can be both parents and workers.

> "I think being a WAHM (Work-at-home Mum) is something to be proud of. It demonstrates that a woman has succeeded in finding a solution to the dilemmas arising from wanting to be both a mum and a professional." (Sheila, online discussion 2)

> "I think being a WAHM is in some ways revolutionary. It's saying that we will not subscribe to the way our culture is set up, in that it forces us to choose between being mothers and being productive and contributing financially. It's saying that we're playing by OUR rules." (Tamara, online discussion 2)

While these examples construct home-work as enabling people to engage successfully in both the work and the home domain, it seems that participants who cite 'childcare' as a driver align themselves more strongly with their parenting practice:

> "But even though I'm not a multinational (yet!), I'm proud of what has been achieved and proud to be a WAHM, so I can work easily around my two adorable children, because as I said to someone recently we are after all – Mums first and foremost and Entrepreneurs second!" (Hannah, online discussion 2)

> "I can't imagine not having left work [...] because it just, the – it became too important to be flexible for the kids. That became more important than the job" (Malcolm, interview participant)

> "And it meant I could walk the lads to school and, which is quite nice ahm and I had a bit more flexibility in being around if it were the case that I ever had to go up to the school or it just meant you were kind of near so there is, you know it's tremendous in that way. And you are a little bit out of the politics," (Dee, interview participant)

The last example also shows how two drivers can interact to strengthen the decision to work from home; in this case 'childcare' and 'escape from the office'. It is perhaps not surprising

that many of the extracts for this driver represent online forum participants, who engaged in debates on a forum for home-working mothers. Many of these women are mumpreneurs (Ekinsmyth, 2011; Duberley & Carrigan, 2012) who sought home-work as a means to combine work and childcare. The next example shows that these women spur each other on in the idea that home-work provides a solution to childcare dilemmas. In this example, the participant references a movie that champions home-work and offers a role model to mothers.

> "Has anyone watched the movie "Baby Boom"? It's a 1987 comedy movie starring Diane Keaton. (I think she's great anyway). The story behind it runs as such. Keaton plays J.C. Wiatt, a career woman in Manhattan whose work leaves her no time to relax. She doesn't mind this hectic schedule – however it's thrown into disarray when she has to inherit a baby from virtually unknown relatives. She has to care for the kid, losing her job and her lover in the process. She tries to put the child up for adoption, but soon discovers she loves it too much. She has to reevaluate her life, and in response moves into the country, into a house she didn't inspect beforehand. Upon moving in she discovers that the place is a mess, and, running out of money, she needs a solution. Luckily she finds one. She begins selling baby products. And, despite a rough start, Wiatt makes a killing off of it. She soon receives an offer for her company – but she declines, deciding she can handle motherhood and the business. It just proves that a woman can have the best of both worlds!!!!" (Miriam, online discussion 2)

Here, ideas perpetuated by a movie are taken on as part of Miriam's individual process of evaluating home-work. She takes the movie as evidence that home-work will enable childcare, which means that she draws on societal narratives, expressed through a movie, in her construction of home-work.

To sum up, childcare as a home-work driver works in three ways: it allows participants to be more available for childcare, it offers a solution to dilemmas between work and caring duties, and it enables participants to prioritise their parenting role. Later on, I will examine how this desire to be involved in childcare affects home-workers' levels of participation at home and at work. Numerous websites on 'working from home' (e.g. www.wahm.com – not the forum consulted for this research because participants' anonymity is prioritised) support the idea that home-work is a feasible solution for parents who want to combine work and caring

duties. The following picture demonstrates the portrayal of home-work on these websites as a pursuit that unproblematically enables home and work to be performed at the same time. Working on the laptop, talking on the phone, and minding children at the same time is represented as a feasible lifestyle:

Picture 2: Portrayal of Home-Work. (Source: www.wahm.com)

The notion of home-work as a solution to balancing dilemmas is reiterated by Kinsman (1987) and Baruch (2000), who proposed that home-work enables mothers to participate in the labour market. The finding that home-workers who cite childcare as a driver tend to align themselves with their parenting role reflects one way of positioning in Marsh & Musson (2008), where home-workers align themselves with their parenting identity. This highlights that home-work is a fruitful site of study for identity issues; however this is beyond the scope of my research. As I explained earlier, I use the notion of positioning to explore levels of participation and thereby levels of control, rather than identity. While the notion of being available for childcare may act as a driver that influences the home-work decision, tensions between this expectation and the day-to-day experiences of working from home do arise. These tensions are explored in relation to the positioning of home and work towards each other and the positioning of home-workers within their home and work domains later on.

### 4.2.2. Escape from the Office and its Associated Nuisances

The desire to escape negative experiences at the office acts as another driver for the decision to work from home. Note that this driver applies not just to employed home-workers, but also to self-employed home-workers and freelancers who use the concept of the office or previous memories of the office as a frame of reference. The nuisances encountered at work that are eliminated by home-work include office interactions, formality, lack of autonomy, and having to commute. Working from home is constructed as a preferred alternative to office work.

> "See, I had the stereo on, the phone going and I was doing this job and I was getting paid and I thought this is – I'm not in an office and I don't have to pretend to be interested in or like people that I had no time for. You know, and I hated where I – not so much the company or the people. What I hated was where it was. It was in [an industrial estate]. And it used to take me like an hour to drive in in the morning, it took me an hour to get home. You're sitting there in this big wasteland of an industrial estate, ah looking out on nothing. It was like working in a library, it was deadly quiet all the time, I hated it. And then I was at home, and I could do whatever I wanted and I could work away and I just loved that. I also loved this sense of just being in charge of myself [...] I can't imagine now ever going back into an office." (Malcolm, interview participant)

Here, Malcolm complains about a combination of office nuisances (office interactions, commuting, office location, office setting) and portrays home-work as a more desirable and autonomous way of working. The next extract highlights a similar construction of home-work as allure versus office work as constraining.

> "P: The reason I did it was the allure of working from home. The, like the fact that I was my own boss. For the first time ever, you know? The fact that I didn't have to sit in my car [...], in a traffic jam, for like half an hour, getting to like moving only 500 yards. Do you know what I mean, like sometimes I could just go to work in my pyjamas, just walk upstairs, get into the office. Pyjama, slippers, turn on the computer, start, like, doing work. As opposed to very formal where you get up at like, half seven in the morning. It was like, iron your shirt, do you know, do your tie, nice and properly. Shave, every single day, do your hair. Complete disaster! Which I wasn't into, like, do you know.
>
> I: Were you not?

P: No! I hated it. It was more like, it was a real chore for me. When I was auctioneering I was, I put on a suit every day. It was like a straitjacket, that's what it felt like. So that's what kinda prompted me to get into it" (Jake, interview participant)

Home-work acts as an escape from the formality, or the "straitjacket", of a more traditional job. Jake also reiterates notions of avoiding the commute and being in charge of his own work. To sum up, the desire to avoid nuisances associated with office work act as a home-work driver for some participants. Accounts that cite this driver tend to juxtapose home-work as allure with office work as troublesome. The contents of this driver (e.g. commuting, workplace distractions, autonomy) confirm similar suggestions made by Armstrong-Stassen, 1998; Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Collins, 2005; Furnham, 2006; Hill et al., 2003; Tietze, 2002; Tietze, 2005; and Tietze & Musson, 2003.

### 4.2.3. Work-Related Cost-Saving

This driver is about home-work being a necessity to save overheads associated with an office building. It is displayed among participants who are budding entrepreneurs and have started their businesses from home, and employees who are based remotely. Starting one's own business often coincides with working from home. It can be a deliberate choice or a necessity on the road to business growth and a separate office. The following two examples highlight how working from home is utilised to facilitate the dream of starting a business.

> "I'm just starting out and due to financial considerations I work in my kitchen. I'm proud of what I do and if I always work from my kitchen table, so be it." (Brigid, online discussion 2)

> "I been reading the thread and have been thinking! And really does it matter what else I am – I work from home. Full stop. I am not a mother but yes I do work from home. I have always wanted to work for my self – be my own boss, take the good and the bad and be accountable to myself. Home just happens to be where I base myself, do my work etc. So now (and to be honest the recession did me a favour and pushed me to

> follow my dream) I work in a place that I call home too." (Miriam, online discussion 2)

Working from home is portrayed as a way of saving costs associated with the running of a business. Home-work is not a privilege or something that is sought in order to care for children or avoid the office; instead, home-work is a necessity while starting the new business venture, as demonstrated by Miriam stating, "home just happens to be where I base myself". This driver relates to the observation (Haddon & Lewis, 1994; Walker & Webster, 2004) that home-work is often used as an intermediary stage on the road to entrepreneurship or as a prelude to moving into premises.

For other participants who are remote workers, the cost-saving is initiated by their employers. Working from home is part of the job description for remote workers, as an office away from the home and the headquarters would be too costly. In the following example, David discusses how his job entails home-work because he works remotely for a company that is based in a different part of Ireland.

> "But it was clear from when they discussed in the interview stage, a rep in the Munster area, that would mean working from home and travelling through the Munster area. And I didn't think that would be a problem…ahm I suppose ahm there was talk and there was discussion about putting a branch or an office down here. Ahm, and of course that was based obviously on figures over the first year. If figures were good and we thought there was an opportunity and a need, they were talking about opening an office. So it was discussed I suppose that working from home was a temporary situation to begin with. Ahm I discussed with them renting an office space, which they looked at and said, "Right, we'll see how the first six months go". And again, it was all financial. It was costing them less to have me work from home than it was to open a branch or an office." (David, interview participant)

Working from home is constructed as a necessity for his job, not something that he particularly wanted to engage in. It is also made clear that home-work is a financial decision on the part of the company: "It was costing them less to have me work from home than it was to open a branch or an office". Therefore, home-work was not David's choice. He discusses his expectations, and admits that he thought home-work would be a temporary arrangement.

Here one gets a sense that home-work was not a deliberate choice, yet David is not explicitly forced either. Home-work is a rational choice for remote workers and entrepreneurs alike because it allows them to work on growing a business from within their homes, while saving on office overheads.

### 4.2.4. Avoiding Unemployment

A driver that seems to leave little choice to participants is the urge to avoid unemployment. In this case, working from home is seen as the only alternative to becoming unemployed, leading participants to embrace this opportunity. However, while they are happy to avoid being unemployed, home-work is constructed as not being their preferred choice.

> "I started to work from home because I was forced to. I lost my job. When I was auctioneering. I lost my job so I, it's just I had to. I didn't have a choice. It was do this, work from home, or don't do any work basically. I was kinda more forced into it than anything else. It wasn't exactly my choice." (Jake, interview participant)

> "Ahm, you see, this just happened to me, I didn't look for a job from home. It was not a choice. When I came back from India, I knew it was impossible to go back to my previous job as a psychologist and I actually didn't want to. [...] it's not so easy to get a job and I'm not that young, so that, you know, was a brick that fell on my head. So I took the chance. It was a good opportunity. I was not planning to get a job of that kind." (Lisa, interview participant)

In both examples, participants position themselves passively, with Jake stating "I was forced" and Lisa claiming home-work "just happened to me" and "was a brick that fell on my head". This leaves both participants with little agency in their decision to work from home. Portraying themselves as passive however also serves to deflect any blame for home-work failures, which might be important given that Jake had already given up on home-work at the time of interview and Lisa quit a few months after her interview.

The passivity displayed here is in stark contrast to other participants, such as interview participants Mark and Simon, who approached their employers with the intent to work from home.

> "I then secured permission from my bosses to ah move my office basically down here." (Mark, interview participant)

> "And I had expressed my interest in it last year and then the good result at the end of the year worked in my favour and positively influenced their decision. So that – otherwise it would have been more difficult to get them to agree to me working from home." (Simon, interview participant)

Simon and Mark's accounts demonstrate the contrast between the passivity that seems inherent to some drivers (such as 'avoiding unemployment') and the agency that is observed in conjunction with other drivers (Simon cited 'childcare'; Mark cited 'escape from the office'). Based on the findings explored here, it becomes possible to suggest that some home-work drivers result in a conscious choice to work from home, while other drivers leave participants no choice. A distinction can be made between drivers that are 'pull factors' (those that entice people to work from home) and 'push factors' (those that force people to work from home). The push-pull distinction highlights the differing nature of home-work drivers. The findings further indicate that when people position themselves as passive home-work recipients, as opposed to active agents, their home-work arrangement can fail. Agency and choice therefore lie at the core of the home-working experience. From a practice perspective, notions of agency imply that a person is powerful or legitimate enough in a practice in order to influence future developments. People who are powerful are most likely found at the core of a practice (Wenger, 1998). Accordingly, it can be proposed that when home-workers have the power to choose home-work, it means that they are core members of the practices which need to enable home-work (e.g. the office environment). Conversely, those who are passive or are forced into home-work lack influence and are not at the core of the practices that make home-work happen. By using the Wengerian concept of levels of participation, I contribute to the debate regarding home-workers' level of control, which I

raised in the literature review, by explaining that control depends on participation in social practices. This issue of participation and how it relates to control will permeate throughout the following chapters.

As mentioned in the last chapter, the notion of practice implies a social site where several actors engage with one another. In this research, I investigate practices primarily through the home-workers' accounts. However, what is interesting is that when participants discuss elements of home-work, such as the drivers that motivated their decisions to work from home, they voice the opinions of others. The presence of other people in their home and work practices is implied and sometimes explicitly suggested. Home-workers make sense of their arrangements through others' perspectives. The following is an example of how a home-worker evaluates his home-work decision through the reactions of others:

> "Well the reaction was more to leaving work to mind the kids. [...] Yeah the reaction to leaving the job was a kind of bafflement at times. Like "That's a bit ridiculous!" People thought I mean – my parents thought I was daft. Gina (his wife) was very supportive. I think she realized I just didn't like what I was doing. Ahm, friends figured I was being lazy sometimes, you know that I just ah was looking for a way not to work. They know me! [...] So yeah people did, people advised not to, and I can understand why. Like my dad in particular just thought I was crazy to walk away from, you know, as good as a permanent job." (Malcolm, interview participant)

In this extract, Malcolm gives an account of his social environment and the different perspectives within it. Without speaking to Malcolm's environment directly, I can access the voices of social others, as reconstructed by him. Similar representations of other people's opinions emerge in the following extracts:

> "Some people found that (home-work) very strange [...] What they think is that I really spoiled my career, ok, that I threw out the window all my studies and left my salary, my position and everything [...] And others looked at me like, with shock (Laughter). Well, somebody's shocked, somebody's impressed, it depends." (Lisa, interview participant)

> "My parents basically they'd say if I'm happy, then they're happy with whatever I do, you know? Like they were completely, one hundred per cent behind me. Because they knew the situation I was in, like they knew that there were no other opportunities out there at the time. So they said to me that "just go for it, just whatever you do, just

> enjoy yourself. And if you don't enjoy yourself, don't do it." But they said, "Just give it a go", like. "Who knows what could happen" (Jake, interview participant)

By voicing the opinions of other people, home-workers construct an account of home-work that is socially embedded. Sometimes I was also able to access the opinions of others directly, such as in the following example, where the participant's wife was present at the interview and offered occasional comments.

> "For me it (your home-work) is a relief. I've a better conscience if you're at home than when you're not" (Jana, interview participant Simon's wife)

To situate this extract, I should add that Jana and Simon have a daughter, who Simon minds while working from home on Fridays. The rest of the week, their daughter goes to a childminder, while both work away from the home. Jana constructs her husband's home-work as a relief, which possibly means that she does not feel the same parental guilt, knowing that one parent is there, that she experiences when leaving her daughter with a childminder in order to go to work. Her understanding of home-work as contributing to a better parenting conscience is likely to feed into Simon's evaluation of home-work.

This leads to the proposition that home-workers' accounts, regardless of whether others' opinions are implicit or explicit, are co-created and are constructed within their home and work practices. This idea will be of particular importance later on in the thesis when I discuss home and work as practices in more detail. At the end of this chapter, I will discuss how the home-work drivers identified here relate to existing literature. After exploring why people work from home, I will now delve into the types of boundaries that people draw when working from home.

## 4.3. Types of Boundaries

This research set out to investigate how the boundaries between home and work practices are negotiated. This section explores the kinds of boundaries that are constructed by participants (the 'what' of boundaries). Participants' accounts reveal that as they engage in their home-working arrangements, they have to make decisions as to where, when and how they work. These decisions determine the level of interaction between home and work that is acceptable for participants and their home and work others. Participants' temporal, spatial, psychological and social boundaries varied between flexible and strong boundaries - in fact even allowed for both ends of the spectrum to co-exist. Below, I will outline each type of boundary and its various manifestations. Whilst discussing types of boundaries I will also delve into the functions that they serve for the home-workers. At the end of this section, I will evaluate what has been achieved so far, and present issues that are raised by this section and require elaboration.

### 4.3.1. Temporal Boundaries

By imposing temporal limits or schedules on home and work activities, participants create temporal boundaries between home and work. Temporal boundaries are frequently borrowed from the traditional 9-5 office structure, probably because it is a structure that is familiar to most. This is despite the fact that home-work is often constructed by participants as the opposite of office work practices. However, some participants also arrive at novel structures that move away from the traditional 9-5. Temporal boundaries vary in strength from rigid working and non-working times to freely interspersed home and work activities throughout the day, depending on the demands or tasks that arise. The types of temporal boundaries

discussed by participants were: 1.) Traditional 9-5 structure, 2.) Mixing traditional and flexible boundaries, 3.) Task-based approach, and 4.) Interspersing home and work.

*Traditional 9-5 structure*

It emerged that some participants follow the well-known 9-5 temporal structure. Relying on such a traditional boundary serves to turn home-work into a more legitimate formal working arrangement.

> "So I actually had quite a formal structure. When my minder came in at nine, say on the days that I was working and I just started work, yeah ahm and maybe took a lunch break or whatever. So quite a formal ahm working day. So I treated it always as a very much 9 to 5 work." (Dee, interview participant)

Dee not only sets temporal boundaries around work and home, she also draws social boundaries by relying on a childminder during her working hours, which allows her to limit her availability for childcare interactions during her working hours. Interesting is also her treatment of home-work as "formal" and "9 to 5 work", aligning her boundaries with those of traditional work. It is likely that Dee's boundaries are influenced by the fact that she is in formal employment and has to be contactable during office hours. This indicates that boundaries are embedded in a person's home and work contexts, rather than being set arbitrarily, based on preference. Control over boundaries is therefore constrained by structural factors.

*Mixing traditional and flexible boundaries*

Some participants use the traditional 9 to 5 as a loosely followed guideline and then infuse this with a degree of flexibility to suit their needs. This pattern demonstrates that strong, traditional boundaries can co-exist with pockets of flexibility.

> "I'd be starting work at 9. Ahm, work through till about lunchtime, take a standard half hour break, ahm back upstairs, kind of office…heap…upstairs. Ahm continue working until about five, cook dinner, set fire, do whatever the necessary is there. Ahm, watch a bit of TV with Clarissa. You need personal time [...] and then about eight o'clock I'd go back upstairs and I could stay up there until four in the morning sometimes, depending on what the workload is for that week or what I've set myself as timetabled. On a – yeah pretty average two o'clock in the morning finish up – bed." (Mark, interview participant)

Mark works from 9 to 5 and takes a "standard half hour break" for lunch, thereby borrowing from the traditional work discourse. He then dedicates the hours of 5 to 8 pm to personal time, thus making a distinction between home and work time. However, a move away from traditional temporal structures is shown in his allocation of the hours of 8 pm to 2 am to work, depending on his work tasks. This reveals a degree of flexibility and task-orientation as opposed to temporal orientation, as well as breaking with the temporal norm of engaging in leisure at that hour. The next example is a similar mix of traditional and flexible boundaries:

> "Typical day would be get up around 8 o'clock, right? Ahm, start work at 9, work for, I'd say maybe about 2 or 3 hours. Ok? Take a long break for another 2 or 3 hours and then come back and work in the evening for maybe, I don't know, 4 or 5 hours. On average. So, I'd usually finish at about maybe around 7 or 8 o'clock and then go away, like, to my own stuff, like gym or whatever, watch TV, watch a game, something like that. But it was very hard to stick to a routine, like do you know." (Jake, interview participant)

This excerpt also highlights a distinction between work and "my own stuff", i.e. personal time, as well as displaying a loose resemblance to 9 to 5 structures by starting work at 9, taking a lunch break and finishing sometime in the evening. However, stretching his lunch break for 2 or 3 hours shows that there is a degree of flexibility to his temporal boundaries. Jake's temporal flexibility becomes even more apparent in his choice of working days. While he is guided by 9 to 5 in his working hours, he breaks from the convention of working Monday to Friday and instead reinvents the working week to suit his preferences:

> "You choose your own hours. If you wanna take a holiday, you take a holiday. You wanna work a Sunday, go work a Sunday. Do you know? That's what I did, like. I kind of, I used to prefer to work maybe Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, and then take midweek off, do you know?" (Jake, interview participant)

The flexibility of his working arrangement positions Jake as somebody who is in charge of his work, somebody who has the agency to "choose [his] own hours", which is in contrast to the passivity he displayed earlier in regards to the home-work decision. The next excerpt also distinguishes between work time and personal time (where one has the autonomy to do as they please). The participant is closely guided by traditional 9 to 5 structures; however, when it comes to her lunch break, home and work are performed at the same time, as she eats while typing.

> "I try to give myself a very sharp timing, cos it's very tough to work from home and to work alone. I mean at least for me. You have thousands of distractions. So I wake up very early, around 7, I do my exercise, and then usually, at 8, I'm online and I work till 1. One hour of break, which is never a break because the boss is online. So I'm eating with one hand and with the other hand I'm typing. Ahm, yeah, and then I can work till 5 or 6 in the afternoon, yeah and that's it then so I can do whatever I want." (Lisa, interview participant)

This emphasises that strict temporal boundaries of working 9 to 5 and then engaging in personal time can co-exist with a temporal blurring of home and work during lunch, demonstrating that boundaries are fluid in nature. Lisa seems to experience pressure to work during her lunch break because her boss is online, which shows that her temporal boundaries are co-created and that she is not solely in charge of her working pattern. Lisa's extract also hints at the fact that boundaries serve important functions, such as protecting from distraction. The following example also demonstrates the importance of temporal boundaries; however, the participant admits that her schedule is not entirely rigid:

> "Until I realised the importance of scheduling my time, I was all over the place, and miserable half the time because I felt as though I was running around like a headless chicken-and getting nothing done. Now I have a schedule- and while I doubt I will stick to it rigidly, at least I now have some time for my family, and also some chill out time for me. When you have to wear all the different hats it is so easy to get lost and out of focus, and consequently miserable..which then spills over into your personal life as well- not the best situation to find yourself in!" (Jane, online discussion 3)

This example portrays temporal boundaries as necessary in order to ensure that the home-worker has time for both work and family. The potential for negative feelings to spill over

from work into personal life is highlighted. The pattern of mixing traditional boundaries with flexibility is common amongst the sample of home-workers in this research. This is possibly because the 9-5 structure offers a well-scripted routine, while pockets of flexibility allow for home demands to be met without completely upsetting the traditional ordering of home and work.

*Task-based approach*

Temporal boundaries are not only guided by the traditional 9-5 structure, or 9-5 with pockets of flexibility; they can also be based more loosely on whatever tasks emerge. The next extract from an interview with Malcolm shows that his temporal boundaries are flexibly guided by work and home tasks as they arise.

> "Ahm, we'd all get up together, get the kids ready for school. I bring them to school, come back, normally start work about quarter past nine [...] and then Gina would pick up the kids, pick up Sarah at half two and then Becky is in crèche, so she'll be picked up at one or two. Ahm she'll have them for the afternoon, and I'll finish up generally, depending on how busy I am, half five. And sometimes just continue on in the evening. For the last month or so it was like anytime at all [...] Yeah I would work late cos I just had to get something finished [...] The last month or so she looked after them in the afternoon. At the moment, like for example, when she needs to go to Dublin, I'll just take over the kid-minding. Generally, on a – I'll usually do Monday and Friday afternoon, so I would knock off two afternoons to look after them. And she at the moment, would be taking the other three. Now, from next week on, we're not gonna, we're cutting back the crèche to two mornings a week, because at the moment I have a bit of a low, so there's no point sending her to the crèche if I'm not working. Ahm, so yeah, at least two afternoons, some mornings, and then the degree of flexibility like if either of us needs to go somewhere the other will be able to cover. We kind of manage" (Malcolm, interview participant)

Malcolm's account shows that his work tasks are highly changeable and that the temporal boundaries between home and work are set according to whatever demands arise. The times of home can be made dependent on work and vice versa. His account demonstrates that temporal boundaries can be set not just according to the 9-5 structure, but according to the

changing demands of both spheres. Malcolm's ability to be flexible with the scheduling of home and work is situated in the context of him being a freelancer. In his account, Malcolm also speaks for others, particularly his wife, as shown by the pronoun 'we'. Again, this shows that individual tales are informed by the voices of others, as shown in regards to 'drivers' earlier. The next example is an extract from Dee's interview, who was categorised above as utilising traditional 9-5 boundaries. However, the next extract shows that people can vary how they construct their type of temporal boundary. While Dee still operates roughly within the 9-5 frame, in this extract, she makes the temporal boundary around work dependent on family tasks.

> "And then I probably stop, kinda depends if the kids have to be dropped somewhere at five, I'll have to stop at five, cos they might expect – they have to go to piano at half five. So I stop at five then. Ahm because they have to go. [...] I suppose by around five half five I've to start getting dinner organised and things. I have to kind of stop then. If I had to go back to it, fine. But I probably have to kind of stop then to get stuff sorted. Or six maybe. Sometimes, some evenings occasionally about six. But they could be below and I'd say "I'll finish up at around six" [...] so I suppose family routines take over at that stage, you've gotta kind of stop at six o'clock." (Dee, interview participant)

Practical concerns, such as the task of having to drive the children somewhere, put an end to the working day. The task-based temporal boundary shows that home-workers can vary their work and home times depending on the demands that emerge in each domain.

*Interspersing*

The next example shows a pattern of organising work and home demands around each other as befits the situation. However, unlike the task-orientated pattern described above, in this case there is an almost complete lack of temporal boundaries and an interspersing of home and work instead:

> "I get up very early to make sure I have a little bit of time before the little one wakes up. Sometimes that actually works. Most of the time, ahm, I deal with my email, but mostly I catch up on work from the previous day. And, ahm, think about what I will do for that day, if nothing happens in the meantime. And then, well, at some stage the little one wakes up so I take care of her, make breakfast. And then she'll either sit on my lap while I work or she'll play while I'm working. Or I don't do anything and just play with her, or yeah, that's how we pass the day. Then, thankfully, she takes a long nap, during which I cram in a lot of work. So it's a constant mix between proper work, childminding, and somewhere in between." (Simon, interview participant)

In this account, home and work are performed at the same time, meaning that the temporal boundary between them is highly permeable. This also has implications for the relationship between home and work. It is important to note that Simon is a parent. Parenthood is an important structural factor in boundary setting, as it exerts particular pressures on home-workers. Temporally interspersing work and home is perceived as impossible by other participants, who have more clearly defined temporal boundaries:

> "I: Do you ever go back to work after 6?
>
> P: Eh no. I would rather I not. I mean if I have to – if I have a lot of things to do, if I'm not on schedule, I'd rather skip dinner and keep on working until everything is done. For me it's impossible to take a long break and then go back to work." (Lisa, interview participant)

It is interesting that this participant has no trouble stretching her temporal boundary a bit by working past 6 pm to ensure her tasks are completed; yet she refuses to intersperse her workday with breaks. This means that she expands the boundary, but refuses to cross and re-cross it. Another participant's scheduling that is in stark contrast to the moment-by-moment interspersing seen in Simon's example is the following:

> "I timetable myself in tasks more than time. So at the start of each week, say for maybe an hour on a Sunday evening I'd go through whatever needs to be done for that week and I'd come up with a week list and then in typically boring fashion you split that down into the five days of the week and you have to have this done by the end of the week." (Mark, interview participant)

Mark carefully maps out a work schedule at the start of each week, assigning temporal slots to work tasks. His deliberate approach contrasts the more haphazard interspersing reported above. This highlights a qualitative difference between temporal boundaries: some

participants actively plan their boundaries (particularly those falling into the 9-5 category). Others plan, but are open to unforeseen circumstances, and yet others have a haphazard approach that is guided by circumstances as they arise. This demonstrates that boundaries are highly variable amongst participants and their unique social configurations. While there are some patterns, such as *traditional 9-5 structure, mixing traditional and flexible boundaries, interspersing and scheduling according to tasks*, it emerged that temporal boundaries are fluid in nature and change according to participants' circumstances. I showed that participants experience constraints in the kinds of temporal boundaries that are available to them, e.g. some jobs require home-workers to work from 9-5. This contributes to the debate over home-workers' levels of controls by highlighting the role of structural factors. I will continue to engage with this debate and in the next chapter, I will compile a list of structural factors.

### 4.3.2. Spatial Boundaries

Spatial boundaries are expressed in decisions as to where home and work should be performed. Participants' spatial boundaries range from spatial flexibility to spatial rigidity. Space is heavily tied to participants' resources and can be outside of participants' control. Some participants specify a preference for strong spatial boundaries between work and home, but do not have a room that they could turn into a designated office. This means that they have to carry out their work from within a home space. In the case of spatial boundaries, it can therefore be a battle between preferences and spatial availability. What is interesting, though, is how participants construct their own versions of spatial separation even in the face of spatial merging by assigning specific functions to objects. Another tendency that became apparent is that spatial boundaries can be something that 'just happens': participants begin to

work from home and fall into habits of where they work without making a conscious decision about it. Further, most participants' spatial boundaries change over time, depending on their living situation. Many of the participants were able to recount at least two different spatial home-working arrangements because they had moved house in the past. The participants' spatial patterns fall into the following categories: 1.) Spatial Rigidity, 2.) Boundary Objects, 3.) Spatial Flexibility, and 4.) External Influences.

*Spatial Rigidity*

Spatial rigidity manifests itself in strong spatial boundaries around home and work, with home and work tied to specific places. This can be in the form of restricting work to one room within the house or even having a separate building in the garden for work, as is the case for the following participant:

> "I always had a separate building so they just knew that was Mum's office. Ahm so it was never in the bedroom or it was never, so it wasn't that difficult for them because as toddlers they were in the house and I would have been gone out of the house." (Dee, interview participant)

Spatial rigidity of this kind resembles a traditional working arrangement, whereby the worker leaves the house to go to work and there is a clear distinction between home (taking place within the house) and work (taking place away from the house). Dee's excerpt highlights that spatial boundaries serve important functions: they serve to define spaces for herself and others ("they just knew that was Mum's office") and help to create a separation between home and work. The same participant also constructs spatial separation as a necessity when she states that,

> "When you work at home full-time, which I do more or less, then ah you just kind of you just need a space that you know, that's just for work". (Dee, interview participant)

Again, the portrayal of a dedicated workspace as a necessity is evaluated in light of this participant's job requirements. Dee is in full-time employment and has to be available for work interactions, such as teleconferences; which contributes to her preference for separation. Approximately half of the participants work from within a designated office. Strong spatial boundaries between home and work are however also reported by participants who do not have a designated workspace available to them, which I find particularly interesting.

*Boundary Objects*

Instead of using the walls of a room as the boundary around their workspace, some participants work in spaces that are both home and work spaces. To draw a boundary, they designate certain objects as work objects and achieve spatial separation in this way:

> "Ahm, unfortunately I live in a small, one-bedroom apartment, so I don't have a separate office space, which would be nice. So I work from a table in my kitchen, in a high chair. I've tried to position it looking out a window, so I'm not staring at four walls, you know, I have a nice kinda view to the open, outside area. Ahm, and I generally try and keep that area a work area. I very rarely – I have it kinda set up with my paper work and my folders and my – I have it kinda set up with my office as such. And, I try not to move that or disturb that. And I keep it like a desk, like an office desk. You've got your stapler here, your calculator there. And I try and keep that as such, ahm, so that that's my office space. That when I sit down in that chair, it feels like I'm working, I'm at work. Ahm, I don't use the chair or the table for any other purpose but work. But it's not a separate office as such" (David, interview participant)

This excerpt shows that even within the kitchen, a space that is typically a home space, the participant is able to create a work domain by consistently carrying out work activities from the kitchen table. The kitchen becomes a dual-purpose space (home and work); however, while both domains co-exist within this room, they are not performed in the same places. The kitchen table becomes David's office, while home activities, such as eating, are transferred onto his coffee table (which he mentions later in the interview). His extract shows that an

office space can be created by consistently allocating a particular space to work and buffering this with the presence of work objects, such as staplers and calculators. The kitchen table becomes defined as a workspace through the practice of working. The actions performed in a space determine how that space is defined. David's extract can be interpreted as an example of Wenger's (1998) duality of participation and reification because David achieves a boundary through the combination of material objects, e.g. staplers and paper work, and his work-related actions. David's situation could also be termed 'overlap' (Wenger, 1998) because home and work domains are situated within one room, yet no merging of domains takes place. David also hints at an important function of spatial separation when he states, "when I sit down in that chair, it feels like I'm working": that of mentally distinguishing between home and work. Appropriate physical cues created through spatial separation induce a work or home feeling. This is also evident in the following excerpt:

> "The door would be closed. I'd never use the computer. If I had to use a computer for home stuff I'd use a home laptop. I just would never – to me it was just a work space and I never. [...] I'd rarely ahm use the desk or computer at the weekend otherwise. You know, it's just too much like work then if I'm kind of sitting here. So we have home laptops and I might just check stuff on those if I need to, book stuff for home or whatever ahm so again it's kind of separating that space out. You need to do that. I think otherwise you're, there's just no end to it, you know it's kind of, it'll be endless (Dee, interview participant)

Again, there is an association between a particular space and a work way of being ("it's just too much like work if I'm sitting here"). Dee also hints at the reasons for separation - protecting against work because "there's no end to it". Work is portrayed as a threat. The separation of work and home relies on a coupling of space (office vs. not office) and objects (home vs. work laptops). In other cases, objects can act as spatial boundaries in their own right:

> "Going to buy a mobile phone for the business so at least when 'that' phone rings, I'll know it's for the business and run down the garden if I have to!!! " (Maya, online discussion 1)

> "Set it up, organise it in such a way as it is a, you need to have it as a clearly delineated work space to a certain degree. There shouldn't be any encroachment. Like on work computers, there should be no personal photographs, I think [...] I have my own personal laptop, which I'll use for my thesis and which I'll use for the ahm for whatever videos or photographs to look at. But I never the twain shall meet" (Mark, interview participant)

Maya plans to use separate home and work objects in order to achieve ontological security. If her home phone rings, she knows it is home-related. If her business phone rings, she knows it is business-related. Depending on which phone rings, she is already prepped to deal with home or work issues. She also plans to buy a dedicated business phone in order to be able to protect work from any home-related interruptions or noises, such that if the phone rings, she can seek a quiet space from which to conduct business. Mark similarly guards his work objects from "encroachment". He references Rudyard Kipling's phrase *"Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet"*, which was used to describe two things so different that they have no opportunity to unite. The word 'twain' derives from the Old English word 'twegen', meaning two. Kipling's phrase refers to the lack of understanding between Britain and India. Mark equates the rift between two very different countries with the rift between home and work. His drawing on Kipling's phrase highlights that he prefers home and work objects to have as little interaction with each other as possible. Mark references other people as he explains his preference for separation, which renders his boundaries socially situated:

> "I mean the office would have to be sealed off on a practical level. Ahm, the level of intrusion and all that, it would create a problem and I've known people that it would create problems for. People with similar work habits to myself…have gone with B&B's in the city, rather than go back down to their commuter belt home" (Mark, interview participant)

In this extract, Mark considers whether home-work would be feasible if there were children in the house (currently, there are none). He cites "people with similar work habits to myself" as a reference point and claims that these people preferred working in a B&B, rather than at home, because of the possibility of intrusion. Mark anticipates his own reaction to working

from home with children present based on what other people have done. This means that he uses social others as a way of gauging his individual behaviour, thereby operating at the duality of social and individual (Wenger, 1998). Individual accounts are never far removed from the social, which makes it possible to adopt a practice framework to the analysis of individual accounts. The imagery used by Mark (of the office as "sealed off") is also very interesting because it evokes images of a crime scene that is heavily protected by persons of authority, which gives insight into how Mark constructs the relationship between home and work. Constructions of home and work will be the focus of chapter 7.

The examples presented thus far demonstrate that participants seem to prefer strong spatial boundaries between work and home and that if they cannot achieve these through separate rooms, they utilise objects for the purpose of separation. It is worth mentioning that boundary objects in this section refer to artefacts that help home-workers distinguish between work and home. This is accomplished by designating artefacts as either work or home objects and refraining from appropriating objects for cross-purposes. This understanding contrasts with Wenger's (1998) conceptualisation of boundary objects as those objects that connect practices with each other because they are used for multiple purposes. Later on, I use Wenger's definition to explore how connections across practices are established. Both definitions of the term are analytically useful. The implication is that the notion of boundary objects can be broadened and applied not just to connections across practices, but also to distinctions.

Returning to the current use of boundary objects, it became apparent that participants attempt to create as much spatial separation between home and work as feasible. One reason for this preference could be the difficulty of working from home when spatial boundaries are weak. One participant, David, was quoted above as consistently limiting work to his kitchen table. He also reported a previous living situation where he did not have a consistent workspace.

His habit of making the kitchen table his office could have resulted from previous home-work difficulties, where the spatial boundaries between home and work were not strongly drawn:

> "There was a dining room table, that I used to sit at, on a hard chair, or there was a soft couch with kind of my laptop open in front of me on a glass table with like paper work strewn around to my left and strewn around to my right on the couch. So I'd have papers left of me, papers right of me. But ah, way too easy, way too – I found more and more, if I wanted to get a good day's work done, I used to put myself over onto the dining room table because whenever I sat down on the couch, as much as it was a lot comfier on my ass and on my back, I found it was way too easy sometimes just to slouch back into the couch and kinda go "Right, I'm just gonna switch the telly on". Ah, so I tried to keep it on the dining room table." (David, interview participant)

Here, it becomes evident that working from the couch invoked leisure feelings and made it difficult for David to work. This is possibly the reason why he has since stuck rigidly to the kitchen table. It appears that clearly designated home and work spaces make working from home easier for participants, whereas spatial flexibility can create tensions, as the next section demonstrates.

*Spatial Flexibility*

When participants work from spaces that are used for both home and work, it can create unease (or temptation into leisure, as in David's example). Some participants feel this unease particularly if they are working in a spare bedroom, as Malcolm's description of his workspace shows:

> "Ahm, just a laptop, printer, phone ah desk. Gina now has another desk set up in there as well. The problem is there's a bed in there. So it's kinda used when people come to visit." (Malcolm, interview participant)

The co-presence of office and bed is seen as a problem. The next extract discusses this conundrum in more detail:

> "And when we bought this, it was just, we said, "Look ok need to use the spare room for a while", but it's not ideal. But it's ok actually cos I've gotten more used. At the start I didn't like it. I didn't like the bed, I just didn't like being in kind of a bedroom

> in the house ahm but it's rarely used. My mum comes from time to time, so it's rarely used actually as a spare room. It would only be used at night, so it probably actually does fine" (Dee, interview participant)

Malcolm and Dee's extracts show that having to work from within a room that is also used as a bedroom is "not ideal". While Dee admits that she has gotten used to the dual function of the room, she clearly states that she did not like the presence of a bed in her workspace. This unease might occur because a bedroom strongly invokes the home sphere and might a) invalidate the work done there and b) tempt into the home sphere. It is possible that the notion of work is tied to 'proper' workplaces, not bedrooms.

While most participants prefer to limit their work activities to a particular space, many of them actually have the option of working wherever they want (e.g. "From where I work, it doesn't matter", Lisa, interview participant). However, spatial flexibility is not used nearly as much as temporal flexibility. One participant who was unable to limit his work spatially is interview participant Simon, who uses home-work as a childcare strategy:

> "I: And where do you work?
>
> P: In the living room.
>
> I: That means the little one is right next to you?
>
> P: Yes. Unless she's somewhere else in the apartment." (Simon, interview participant)

Even though this participant has a desk in one of the bedrooms, he rarely uses it and instead flexibly follows his daughter around with his laptop, working wherever in the house she is playing. For him, work and home take place not just under one roof, but in the same room, at the same time, meaning home and work merge spatially and temporally. His spatial flexibility seems to be a matter of necessity rather than choice, which raises questions over the amount of control home-workers have over their arrangements and brings us back to Wengerian notions of positioning, which shall be fully explored in the following chapters.

*External Influences*

Another finding regarding spatial boundaries is that participants tend to determine where they work based on external factors and practicality. Therefore, while preferences do at times come into the decision, spatial boundaries can be the result of something as simple as heat and light.

> "Sometimes on a sunny day you've great light in here (kitchen), I'll come out and work here, instead of in there (office) where it's just dark" (Malcolm, interview participant)
>
> "She's a teacher and [...] she was writing up more and more lesson plans. However, we have a netbook now and she prefers to be down here with the fire and heat. We have a fairly rudimentary back boiler system, so upstairs is a little cooler which suits me, not so much her, so she would work down here now more and I've pretty much got the office to myself" (Mark, interview participant)
>
> "I work in the kitchen, because ahm it's very bright and warm. Here in Ireland you can be very cold, so it's important. So I chose the warmest room in the house" (Lisa, interview participant)

These examples show that spatial boundaries in home-work can be the result of practical concerns, rather than specific preferences. Added to this list of light and heat are issues such as availability of space, presence of others in the house, and so on. Spatial boundaries can also arise out of habits that are formed without conscious thought.

> "As we packed up the last of BF's belongings in his old apartment last night, he pointed out a large black box underneath his kitchen table. He told me that he had purposely bought that box to be able to put away all of his work stuff every night and use the kitchen table for its original purpose, but that he had just never bothered [...] It looks like BF did not initially set out to use the kitchen table for work only. He did not deliberately assign it a single function – it just happened over time, maybe because he was too lazy to pack away work things every night and use the kitchen table for eating. Instead, he conveniently used the coffee table for eating and relaxing and over time, had got it in his head that the kitchen table is his office" (Researcher's diary)

This makes it clear that spatial boundaries are sometimes the result of convenience, highlighting that boundaries can be rather haphazard, as opposed to deliberate. Boundaries are drawn in particular ways out of necessity. There is therefore a parallel between temporal

boundaries that are influenced by situational demands and spatial boundaries that are influenced by practical demands. This leads to the proposition that decisions about when and where to work from home are embedded in the participants' home and work practices, their environments, resources, and circumstances.

### 4.3.3. Psychological Boundaries and Transitions

Psychological boundaries are about the mental distinctions that participants make between home and work. Some participants refer to a 'work mode' and a 'home mode'. Often, these modes are constructed in relation to spatial and temporal boundaries, as in the examples of David and Dee, who reported feeling as if they were at work when sitting in a particular chair. For the participants of this research, psychological boundaries were manifested in 1.) different 'home and work modes'; and 2.) mental transitions that they made between home and work.

*'Home and Work Modes'*

Psychological boundaries can be constructed in relation to physical boundaries or specific actions. In the following example, the act of switching on and off the radio serves as a signal to 'work mode' or 'home mode' and prepares for a way of being:

> "Because we still don't have an office, I work at the kitchen table, from the same chair that I sit in when I have my breakfast or my lunch. The way I make it feel like I'm either working or not is by using the radio as a signal. In the morning, when I'm having my breakfast, the radio is on. Once breakfast is over, the radio is off and I get started on my workload for the day. At lunch, the same thing again. Lunch break – radio on. Lunch break over – radio off. For some reason, this works for me and as soon as I have silence, I'm able to work or at least feel like I should because there is nothing there to distract me." (Researcher's diary)

In this case, because psychological boundaries between work and home cannot rely upon a physical separation, the act of switching the radio on and off serves as a replacement. Note that work is constructed as an 'either or' concept– one is either working or not, there is no grey area. Also, work is portrayed as something that one should do, reflecting the 'ideal worker' discourse (Halford, 2006; Gambles et al., 2006; Acker, 1990).

It is possible that the feeling of being at work is important in home-work in order to limit mental associations of the house as a home that would tempt into leisure. The following participant uses temporal boundaries to achieve a work feeling:

> "I'm very rigid about that. Ahm, so I really need my timings to feel like being in the office. That helps me a lot, because I can't – you know maybe one morning you wake up at 9, and one at 10 and one at 7 and ah, no I can't manage that." (Lisa, interview participant)

This work feeling is constructed as a necessity. Home-work could potentially pose a threat to the feeling if one did not impose boundaries around home and work. While the feeling of being at work is tied to temporal boundaries, spatial boundaries, and specific activities in the examples so far, the following excerpt suggests that this work feeling can be induced by setting imaginary boundaries:

> "And stick to a plan, where, pretend that you are in an office environment. Pretend that you have someone checking on you. You have to kind of put yourself in this mentality" (Jake, interview participant)

Jake advises that home-workers ought to pretend to be in an office. The office mentality he refers to protects against home temptations because one is pretending to be monitored by work others. So, unlike the other examples, Jake does not rely upon physical boundaries in his office mentality. Instead, he imagines the existence of aspects of an office environment, such as being monitored by others, to invoke his 'work mode'. Jake's extract highlights the interaction between the individual and the social, which is a key feature of Wenger's practice approach. His example shows that even if there are no explicit interactions with others, we

impose socially learned norms onto our individual endeavours. This is congruent with Wenger's (1998) proposition that the meaning of all action is determined socially. Jake imagines being embedded in a social practice as a way of maintaining socially accepted work norms. The necessity of creating mental distinctions between home and work is also explained in the following example, where it is demonstrated that different 'modes' are needed in order to guard against leisure temptation:

> "I: Ahm, how come you've that kitchen table kinda dedicated to work? How come you don't use it for anything else?
>
> P: Mm, for the reason that psychologically, when I sit down at that chair that I'm sitting there to do work. So that I don't switch on the television. Mistake I made the last time I was working from home. The same position that I sat in to watch television in the evening time when I was relaxed was almost the same position that I was sitting in when I was sitting down with my laptop in front of me, doing work.
>
> I: And why is that necessary?
>
> P: Ah, I find psychologically it flicks a switch inside in your brain, that you're either at work or that you're relaxing and it's essential to flick that switch. So that your body kicks into either work mode or into relaxation mode. Ahm, if you're in an environment where you're used to relaxing and you try to do work in it, your body isn't prepared to do the work. It's like "What are you doing? We're in relax mode! I don't want to work. I'm not going to work" and you're sitting there, "I really want to work", you know in your mind you're thinking, "I really want to work", but your body is going, "No, we're not. Forget that. Not gonna do work. This is where we come to relax and chill"…So it's important to have that…" (David, interview participant)

David reports that the spatial separation he imposes between home and work "flicks a switch inside in your brain". Space invokes a particular mode. He constructs work and relaxation as an either-or dichotomy and emphasises that it is "essential to flick that switch". In other words, psychological boundaries are a necessity. David has come to learn about the necessity of mental boundaries through a previous experience of spatial merging, where he was tempted to switch on the television during the workday. What is very interesting in his example is that he introduces a discourse of the body into the discussion of mental boundaries. Spatial separation is necessary to kick the body into the appropriate mode, not

just the mind. In this excerpt, David introduces a division between body and mind, where the mind is willing to work, while the body only responds to appropriate spatial cues. In this way, David cannot be blamed for being tempted into relaxation because he is powerless against his body. The analogy of 'the switch' in relation to work and home and an either-or relationship between the two domains is reiterated in other extracts:

> "P: The office was upstairs and when I left I just locked it, do you know?
>
> I: Did you?
>
> P: Yeah. Cos I'm very good at like – no matter what job I'm in anyway, I used to never bring it home, you know. So, like, the minute I can switch off one hundred per cent like. Even now, I'm not even thinking about work [...] So that was never a problem with – because to me, it wasn't part of the house. It was just somewhere I went to work. And like, I had no other business being inside that room. The only time I was in that room I was working. So, it was easy for me, like." (Jake, interview participant)

In this example, Jake manages to switch off when he is not working by a) physically containing work, and b) psychologically removing work from home. By locking the office upon leaving it, he physically contains work and makes it unavailable during leisure. This imposes a strict boundary between home and work, which aids the mental switch. It is noteworthy that Jake has no obvious practical incentive to lock the door because there are no children in the house who could disturb his work setup. Further, by stating that "it wasn't part of the house", he psychologically removes the office from his conceptualisation of the house. This contributes to a dichotomy between home and work. Also, by only being present in the office while working, he spatially limits work to this room and refuses to let home activities enter the room. This creates a mental association between the office and his work mode, with other parts of the house presumably invoking his home mode. It is interesting that Jake talks about work as being completely distinct from the home. This is possibly to guard against leisure or work spiralling out of control. However, it needs to be clarified that even though participants work hard to create mental distinctions between home and work, many of which

are accompanied by physical distinctions, one of the most important work activities, thinking, is highly portable and hard to fence in:

> "Because even if I stop working and I say to myself I've stopped working and I close the laptop, my mind's still thinking, right, "That needs to be done, this needs to be done". My mind's still on work." (David, interview participant)

Here, David admits that despite the fact that he may have physically shut down work by closing the laptop, a mental boundary does not necessarily follow. This is important to keep in mind because it demonstrates that physical and mental boundaries do not always run parallel to each other.

An alternative account also needs to be presented. While some participants do construct home and work as opposing modes or ways of being, one participant explicitly rejects this dichotomy:

> "I don't consider myself to be – I don't have an office mode, I don't throw a switch in the back of my head. I'm the same person where I work or wherever." (Mark, interview participant)

Mark emphasises that he is the same person at work and at home, which contradicts other participants' accounts and shows that experiences of mental boundaries vary. It is possible that Mark positions himself to be the same person regardless of domain because of the nature of his work. He is an academic researcher, which seems to be a calling for him, reflecting who he is as a person, as opposed to just a job. This may lead Mark to see continuity between his professional and private life. Again, structural factors, such as occupational category, are implicated in boundary setting. However, in the same interview, Mark also constructed home and work as a dichotomy, stating "never the twain shall meet", in regards to not wanting home to encroach on work. So it is possible that the continuity displayed here is only for professional concerns, i.e. that his home life is a continuation of his professional life, but not the other way around. Work is allowed to be ever-present while the home needs to be contained. This resonates with Clark's (2000) asymmetrical borders, where borders can be

strong around one domain and weak around the other. It also reflects the findings of this research that participants experience boundaries ambiguously – strong and weak boundaries co-exist.

*Transitions*

Psychological boundaries are not only apparent in home and work modes; they are also implicated in the transitions that participants make between home and work. Physical transitions, traditionally in the form of commuting (Haddon & Lewis, 1994; Kylin & Karlsson, 2008), aid a mental transition between spheres. They help participants exit one sphere and prepare them for the other sphere. The home-workers in this research reported ways in which they replaced the traditional commute and found new ways of moving between domains. Morning routines that help participants leave home (metaphorically speaking) and start work include making coffee, opening curtains, starting up the computer, dropping kids to school, exercising, getting dressed, and the act of going into their designated office (if available). Other rituals include closing the door on home in order to be present in the work domain:

> "But it was a dedicated office space so it just meant close the backdoor and out and that was…you'd kind of remove it" (Dee, interview participant)

Transitions of this kind help participants remove themselves and their work from home. This helps them to engage in work activities. The reverse transition can be similar, as seen in Jake's example of locking the office door after him when finishing work. Locking the door is a symbolic act that confirms the end of a workday. Similarly symbolic is the act of leaving the house upon finishing work and returning later on:

> "I often times would just leave the apartment for half an hour and go to a café, have a cup of coffee, or meet somebody, or just get out and go to the shop, for a drive for

> fifteen minutes and I feel that walking out of the apartment and walking back into the apartment definitely feels like a transition, you know, rather than sitting in the same apartment and being working to then suddenly sitting in the same apartment and not being working. I definitely find that leaving the actual apartment and coming back to it is a help." (David, interview participant)

David reports that the act of leaving and returning makes the transition between work and home easier than "suddenly sitting in the same apartment and not [...] working". A physical transition is constructed as necessary for mentally making the move between work and home. Other work-home transitions are less deliberate:

> "Typically, I work until I need to go to bed. Ahm so I work until the screen starts getting blurry. Ahm, I mean I need a good six hours' sleep like everyone else, so at about – except in exceptional cases – at about 2 in the morning I'll down tools and go to bed. Ahm, Clarissa will probably be in bed already. And go to bed then and back up at 8 or half 8 in the morning" (Mark, interview participant)

Mark uses tiredness as a signal that makes him finish work and go to bed, which means that he does not need an elaborate transition back into the home. He is probably so tired that it does not matter whether he feels like he is at home or at work – he just wants to sleep. However, the use of the phrase "I'll down tools" mimics a more traditional way of finishing up work than is the case here.

To sum up, physical routines and rituals can help participants make the mental transition from home to work and vice versa, replacing the traditional commute. Kylin & Karlsson (2008) suggest that the transition from home to work is more difficult than the other way around because of the greater levels of concentration required for work. However, no evidence of this claim was found amongst the participants in this research, who, if anything, struggle to switch off from work.

### 4.3.4. Social Boundaries

Participants set social boundaries by determining the level of engagement with home others whilst in the work domain or vice versa. Social boundaries are about deciding whether to tolerate the presence of home others while working (or work others while at home) and whether interruptions are acceptable or not. Social boundaries are also displayed when home-workers limit their home or work activities based on the presence of others. Social boundaries imply a moral judgment because navigating whether one is more accessible to work or home prioritises one sphere over the other. This relates to the power relationship between home and work, but also to power relationships between people of the home and work practices, and therefore positioning. Three constructions of social boundaries emerged: 1.) Issues of Accessibility, 2.) Minimising the Effect of Home and Work on Each Other, and 3.) Prioritising Work or Home.

*Issues of Accessibility*

Similarly to other types of boundaries, social boundaries can be strong (no cross-domain interaction allowed for) or weak (interacting with home and work others freely). The following is an example of a strong socio-temporal boundary, where the participant does not tolerate family conversations during work time:

> "From this time to this time, ok, I'm in office. So, my mother is not skyping with me at that time. I'm not taking calls, ok" (Lisa, interview participant)

Lisa restricts her accessibility to family during work time, thereby setting a socio-temporal boundary. It is interesting to note that she states she is "in office" at a particular time, when she actually works at a kitchen table. This means that she uses the term 'office' to demonstrate that she is engaging in 'proper' work and is not available, which also reflects a

mental office mode. While Lisa makes her social boundary around work dependent on a particular time, in the following example, the columnist restricts access to family based on having to meet a deadline.

> "Finally an unshiftable deadline looms, everyone in my orbit is warned to back off, the caffeine drip gets switched to espresso and output cranks up. Job gets done, I get paid, kids are released from attic, we all eat." (Newspaper column 6)

This example shows that the home-worker needs to restrict his accessibility in order to get work done. The columnist exaggerates the need to restrict access by claiming, "everyone in my orbit is warned to back off" and that the "kids are released from the attic" once his task is completed, constructing non-work as an obstacle to work. Another example of limiting access to family while working is the following:

> "Way back when, you know, James was small, he might come out and knock on the door if they were playing in the garden and I'd just say "Mummy's working! Mummy's working!" ahm and I'd threaten him and say, the odd time I'd say "You can go to a crèche or you can stay at home, but if you stay at home you can't interrupt me when I'm working." So they got the message, fine. Mary was my first minder and then Kate. And I'd say "Look, there's your choice, if you wanna stay at home, you've got to, you know, you've got to stay with Mary or Kate and I'm, you can't come out." So they rarely would." (Dee, interview participant)

Dee imposes a socio-temporal boundary around her work and declares herself off-limits to her children during work time by hiring a childminder. The presence of the childminder alone is a signal that she is not to be disturbed, meaning that people within a practice can serve as boundary enforcers. Dee's extract is also an example of how participants construct boundaries – in this case by threatening her children with having to go to the crèche. This indicates a certain degree of influence and power, which situates Dee at the core of her family practice. The positioning of the participant is implicated in her boundary setting. The same participant actually reports another interesting type of socio-temporal boundary: while she is working, her children are not allowed to invite friends over to the house.

> "And the friends know cos like I've said "No I work at home and you can't come in until after five" and they'd be "Are you finished work yet? Can we come in?" ahm anyway you can hear them shouting on the trampoline and playing and ahm and even

> when I had a childminder I'd say to them "I'm sorry you can't have until I finish" because particularly in the garden, cos I had my office in the garden, you couldn't have children running around in the garden ahm so that's the same rules here. Saying "Look, you can go out but you can't have your friends in until - I can say look after five" and then by five or so – because you'd rarely I mean if I stay working here beyond five it's just me usually working on stuff, or maybe one of my colleagues who I work with ah might be on the phone, but I'd rarely have meetings, telephone meetings or calls or anything after five. Then it's just I don't mind if they have a pal here. It's just if I had a teleconference or a meeting, you know, I can't." (Dee, interview participant)

Dee limits home activities to protect work. This extract shows that boundaries are tested by social others (in this case the friends asking "can we come in?") because they are of a socio-temporal nature, meaning that boundaries change after a certain time. Her construction of work as impossible if there are children running around in the garden also creates a dichotomy between work and family, with family being a barrier to work. It further becomes evident that Dee's social boundary depends on the nature of the work that she is protecting from home. If she is engaged in meetings or teleconferences, she strongly enforces the boundary, whereas if she is working on her own or with a familiar colleague then the boundary is loosened and children's noise is tolerated. This is an important consideration, which highlights the significance of context. Overall, the notion of social boundaries indicates that boundaries are played out in social spheres and depend on the actors involved and each person's positioning and degree of influence.

*Minimising the Effect of Home and Work on Each Other*

Another motive to draw social boundaries and limit engagement with home-related others while working is because home-workers want to limit the effect that home has on work and vice versa. The presence of home others might tempt them into leisure, as in the following example:

> "He said, "I won't be able to do any work with you here now. I won't be able to concentrate". So I told him, "I won't distract you, I won't say a word, I don't even mind you having the radio on or talking to customers because I have only a few things to catch up on". "Yeah but it's not that. I might head out. It's just that it won't feel like my office when you're here, regardless of whether we chat." (Researcher's diary)

This conversation between the researcher and her home-working boyfriend shows that her presence means that the house will not feel like his office any more. This indicates that social others can invoke a particular domain, which is why engagement with others is managed. The level of engagement with social others is not just about protecting work from home-related disruptions. Participants also demonstrate awareness of the effect that their work has on home others and attempt to curtail this.

> "Sometimes if somebody's at home, I work in my bedroom. It's just to let people be free and go around. It's not nice, you know, keeping one room only for me. It's the kitchen, so you know, if somebody needs a coffee or something and I'm always there, it's not nice." (Lisa, interview participant)

Lisa draws a socio-spatial boundary around her work and moves her work setup into her bedroom in order to "let people be free and go around". Consideration of the fact that her home-work might impair other people's enjoyment of their home space is shown. It also appears that she draws on norms of what is nice and what is not when you live and engage in a home practice with others. Hogging the kitchen clearly is not nice. Again, as before, individual decisions are made with regard to social others, which reflects Wenger's (1998) duality of individual and social. The next excerpt also highlights that social boundaries are about considering the role of others in home-work:

> "So it's good that the relationship makes me go, "Right, well I really should switch off because I wanna spend time with this person", you know, so you switch off from work. And it's a reasonable time to be switching off from work. You've done an 8-hour day, there's no harm in switching off. [...] I think there's positives to the relationship from the working from home, it does stop you from overworking, but there's negatives that sometimes it can be a distraction, too. Ahm, when maybe you should put in that extra hour because, you know, really it would benefit the rest of the week, and your time management of your week of working from home if you got that extra hour done. Ahm, and you don't do it because of the relationship. So it's a catch 22 and I don't think there's any right or wrong solution for it. But, I think it can put a little bit of extra strain sometimes on a relationship. Especially if you find you're still

> in work mode when you're supposed to not be in work mode. Or, if you find that ahm…yeah if you find it hard to switch off from work basically. Ah, hard to separate the two. And it can probably sometimes be hard on the relationship" (David, interview participant)

In this extract, David uses his relationship as a boundary enforcer to stop him from overworking. However, he also discusses the other side of the coin, which is that the relationship acts as a barrier to work when he ought to continue working. The extract portrays social boundaries as a constant dilemma of 'Should I work or should I spend time with home others?', which highlights the negotiation aspect of social types of boundaries; more on this in chapter 5. The decision that participants arrive at contributes to home or work being prioritised. The relationship between home and work thus necessitates further investigation, raising questions about which sphere tends to be prioritised by home-workers, or whether one sphere is dominant over the other at all.

*Prioritising Work or Home?*

Drawing social boundaries around work and home implies a moral judgment which prioritises one sphere over the other. So far, all the examples in the social boundaries section have been about navigating one's level of engagement with home others while working, as opposed to work others while at home. This could be due to a tendency of home-workers to make themselves more available for work demands than home demands (Tietze & Musson, 2003) because of the power differential between domains, as discussed in the review. It could also be that the presence of home others presents a bigger problem because they are physically near, whereas work others tend not to be around. However, rare examples of problems regarding social boundaries with work others do exist:

> "My clients can get to me six days a week. They can shag off on a Sunday and after six on weeknights. By then the kids are screaming and the missus is bending my ear, I

> haven't the energy to think outside the family box at that stage." (Newspaper column 2)
>
> "Sometimes I'd even be in bed in the morning, talking to customers, while I'm still in bed with my girlfriend. I'd often be called before technically work hours [...] and I would still be in bed and I would take their call and I would talk to them." (David, interview participant)

The boundaries with work-related others are not so much about physical presence as they are about invasion by phone, email, etc. In the first example, the columnist sets a clear socio-temporal boundary, specifying his availability for work others. In the second example, David draws on his official work hours, yet allows work others to access him beyond those boundaries while he is still in the home sphere. The two examples highlight different degrees of strength in each person's social boundaries. The strength of the boundary depends on the nature of the domain to be protected. In the first example, a boundary is drawn to protect family and children, while in the second example the boundary protects a relationship without children. Furthermore, it appears that home others can be influential in the home-worker's drawing of a social boundary with work others (e.g. "the kids are screaming and the missus is bending my ear"), meaning that home others might simply not allow engagement with work. In short, social boundaries are about negotiating the work-home interface with others and deciding on the level of interaction that is acceptable to those involved. What we do not understand yet is how exactly boundary invasions such as in David's example operate. How is it possible that a connection between home and work is established? What do boundary invasions reveal about the participants in each practice? Who is positioned as being in charge, who is the passive recipient, etc.? These questions necessitate further analysis and application of Wenger's concepts that explicitly deal with positioning and connections across practices.

## 4.4. Chapter Conclusion

*Interim Summary and Discussion*

The following table summarises the home-work drivers that emerged in this research along with the associated participants.

| **Driver** | **Participants** |
|---|---|
| Childcare | 3 interviewees: Malcolm, Dee, Simon; the online forum participants cited here; the columnist |
| Escape from the Office and its Associated Nuisances | 7 interviewees: Mark, Jake, Malcolm, Dee, Simon, Lisa, David; the columnist; BF in the researcher's diary |
| Work-Related Cost-Saving | 4 interviewees: Jake, Malcolm, David, Lisa; the online forum participants cited here; the columnist; BF in the researcher's diary |
| Avoiding Unemployment | 2 interviewees: Jake, Lisa |

Table 10: Overview of Drivers and Associated Participants

The table demonstrates that it is possible for multiple reasons to drive the home-work decision. It also shows that both push and pull factors can be at play for the same participant, indicating that there can be ambiguity in the decision: home-work is at once constructed as allure, as escape from the office, but is also the only alternative to unemployment (e.g. Jake). Maybe home-work has to be constructed as an allure in order to cope with the fact that one has no choice. The ambiguities in the home-work decision set the scene for my analyses below. In all aspects of home-work explored in the following chapters, such as boundary negotiations and positionings, participants report tensions and paradoxes. The reason for this could be that home-work is an inherently ambiguous phenomenon: one is at home, but not really available for home interaction.

The pull factor drivers of home-work that emerged in this research resonate with the literature on positive home-work consequences, showing how positive perceptions of home-work incentivise people to engage in this arrangement. For example, Sheehy (2008) lists home-

work reasons such as: organisational benefits including cost-saving, and individual incentives such as removing the need to commute, achieving work-life balance and job satisfaction. However, push factors have received less attention (Walker & Webster, 2004). The application of Wenger's 'levels of participation' to issues of control and agency is novel and unique to this research. It helps us to better understand the complexities underlying the decision to work from home. I have also shown how accounts of the home-work decision are socially situated and that the voices of others are implied when participants make sense of their home-work drivers.

The section 'types of boundaries' has discussed how participants draw temporal, spatial, psychological and social boundaries around their home and work domains. The following table summarises the types of boundaries and their different variations:

Types of Boundaries

a) Temporal Boundaries
    1.) Traditional 9-5 Structure
    2.) Mixing Traditional and Flexible Boundaries
    3.) Task-Based Approach
    4.) Interspersing Home and Work

b) Spatial Boundaries
    1.) Spatial Rigidity
    2.) Boundary Objects
    3.) Spatial Flexibility
    4.) External Influences

c) Psychological Boundaries and Transitions
    1.) 'Home and Work Modes'
    2.) Transitions

d) Social Boundaries
    1.) Issues of Accessibility
    2.) Minimising Effect of Home and Work on Each Other
    3.) Prioritising Work or Home?

Table 11: Overview of Types of Boundaries

The types of boundaries identified here are in line with existing research as far as the overarching categories temporal, spatial, psychological and social boundaries are concerned. However, the variations within each category of boundary have not been discussed in the same way before. Temporal boundaries have been analysed by Tietze & Musson (2003), Ahrentzen (1990), and Kylin & Karlsson (2008). Tietze & Musson (2003) have distinguished between clock-based and task-based approaches to time, thereby reflecting the segmentation-integration notion (Nippert-Eng, 1996). My research shows that beyond this dichotomy, there is also the possibility for home-workers to draw on both traditional clock-based and more flexible approaches. The accounts of participants have demonstrated that flexibility and rigidity are not opposites, but can actually co-exist. Further, I have shown that there is a difference between a temporal approach that is based on tasks and an approach that is completely interspersed, with the difference being that the former is more deliberate and planned. These findings have to be incorporated into my new approach to boundary theory, where one of the aims is to connect the different dimensions of boundaries to each other.

My findings also reflect some of the existing knowledge on spatial boundaries (e.g. Sullivan, 2000; Halford, 2006; Ahrentzen, 1990; Kylin & Karlsson, 2008). By showing that spatial boundaries can be rigid and flexible, a resemblance to segmentation-integration remains. However, participants' accounts revealed surprising attempts at spatial separation, which, if not physically attainable through separate rooms, they achieved by assigning specific functions to objects and thereby distinguishing between home and work. This resonates with Kreiner et al.'s (2009) notion of boundary incongruence. I have shown that boundary objects can create distinctions, not just connections, as proposed by Wenger (1998). The extension of the boundary object concept will be incorporated into my version of boundary theory. This

research has also highlighted that spatial boundaries are heavily dependent on resources and thus have to be analysed within the participant's social and material context. I will make this link explicit in chapter 5 by describing influences on boundary negotiation.

In regards to psychological boundaries, I confirmed research which proposed that boundaries achieve distinctions between work and home frames of mind (Clark, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996; Ahrentzen, 1990), and that they serve as acts of transition (Kylin & Karlsson, 2008). Participants' constructions demonstrated that they perceived a need for psychologically attaching meaning to particular times or places because this helped them to work from home. One very interesting finding was the case of a participant who established an imaginary boundary between home and work to help him cope with home-work. The possibility of being able to imagine the presence of others is novel. When this is related to the rather social approach in my research, the conclusion must be that individual sense-making processes and social participation are both at play in the negotiation of boundaries, and that the individual and the social are a duality (Wenger, 1998), not a dichotomy.

The findings on social boundaries reflect research that has conceptualised social boundaries as negotiating the level of engagement with and access to other-domain participants (Ahrentzen, 1990). Issues of priority between home and work were also evident in how social boundaries were set, in line with Tietze & Musson (2003). This sets the scene for the practice approach taken in this research and raises further questions over positionings in home and work practices. The category of social boundaries also echoes Lamont & Molnar (2002), who state that social boundaries operate at the level of social differences. This is evident when one sphere is prioritised over another and has consequences for what participants of a sphere can and cannot do.

Ahrentzen (1990) and Kylin & Karlsson (2008) have suggested that home-workers draw activity or behaviourally-based boundaries around home and work. In this research, a separate category of 'behavioural boundaries' did not emerge. When reviewing the other types of boundaries, it actually becomes apparent that each of them is activity-based, e.g. assigning a function to an object is an act, as is the decision to refrain from engaging with children while working, etc. This research therefore proposes a view of boundary setting as action and acknowledges that temporal, spatial, psychological and social boundaries are reliant upon the *act* of negotiation.

Throughout this chapter, I have indicated the various functions that boundaries serve. The setting of different kinds of boundaries between home and work helps participants to cope with the daily challenges that they encounter as they work from home. The boundary functions encountered in this research can be summarised as:

- Protecting home and work from each other
- Maintaining order between home and work
- Legitimising home-work
- Enabling work
- Enabling family life
- Creating separation between home and work
- Attaching meaning to times/places
- Inducing a work or home mode

The boundary functions identified here reflect similar propositions made by Felstead et al., 2005; Tietze & Musson, 2003; Sullivan, 2000; Mirchandani, 1998a; Cohen et al., 2009; Dart, 2006; Kompast & Wagner, 1998; Halford, 2005; and Kylin & Karlsson, 2008. Home-workers have a need for boundaries despite the fact that home and work are performed under one roof. Home-workers depend on different kinds of boundaries to fulfil important functions. The act of drawing boundaries has implications for how home and work as practices or domains are positioned towards each other and for how home-workers are positioned in each domain.

*Propositions*

This research is able to make a number of propositions about the relationships between the different types of boundaries, and about the functions that they serve. The categories of spatial, temporal, psychological and social boundaries do not necessarily exist independently of each other. Instead, the following relationships between categories emerged in the data:

*1.) Different types of boundaries overlap with each other.*

One type of boundary can co-exist with another type of boundary. At times, participants draw both spatial and temporal boundaries around work, as in the following example:

> "When I was in with the office ahm [...] the shomera (= garden studio) I would never go in there at weekends" (Dee, interview participant)

Work is temporally and spatially removed from Dee's home domain. The use of two types of boundaries strengthens the partition between home and work. Another frequent link is the coupling of relatively tangible boundaries, such as temporal or spatial boundaries, with more intangible boundaries such as psychological or social boundaries. For instance, recall the extracts where participants associated a particular mode (a psychological boundary) with a particular space, such as their desk or kitchen table (spatial boundaries). Similarly, social engagement with others (social boundaries) was often guided by particular timeframes (temporal boundaries). This leads to the proposition that intangible boundaries are supported by more tangible boundaries (except in the case of Jake who constructed imaginary boundaries). As such, my findings confirm observations made by Nippert-Eng (1996), Sullivan (2000) and Kylin & Karlsson (2008) in regards to mental boundaries being dependent on physical boundaries. However, it has been shown here that social boundaries operate in a similar manner: they are also dependent on tangible boundaries.

*2.) Boundaries can compensate for each other.*

Another relationship between different categories of boundaries that emerged was the ability of a strong boundary on one dimension to compensate for a weak boundary on another dimension. This was evident within and between different types of boundaries. For instance, in relation to spatial boundaries, a lack of spatial separation between home and work (through an office space) was often compensated by defining particular objects as home or work objects only. In regards to different types of boundaries, it was found that e.g. temporal-psychological boundaries can compensate for a lack of spatial separation between home and work, as in the following example:

> "I can work from the sofa, the armchair, my bed, whatever. [...] For me, I can create that situation in my mind with timings. From time to – from this time to this time, ok, I'm in office." (Lisa, interview participant)

This participant does not have a separate office and instead is spatially very flexible. She compensates for the lack of office by setting strong temporal boundaries; which in turn activates a work mindset. This shows that weak and strong boundaries can be drawn at the same time, and that boundaries need not be strong in all dimensions in order for participants to distinguish between home and work. The findings that boundaries compensate for each other corroborates Cohen's (2008) notion of boundary multidimensionality, where spatial and temporal boundaries can be shifted and replaced by other boundaries.

*3.) Boundaries are fluid and changeable in nature.*

Despite the fact that different categories of boundaries can be identified, they are not irrevocable choices that stay stagnant forever. Boundaries are fluid and constantly renegotiated, depending on the situation and the home-worker's circumstances. The following example from the perspective of a home-working spouse clarifies this:

> "At times, I accept his requests and try to be quiet around the kitchen. Other times I just don't see why his work should be more important than my breakfast in MY home. Depends on my mood I guess and on how mad he gets if I ignore him." (Researcher's diary)

The notion of fluidity is important because it means that the boundary configurations reported above will not stay the same way forever. Instead, it becomes impossible to state with certainty that participants draw unmovable boundaries. Even if they wanted to, the example here shows that home others can interfere with these plans, which emphasises that boundaries are embedded in social context, as opposed to individual preference. Boundary fluidity resonates with propositions made by Musson & Tietze (2004), Golden & Geisler (2007) and Felstead et al. (2005). Felstead et al. (2005) aptly construct boundary work as a daily pursuit:

> *"Through their daily decisions, workers generate a kaleidoscope of different spaces and times in which they work, which they are responsible for assembling, repairing and reassembling over time"* (178).

The notion of boundaries as assembled and re-assembled contrasts previous approaches to boundary theory such as Nippert-Eng (1996), which portrayed people as having a relatively stable preference for integrating or separating their home and work lives. Such an approach neglects the context of the home and work practices within which people operate. It fails to account for the constant possibility of change and the ambivalences in how people draw simultaneously weak and strong boundaries. Instead, the version of boundary theory that is formulated towards the end of this thesis will attempt to situate boundaries within a complex web of personal, situational, and social influences, with boundaries being viewed as flexible strategies that people use in their daily attempts to manage the home-work interface. By adopting a practice theory stance towards boundary theory, I can connect the individual home-worker with his or her surroundings and explore how the home-worker is situated within each practice and how links between practices are established.

*Conclusion*

The chapter has highlighted some of the drivers of home-work that entice participants to work from home (pull factors: childcare, escape from the office and its associated nuisances), while others leave them with little choice (push factors: work-related cost saving, avoiding unemployment). I have suggested a link between drivers and the failure and success of home-work. There is also potential for drivers to interact and for home-work to be constructed both as an allure and as the only alternative. I have also shown how home-work decisions are informed by the voices of others.

This chapter showed that home-workers construct temporal, spatial, psychological and social boundaries between their home and work domains. Within these kinds of boundaries, strong and flexible kinds of boundaries were evident, but also co-existed. It emerged that different kinds of boundaries are not constant, that they overlap with each other at times and even compensate for each other, which is captured by the term 'multidimensionality'.

This chapter has proposed elements that have to be incorporated into a new version of boundary theory and has begun to apply Wenger's practice concepts, in doing so raising issues surrounding positionings that require further exploration. The 'why' and 'what' aspects of boundaries addressed in this chapter needed to be understood before moving on the answering the question 'How do people who work from home negotiate the boundaries between their home and work practices?', as they underpin the negotiations that home-workers engage in. The next chapter investigates boundary negotiation strategies and supplements this with a discussion of the various influences on negotiation, thereby further embedding negotiation in its context.

# Chapter 5

# The Negotiation of Home-Work Boundaries: The 'How'

## 5.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the boundary negotiation strategies that home-workers engage in when managing the interface between home and work. Negotiation occurs within the home-workers' work and home contexts. These contexts constrain the kinds of negotiations that are available to home-workers. I will discuss boundary negotiation contexts before delving into negotiation strategies.

## 5.2. Boundary Negotiation Contexts

Boundaries are created by home-workers in conjunction with the participants of their surrounding home and work practices. This leaves the boundary negotiation process open to a range of important contributing factors, among them a) work-related aspects, b) home-related aspects, and c) other aspects. These are briefly outlined below and need to be understood before delving into the kinds of negotiation strategies that home-workers adopt, as they constrain the strategies that are available to home-workers.

### 5.2.1. Work-Related Aspects

Work-related factors have a bearing on how boundaries are negotiated. Factors such as employment category (self-employed/freelancing vs. employed) and occupation (e.g. academic, sales executive) are implied boundary setting. Self-employed home-workers experience greater autonomy in boundary setting than their employed peers, and employment categories, such as freelancing, exert pressures on workers to use flexible boundaries in order to overwork.

*Employment Type*

The participant in the following example speculates that the presence of children during working hours would not be acceptable for an employed home-worker, yet in his case it is appropriate because he is self-employed.

> "It is of course different if you're working from home for a company. If you're an employee, then I think you'd obviously have to have – if they were to know that you have your three kids floating around the place when you're working that wouldn't be good" (Malcolm, interview participant)

Following his line of reasoning, then, boundary blurring is more acceptable for people who are self-employed than for people who are employed. This holds true for some participants, e.g. Dee who is in full-time employment and hires a childminder to look after her kids while she works from home. However, the opposite is also represented amongst the sample: Simon is employed, yet uses his home-working day to simultaneously work and look after his daughter. There is an important difference between Dee and Simon that comes into their boundary setting. Dee is based mostly at home, while Simon only works from home for one day a week. Therefore, it is not just employment category that is influential. Other factors, such as the exact *home-working arrangement*, interfere. Dee also reported that home-working is a formalised arrangement within her company, which is why she treats it very much the same way as an office-based job, whilst Simon came to an informal, individualised agreement with his superiors. So *the status of home-work within a company* is another factor.

*Freelancing*

Freelancing or self-employment is an occupational umbrella category that describes nearly half of the participants. Some of these participants work for themselves, some are paid on a task-basis, and some are employed, but do not have explicit contractual arrangements.

Freelancing exhibits what Warhurst et al. (2008) call 'volatile employment patterns': workers experience highs and lows in their demand and experience greater levels of insecurity than many employed workers. Insecurity exerts pressure on freelancers to blur the boundaries between home and work in favour of work. The financial pressure of freelancing means that participants are likely to work whenever possible and thereby let work invade their home sphere.

> "But the salary is a big issue. It's a joke because I don't have paid holidays, I don't have any health insurance, I don't have anything. So it's just the salary, and that's it. So with that salary, I have to manage everything and if I take one day off, I don't get any money [...] But once you get sick, ah, from November, I took some holidays but I lost one full week of salary, and I never took a day off when I was sick or I was feeling bad. That is a problem [...] But yeah, in a way you feel, yeah you feel guilty. It's like, ok, whatever, even if you have fever, you can still type on your keyboard" (Lisa, interview participant)

> "Yeah because working for someone else is child's play. You just go, you do what you're told and on a Monday, you know what you're gonna get on a Friday. You know how much money you're gonna get. Whereas this, Euromillions stuff, like, you know?" (Jake, interview participant)

These examples highlight that freelancing is financially insecure and that it lacks the benefits that salaried jobs provide, making it difficult to take time off. Freelancers are therefore likely to experience loose work boundaries – work can become pervasive and all-consuming – leaving little time for the home domain. They are likely to experience autonomy because they tend to be in charge of their own schedules; however, the pressure of financial insecurity can be so great that they are at the mercy of clients and will overwork to deliver a project.

*Professional work*

All of the participants of this study engage in professional work, as opposed to blue-collar work. Professional work tends to be intangible and mobile (Warhurst et al., 2008). Most of the participants report that all they need to do their work is a laptop, phone and internet

connection. Unlike blue-collar workers who might depend on their equipment to be able to work and physically cannot bring a building site home, for example, the participants in this research are able to access their work anytime, anywhere. Naturally, this facilitates a blurring of boundaries and makes it easier for home and work to overlap.

> "It's not like you drive away from the company and you're done. That feeling is gone completely, because effectively, in three minutes you're logged into the company network and really, you can continue working." (Simon, interview participant)

Many professional jobs rely primarily on the most portable activity of them all, thinking, which is not bound by time or place. For certain professional occupations, such as academia, it can even be suggested that professional life is an extension of private life and vice versa. If academia is a calling, a way of life, and not just a job, then of course this contributes to a blurring of the boundaries between home and work. Mark, for example, claimed that there is no difference between the person he is at work and at home. He also states "there's always an element of work-home interface with academia". This suggests that the home-work occupation one chooses has a bearing on the boundaries between home and work that can be negotiated.

### 5.2.2. Home-Related Aspects

The home-related factors that shape the processes of boundary negotiation include resources, children and their ages, and relationships between the home-worker and others involved.

*Resources*

As previously explained, participants' spatial boundaries change over time, depending on their living situation and resources. In some of the houses that they have lived in, a

designated office space has been available for participants, which of course leads to different boundary configurations and negotiations than having no office space. For example, Dee has always had a separate office, but depending on the house, it has varied from a garden shed, to a downstairs study, to an upstairs bedroom. David, in contrast, despite having moved apartments while working from home, has never had a separate office. For him, the temptation into leisure therefore seems to be more salient. Spatial resources and other types of resources, such as having a childminder, are tied up with financial considerations. Some participants can afford a childminder and are able to work without interruptions, while others have to use home-work as an alternative to childcare. Resources, both material and financial, are therefore crucial in the negotiation of boundaries.

*Children and their Ages*

Parents appear to be more likely to intersperse their workday with work and domestic duties than non-parents. The presence of children can exert particular boundary pressures because when children are young, the concept of 'do not disturb' is alien to them. As a result, it can be difficult to maintain strong boundaries around work. Participants who are parents agree that home-work gets easier as kids get older.

> "You couldn't work from with small smaller kids. It's easier when they get older, but ahm at that stage in time there was only two [...] and you couldn't feasibly work in around them." (Dee, interview participant)

> "Another few years and I won't be able to get them out of bed, never mind worrying about them being outside and making noise!!!!" (Maya, online discussion 1)

The fact that children and their ages are influential in boundary setting contributes to the understanding that boundaries change over time, highlighting boundary fluidity, an element of my version of boundary theory. The role of participants' domestic circumstances is also emphasised in its importance in shaping home-work boundaries.

*Relationships*

Home-workers negotiate boundaries differently depending on who they negotiate with. The relationship between negotiators appears to be crucial. The following is an example of boundary negotiation between spouses:

> "When I had finished up today, I started pottering around in the kitchen and putting a few things away. I heard an imploring "Baby!" – so I turned around and BF looked at me, a mixture between pleading and exasperation. I shouted,
>
> "What?!"
>
> "I'm not finished yet so would you mind?"
>
> I sighed and continued to wash a few dishes, thinking "Does he not realise I'm washing dishes – it's not like I'm pottering around and making noise for the sake of it or for my pleasure". So I said,
>
> "Give me two minutes and I'll sit down. It's not that loud, though!"
>
> "I know I just want you to be aware I'm not done yet!" (Researcher's diary)

This example refers to a discussion between a home-worker and his partner (the researcher), where he is annoyed with her for making noise in his workspace, while she feels that his workspace is also her living space. Negotiations between spouses appear to be a relatively open discussion of give and take (though some thoughts are left unsaid), where participants are at ease with differences of opinion. The exclamations "Baby!" and "What?!" show that spouses possibly get more easily annoyed with each other than negotiators who know each other less well. Negotiations between family members are similarly frank, e.g. recall the example of Dee who would threaten her children with having to go to crèche. A different way of negotiating was observed in Lisa's example (in 'social boundaries' – chapter 4). She shares her house with flatmates and relies on social norms in determining which boundaries are acceptable, as opposed to openly bartering with flatmates. She established a norm of 'it's not nice to hog the kitchen' and draws spatial boundaries based on this. However, there is no actual negotiation taking place with flatmates, perhaps indicating that they have a relationship

where one is pleasant with each other and attempts to avoid arguments. This implies that the relationship between the people involved shapes how boundaries are co-created. A link between the strategies participants use for negotiating boundaries and their contexts becomes apparent.

### 5.2.3. Other Aspects

*The Nature of the Activity that is to be Protected*

It emerged that participants vary the strength of their boundaries depending on the nature of the activity that is to be protected by the boundary. Some work activities need to be strongly guarded against home interruptions, while other activities can tolerate some degree of overlap. In the following example, Dee strongly protects formal work activities, such as teleconferences or meetings, from interruptions by her children and their friends.

> "Because I had my office in the garden, you couldn't have children running around in the garden ahm so that's the same rules here. Saying "Look, you can go out but you can't have your friends in until - I can say look after five" and then by five or so – because you'd rarely I mean if I stay working here beyond five it's just me usually working on stuff, or maybe one of my colleagues who I work with ah might be on the phone, but I'd rarely have meetings, telephone meetings or calls or anything after five. Then it's just I don't mind if they have a pal here. It's just if I had a teleconference or a meeting, you know, I can't." (Dee, interview participant)

Her boundary loosens when formal work activities are over and she is only working by herself or with a colleague. Those routine work activities are less strongly guarded and children's noises are tolerated. Similarly, the next example shows that while Lisa carefully monitors the threat of home distractions, the activity of eating does not appear to qualify as boundary breaking.

> "So I wake up very early, around 7, I do my exercise, and then usually, at 8, I'm online and I work till 1. One hour of break, which is never a break because the boss is online. So I'm eating with one hand and with the other hand I'm typing. Ahm, yeah, and then I can work till 5 or 6 in the afternoon" (Lisa, interview participant)

Lisa sets strong temporal boundaries to cope with the risk of distraction. Home and work are temporally separated. She works from 8 am until 5 pm and engages in leisure pursuits before and after work. However, during her lunch break she allows for home and work to be merged. She states "I'm eating with one hand and with the other hand I'm typing". Perhaps eating does not pose a major threat to work activities. These examples highlight that the strength of participants' boundaries is highly changeable, depending on the activity that is to be protected. However, these two examples also situate negotiations within a social context: Lisa blurs her boundaries because her boss is online while she takes a lunch break and Dee blurs boundaries between home and work only if the work person involved is a trusted colleague. This highlights the complexity of different factors that influence boundary negotiations.

Section 5.2. has situated boundary negotiations within the home-workers' social contexts, thereby demonstrating the myriad of influences that shape boundaries, including home and work-related factors. The different aspects discussed here needed to be understood before examining negotiation strategies in more detail, because negotiations are situated in the home-workers' work and home practices.

## 5.3. Boundary Negotiation Strategies

In this section, the strategies that participants use for establishing boundaries will be discussed. The strategies reported here move beyond notions of integration and segmentation (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Instead, they are about the ways in which participants arrive at home-work boundaries in collaboration with their social others. As mentioned before, the fact that boundaries are co- created does not necessarily mean that I investigate all actors involved in

negotiation. Instead, I primarily base my findings on the home-workers' accounts, where the voices of others are reproduced.

The following patterns of negotiation were observed among participants: 1.) Home-work boundaries as joint effort, 2.) Appropriating flexibility. The first strategy comprises explicit examples of negotiation with social others; while the second strategy is more about coping with the proximity of home and work. The strategies entail varying degrees of agency, which reflects the debate raised in the literature about home-workers' levels of control over their boundaries. At times, participants are reactive; such as when they respond to demands. Other times, they are pro-active agents trying to reach boundary agreements with their spouses. Participants are neither individual agents nor completely passive: even within accounts, participants position themselves ambiguously depending on circumstances. It is possible to be both pro-active and reactive, depending on the particular negotiation. In order to shed light on this ambiguity, I will use Wenger's concept of levels of participation and explore how home-workers position themselves in regards to the home and work discourses.

### 5.3.1. Home-Work Boundaries as Joint Effort

For many home-workers, the boundaries between work and home are arrived at not so much by selecting preferences for the ordering of home and work, but by negotiating solutions with their social others that accommodate each other's needs. Home-workers arrive at solutions by engaging in negotiations that resemble a give-and-take, or bartering approach, where home-workers and others trade time and space.

Home-working parents and their spouses often have the shared aim of meeting both home and work demands in a satisfactory manner. In order to achieve this aim, they fit work and

childcare around each other in any way possible. Often, one parent works while the other minds the children. This is swopped according to demands. Note that this does not necessarily become a peaceful arrangement, as negotiators can have differing expectations about how to achieve their work and family aims.

> "My hubbie is a carpenter, and the biggest hurdle is he tends to be in no big rush to come home and let me into the office, due to the fact that I work from home. If he had to be back at a certain time to let me out to a job it would be different. Therefore I am presently doing up a timetable, to give both of us the discipline to say, ok your working those hours, but then you have to be back by this time, as that is MY allocated hours for my business. If you really cant make it one day, that you have to make up those hours another time!!!! I just cant juggle 101 things at a time like some, I need to be able to work for a certain number of hours without interruption, so it needs to be a joint effort." (Cara, online discussion 1)

Cara stresses her need for uninterrupted work time, in which her husband minds their children, yet her husband is "in no rush" to comply with this. There is a feeling that she has to fight for her working hours. In order to ensure that home and work duties become a "joint effort", she resolves to impose a timetable, which would formalise temporal boundaries. The timetable she proposes follows the give-and-take approach, because she mentions trading hours with her husband and having to make up any hours that they miss. Her situation also indicates that home-work is not taken as seriously as 'proper' work, judging by the fact that her husband does not come home at a certain time to enable her work. Cara's example shows that it is necessary to investigate how a person is positioned in the home or work domain, because it does not seem that she is very influential at home, which could be the reason why her husband does not take her demands seriously. It is interesting that, as in many other participants' examples, Cara voices her husband's perspective. She also prepares herself for a conversation that she wants to have with him, trying out the words she wants to direct at him. This gives an insight into their relationship dynamic, albeit constructed by one person. If one was to ask for the husband's opinion, a different interpretation of their relationship might well emerge. However, it would not be any more objective, as understood by the social

constructionist underpinnings of my research. It is therefore sufficient to rely on a one-sided view of their relationship because no account can ever tell 'the truth'. The following is another example of how a couple negotiate the interface of work and childcare duties, as told by the home-worker:

> "Twice a week my wife takes a half day so I can have those afternoons to work. Yesterday, she assured me she was dragging the monsters to a friend's house so there would be silence in the house for the afternoon. Great. But there's a kink in her plan and she arrives in to tell me her friend has builders in. Ah well, no harm done. 'So I've invited Niamh and Clare here instead,' she says. 'What? With the kids?' 'Yeah, don't worry just keep the door into your office closed.' Seven kids under the age of seven running screaming round my gaff as their mothers sit sipping coffee and ignoring them while I try to concentrate with a sheet of plyboard separating me from the carnage. No problem. No problem except I'm writing this today instead of yesterday, and what I was due to focus on today is shifted to tomorrow. There is a direct financial implication to their coffee." (Newspaper column 3)

Both the home-worker and his wife take time out of their working day to mind their kids. Her non-work enables his work and vice versa, and it seems that they have agreed upon temporal boundaries. However, an unforeseen circumstance arises, which makes the wife disrespect the boundary and bring children and friends into the house while the home-worker is working. This shows that boundary negotiation in home-work can move swiftly from a settled agreement to one person undermining a boundary. What becomes apparent is that for parents in particular, boundaries are quite unstable and can change quickly, depending on childcare circumstances. It is important to understand that even though I have labelled this negotiation strategy 'joint effort', equality between negotiators is not implied. In fact, both of the examples quoted in this section so far show some evidence of the home-workers being undermined by their partners. This suggests that home-workers are positioned as less influential than their non-home-working partners in the home domain, which necessitates further investigation of the concepts of core and peripheral membership (Wenger, 1998). I aim to achieve this in the next chapter, where I focus on how home-workers are positioned in regards to home and work.

Another important issue for further analysis that is highlighted by the category 'home-work boundaries as joint effort' is that of home as a practice. I propose that in the above examples, home-workers and their partners constitute a community of practice, where they engage with one another, have similar aims (ensuring home and work duties are fulfilled) – though they disagree on how to achieve the aim, and share their resources and skills to achieve this mutual aim. According to Wenger (1998), these criteria transform disjointed actions into a practice. In chapter 7, I will explore whether it is appropriate to conceptualise the different home and work domains that home-workers inhabit as practices in more detail.

So far, in this section, I have provided examples of home-working parents and their spouses jointly negotiating boundaries. However, non-parents engage in similar strategies with their home others. Again, the joint aim appears to be that both negotiators' home and work needs are met, which is difficult if one party uses space for home concerns, while the other party uses space for work tasks. In order to meet the joint aim, negotiators communicate their expectations to one another. The following example shows how the home-worker initiates a boundary, which is then enforced by his spouse.

> "Sometimes she'd be annoyed by it (my work). Ahm, you know, I usually, like she wouldn't be able to come in obviously and sit down, relax and have a cup of tea and switch on the telly and have a chat. Ahm, so often times, it was, she would go out and maybe have a long shower or a bath for herself, and, you know, maybe relax and unwind from her own day. Read a magazine in the bedroom or whatever and then come back into me and see if I was finished half an hour, an hour later, you know. Ahm, a lot of times, I'd tell her, I'd set myself a deadline, that "Look, I'll be finished in half an hour, I'll be finished in an hour". And once she'd know that she'd go off and leave me alone for that half an hour or hour and go off into another room and do other things then, you know, she'd come in and say "Right, that's it, put away the work". And I would, you know." (David, interview participant)

While David's spouse does not appear to be happy with the presence of work in her home, as it inhibits her enjoyment of the house as a home, she accepts it because it is a temporal presence that is bounded. While David seems to be the one driving the boundary negotiation, it does become apparent that his spouse is a powerful boundary enforcer and is able to hold

him to his temporal boundaries. In his account, David creates a home practice, which he and his spouse inhabit. They mutually engage with each other in order to achieve their shared aim of accommodating both their needs and draw on a familiar repertoire of negotiation. While David's account is technically one-sided, he does express the perspective of his spouse on home-work and thus constructs a fuller picture of negotiation.

The next example is similar in that it represents a couple bartering over temporal boundaries. However, in this case it is the spouse who initiates temporal boundaries in order for the couple to have more personal time. There are two extracts relating to this couple's negotiations. In the first one, the home-worker accepts the spouse's boundary suggestion, while in the second one he "tosses out" a schedule that his spouse proposed.

> "She…we set aside a night of the week where we have three hours on a Thursday evening to talk about wedding stuff. Ahm it's a year and a half away and we thought we were dropping the ball as regards to organisation ahm and it was her idea to put Sunday off limits. Not that I would have been doing a great deal on a Sunday anyway it was just that occasionally I would if, again, something on the task list wasn't finished, I'd say "Look I'm going in to do some work on the computer" and I would be in there for a couple of hours. So, it would have been on her initiative that that was arranged, but ahm I'm the better for it I think. And, it's with negotiation as much as anything else that it's organised (Mark, interview participant)

It is interesting that while it was his spouse who initiated the temporal boundary around work, Mark constructs it as a joint decision ("she...we set aside a night of the week") and except for the first slip-up, narrates the extract in the personal pronoun 'we'. This constructs their boundary setting as a joint effort. In doing so, he refrains from positioning himself as the fiancé who simply does what she tells him to do. His claim that he did not do much work on a Sunday anyway contributes to the positioning, as does the statement "I'm the better for it". His positioning means that he can accept the boundary without losing face. In the next example, however, Mark rejects his spouse's boundary attempt.

> "P: I mean, Clarissa before, she did make this ah tremendous timetable effort to try and get me to…she scheduled it. I must have had too much free time down here [...] Well like she just thought it would be…she was concerned about the

amount of work that was being done so she thought that if she could schedule it into, say, three to four hour blocks [...] But ahm, either way, it didn't work and that was tossed after about a week. I mean I keep to my own schedule. I know what needs to be done [...]

I: So how was she about the fact that you tossed out the plan?

P: She kind of expected it. I mean, it was always never gonna be a start. Well, like, she knew it and she knew the way I work and she's known me for long enough now to know that that wasn't gonna work. But it was a worthy effort. You know (Laughter)…" (Mark, interview participant)

In both examples Mark assumes knowledge of Clarissa's intention and therefore supplements his account of their negotiations with her perspective. The second extract is a very interesting example of a boundary negotiation that entails a boundary proposition on the part of Clarissa and a rejection on Mark's part. While it was evident in the previous example that Clarissa has a powerful influence on his boundaries when it suits him, in this example he asserts autonomy and refuses to let her schedule his work. Clarissa's boundary attempts arise from her concern "about the amount of work that was being done". The fact that the schedule was discarded after a week indicates that he did make an effort to comply with her boundary requests. However, he did toss out the schedule, claiming "I keep to my own schedule. I know what needs to be done", thereby demonstrating his independence. This is further underscored by the extreme case formulation "it was always never gonna be a start". The example highlights that couples can sometimes reach a compromise that suits both; other times boundary suggestions are rejected.

Boundary suggestions are rejected by home-workers (as above) and home others alike. Note the following excerpt, where bartering does take place, but towards the end of the excerpt a non-negotiable boundary is set by the spouse.

"So I suggested that he work from the dinner table, to which he replied that he would love that. However, I did stress that I do not want him to keep his work things on the dinner table at night. Instead, I suggested packing them away at night and unpacking them every morning. This feels like too much hassle for him. At the moment, his kitchen table in the old apartment is work space only. No eating is done on that table. However, for me there is no way that my dinner table is going to be taken up by work

> and that work is going to be prioritised over us having a nice sit-down dinner together" (Researcher's diary)

The spouse suggests a spatial-temporal boundary. The home-worker agrees with the spatial, but not the temporal suggestion. However, the spouse is definite regarding her boundary ("there is no way") and even assumes possession of the dinner table by referring to it as "my table". A similarly strict boundary is set by a home-related other in the following example. Mark, who was quoted above, recalls a previous home-work situation where he was working in a bedroom that he shared with his brother:

> "Well I mean with the PhD you're schooled. We ahm I had set up a rudimentary home office set up in back at home when I when it was in my bedroom and I had time constraints, too, as in my brother would not allow me continue work into the wee hours if you need to go to bed, cos we were sharing a room" (Mark, interview participant)

Again, the home-related other is definite about his boundary around work: "would not allow me [to] continue work". There is little room for negotiation; Mark's brother strictly enforces a temporal boundary, which leaves Mark positioned as the passive recipient of a boundary configuration. The negotiation strategy of 'joint effort', where home-workers and others barter over home-work boundaries, highlights interesting dynamics of power and influence. Home-workers are influential at times, which means that they take up the subject position of a core participant (Wenger, 1998) in their home practice. Other times, home others are influential and in charge of boundaries, which positions them at the core and home-workers at the periphery of the home practice. This ambiguity receives further attention in the next chapter.

The current section relates back to the discussion of social boundaries in the previous chapter, where I remarked that social boundaries were drawn mostly with home others, not work others. Similarly, strategies of boundary negotiation are predominantly evident between home-workers and domestic others. The reason for this could be that home-workers make themselves more available for work demands than for home demands (Tietze & Musson,

2003) because of the power differential between domains, and therefore do not argue over their boundaries with work others. It could also be that the presence of home others presents more of a problem for home-workers because they are physically near, thus resulting in boundary negotiations. Similarly, the presence of work could be problematic for home others, necessitating negotiations. However, boundary issues are not as evident in the work domain that the home-worker participates in. The reason for this asymmetry could be the fact that home-work is located in the home domain. It stands to reason that the immediate environment of home-work provides the site for negotiations. Lastly, in terms of positioning, it could be that home-workers are peripheral, remote, and invisible in the work domain, which has status implications and reduces their bargaining power in work negotiations. Home-workers have more influence to shape negotiations at home than at work. This highlights that the differing levels of participation in home and work practices are worth investigating.

Up to now, the boundary strategy of joint effort described how home-workers negotiate with their home others in order to achieve work-home boundaries that are acceptable to all involved. The next section will focus on flexibility as a strategy. I will ask how home-workers cope with flexibility, how they conceptualise and account for flexibility (e.g. as a benefit or threat), and how they appropriate the flexible boundaries that are possible in home-work in order to negotiate boundaries.

### 5.3.2. Appropriating Flexibility

The flexibility to alter the places and times of work can be used as a strategy to reconfigure home-work boundaries and combine work and caring duties (Ahrentzen, 1990). However, the use of flexibility can have unintended consequences: work can encroach on family time

(Russell et al., 2009) and flexibility can lead to work intensification (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). This ambiguity was evident in participants' accounts. I will discuss how participants construct the strategy of flexibility as a benefit and a threat. I will demonstrate that flexibility is used predominantly as a strategy that enables overwork. I will discuss the ways in which home-workers account for the appropriation of flexibility, how this positions them, and conclude the section by questioning whether flexibility is an opportunity for work-life balance.

*Flexibility as a Benefit*

The close proximity of home and work, coupled with benefits such as being in charge of how one works, means that many home-workers are able to practice flexibility in regards to the times and places of work and non-work. The participants of this research are professional workers, who mostly just need a laptop and a phone to conduct their work. This implies that their work can be performed anywhere, and often at any time. The portability of professional work can be a benefit because it allows home-workers to renegotiate the times and places of work in a way that suits them. Since for many home-workers it is the output of their work that is important rather than their schedule, many participants organise work flexibly:

> "Ahm…well one good thing is that I can work from any place, which is ok. It's not that I'm using this option so much. Ah, but for example, Sunday I'm going back home, so I can travel on Sunday and Monday I can be online again, but I will be in my Mum's kitchen instead of this kitchen. (Laughter) So this is ok." (Lisa, interview participant)

This extract shows that working from home allows people to rearrange the times and places of work. Home-work is constructed as more flexible than office work and as allowing for personal activities to be fitted into the workday, possibly because one is at home already. Flexibility as a benefit is reiterated by Furnham (2006), Felstead et al. (2002), Hill et al.

(2003), Kelliher & Anderson (2008), and Russell et al. (2009). However, flexibility as a strategy can pose threats, because flexible boundaries do not guard against the temptation to not work at all or conversely to work at all hours.

*Flexibility as a Threat*

The flexibility to reconfigure the times and places of work situates issues of boundary blurring and breaking at centre stage. While flexibility is used as a strategy that gives home-workers more freedom in regards to when, where and how they work, it disturbs the clear boundaries associated with traditional forms of work. Boundaries provide us with the ontological security of knowing when we are at work and when we are at home. The flexibility in home-work means that any time or space becomes available for work and home. The lack of pre-determined boundaries can result in one sphere becoming dominant over the other. This can result in home-workers succumbing to leisure and procrastination, or it can lead to a vicious cycle of always being available for work. Instead of participating in both spheres equally, one sphere can become dominant for home-workers. For the home-workers in this study, home or leisure threatens to become dominant at times and lures them into non-work. However, a more dangerous threat is work becoming a constant presence in their lives and preventing any relaxation or family time from taking place, echoing Russell et al. (2009) and Kelliher & Anderson (2010). The aim of this section is to move beyond superficial accounts of flexible boundaries and instead explore how home-workers negotiate the subtleties, challenges, and ambiguities that occur as they exercise flexibility.

*Home as a Threat to Work*

Home activities can become all-consuming and prevent home-workers from working. Flexibility allows home-workers to participate actively in the home domain, while neglecting participation in their work practice. The following excerpts highlight the potential for temptation into home or leisure:

> "You'd just go "Oh, I'll check my emails now" and then next thing "Oh while I'm on, I'll check my facebook", you know. "Oh sure, I might as well check the news" [...] Yeah, and next thing you know, 2 hours have gone and you've done absolutely no work…" (Jake, interview participant)

> "So I ended up spending more and more time at home. And the more and more time I spent at home, the less motivated I got. And the lazier I got. And the more I started saying to myself, while sitting staring at my computer screen, "Ah sure I'll just put on the kettle and have another cup of tea". And then, before you know it, that's half an hour having a cup of tea and switching on the television just to see what the weather forecast and the news is and accidentally switching over to Dr. Phil and watching that for half an hour, because you know, they have women talking about dating other women and leaving their husbands. So you leave that on for half an hour. Ah yeah and before you know it, it's four o'clock in the afternoon and you've got fuck all work done and it's not good." (David, interview participant)

It is evident here that the proximity of work and home, particularly the availability of leisure during the workday, becomes a problem for participants. Home activities are portrayed as a temptation that threatens their work productivity. Home activities are constructed as a distraction that almost creeps up on participants and catches them unawares ("next thing you know", Jake; "accidentally", "before you know it", David). Home activities sneakily expand into work time. It is plausible that distractions into home activities are constructed as accidental because it is safer to do so, rather than admit that one unmotivated to engage in work. After all, the 'ideal worker' (Halford, 2006; Gambles et al., 2006) is fully committed to work. Deviation from the 'ideal worker' norm is more acceptable if one is not personally to blame – instead, it is safer to claim that it was an accident. Home activities are constructed as easier than and preferable to work duties, as evidenced by accounts that participants lose themselves in leisure and forget to keep track of time. This is possibly because of the nature

of the home activities that are listed as temptations: having tea, watching TV, online activity, having lunch, etc. Home seems to lure participants away from work if the specific home activities are easier than work duties. In the above quotes, home and work are expressed dichotomously. Home activities are easy and tempting, while work is something that requires participants' discipline. So despite the fact that home and work are flexibly bounded, the two domains are constructed as opposites. This shows that flexible boundaries do not necessarily reconfigure the relationship between work and home. The configuration of home and work is an issue to be considered for later discussion as it ties in with the 'positionings' theme. The next extract also mentions the lure of home activities. When people work from home, domestic tasks that remain to be done are visible, whereas if people are away from home, they can forget about these tasks for a while.

> "One day last week I actually got a whole product range finally priced and agreed on. Do I continue on to the next product range? Ooh Noo!! I go and cut the grass and paint the walls outside. They look great now, mind you, but what was I thinking??!! Thankfully I haven't yet felt the lure of Oprah or Jeremy Kyle otherwise I'd be completely stuffed! Determined to get back to the way I was with my little lists; stay in the office upstairs til 5pm [...] and weekends are sacrosanct as "family time" with perhaps a chat over Sunday tea about how the business is going & where to next. I absolutely have to avoid housework ... I have a habit of finding other things that need cleaning and before I know it, a quick hoover turns into a scrub 3 hours later!!! I'm off now to feed the cats ... and do the dishes ... and put the laundry on ... oh no, not again!" (Fiona, online discussion 3)

In this example, the participant also portrays home temptation as an accident ("before I know it"). However, she does take responsibility for the temptation ("what was I thinking??!!") and is self-deprecating. What is interesting is Fiona's awareness that boundaries help to prevent temptation into one domain, displayed when she makes plans for scheduling her work. She constructs family time as "sacrosanct", implying that family is privileged over work, but also that family needs to be protected from work. This highlights the potential for flexibility to become all-consuming not just in the direction of home, but also in the direction of work.

*Work as a Threat to Home*

The participants of this research, because their home and work practices are co-located and flexibly bounded, can easily be tempted into a mental zone where work is always available. Since work is no longer restricted to a physical office, it becomes available at any time, leading to many home-workers overworking.

> "Now there's a danger in working from home. You can work on a bit [...] because you don't have to go now, you're not rushing for trains or whatever" (Dee, interview participant)

> "I have to say that I do a lot of work from home anyway. That means not just on that day. And the possibility to work from home is of course also a temptation to just quickly turn on the computer, just have another look, just quickly finish this or that [...] And ahm, sometimes I do long for, so to speak, yup all good, you're driving away and don't even have the chance. But well, that really is your own problem. So sometimes I leave my laptop in the company because I'm in no mood to do any more." (Simon, interview participant)

The constant availability of work is portrayed as a "danger" (Dee) and a "temptation" (Simon). Both extracts imply that the constant availability is the result of a lack of strong boundaries between home and work. For Dee, the act of rushing for trains used to be a boundary to mark the end of a workday. Similarly, for Simon, the commute home would seal the workday and signal a transition into the home domain. However, because both work from home, these boundary markers exist no longer – though Simon does at times impose a limit on work by leaving his laptop at the main office, thereby refusing to be available for work at all times. Simon's extract also shows that the constant availability of work is rooted in the portability of his job, which is inherent in professional types of work. Other extracts display a similar construction of work as a constant presence through the proximity of home and work. One important thing to note in the following extract is the conceptualisation of work as a mental zone that is all-consuming:

> "The other side of the coin is my difficulty in shutting down when officially off-duty. You never want to miss a potential opening simply because you were resting." (Newspaper column 1)

Work is constructed as a frame of mind that it is hard to switch off from. This relates to the discussion of psychological boundaries in the previous chapter, where it emerged that work as a mental zone is difficult to leave behind because thinking is so portable. It also relates to the contextual issue of being a freelancer and its volatile employment pattern, meaning the columnist does not want to miss any opportunities for work.

The next excerpt shows what happens when a participant succumbs to work being ever-present:

> "There is a potential for me to overwork, [...] to work unsociable hours and to work possibly late into the evening time. Ahm, but what I often find is sometimes, and I try not to do this, but sometimes it can be easy to compensate for that by then not doing as much work during the daytime [...] you just take an hour off and switch on the television. Sometimes you can very easily do that. And say to yourself, "Look, sure, I'll make it up. You know, no one is gonna be kicking me out of the office at 5, I can just work on here till 6. I'll make up this half an hour later on today." And your day becomes very long that way, because you're working, you're taking a break, you're working, you take your break, you're working, you're taking a break. So instead of working from 9 o'clock till 5 o'clock and being done with work and then taking a break, your work and your breaks are intertwined throughout the day and it's like as if you don't stop. [...] It's very tiring. [...] Sometimes you do that extra bit of work at weekends and at night times, but the type of person I am, I feel that, even if I was working in an office environment I possibly would do that still. Although it wouldn't be as easy to do. It's very easy to say to yourself, because your office is your home and because you have access to your work tools all the time, it's very easy to say to yourself on a Friday evening, instead of putting in that extra half hour, that, "Oh, I'll get that done over the weekend." And then, instead of doing it for that extra half hour on a Friday evening, you end up spending an hour and a half to 2 hours at the weekend trying to get it done, because you have to try and get yourself back into the whole work frame of mind, make yourself sit down at the computer and do it. Ahm, so it actually ends up taking longer, and eating into your weekend, and making you feel "Oh fuck, I've work this weekend!" (David, interview participant)

Here, one gets a sense of David's leisure time being taken over by work. While he uses the strategy of postponing work until the weekend, and the strategy of compensating for late nights by starting later in the morning, this use of flexibility does not result in him being more rested. Instead, using flexibility in these ways makes work a constant presence, especially on a mental level: "Making you feel 'Oh fuck, I've work this weekend!'", "it's like as if you don't stop". The flexibility that can be beneficial for some in this case erodes personal time,

or as David puts it "eats into your weekend". Being too flexible with work leads to its constant availability. This raises questions such as whether the strategy of flexibility enables workers to practice autonomy over their work or whether it constrains workers and traps them in a vicious cycle of a constant possibility of work. It could also be argued that home-workers do have the autonomy to re-schedule their working arrangements, but that they use this to work whenever possible, instead of achieving lifestyles that are more liberated, where work is not constantly present. I therefore argue that a 'misappropriation' of flexibility is evident (similarly to Kelliher & Anderson, 2010; and Russell et al., 2009).

*Justifying the Constant Presence of Work*

An interesting theme that emerged alongside the threat of work being available at all times was the ways in which participants accounted for their constant work. Constant work describes a category that emerged in many participants' stories and captures the psychological experience of work always 'hanging over them'. Being constantly available for work is the result of flexible boundaries. This issue is important because it draws on notions of agency and power. Participants' explanations for overwork situate them either as active agents who are to blame for their constant work, or as passive recipients who merely respond to job or societal pressures. For some participants, the experience of constant work is reflected by their actual work hours – one participant in particular reported working 80 to 100 hours a week (Mark). For other participants, constant work is more of a menacing presence, as in David's above example. While he uses the flexibility of home-work to take breaks, he dreads having to make up for those breaks. In the end, the dread he feels about work translates into its constant mental presence. The strategies used to account for constant work range from constructing it as a personal characteristic, blaming the body, blaming insecure

employment, making it a criterion for career success, to blaming society. In each of their justifications, participants position themselves in certain ways towards their work.

The following are examples of *participants taking personal responsibility for their constant work*. These home-workers blame themselves for overworking, instead of focusing on external pressures that may influence them to do so.

> "Sometimes you do that extra bit of work at weekends and at night times, but the type of person I am, I feel that, even if I was working in an office environment I possibly would do that still" (David, interview participant)
>
> "I have to say that I do a lot of work from home anyway. That means not just on that day [...] But well, that really is your own problem." (Simon, interview participant)

Simon and David internalise overwork and portray it as a character trait of their own person. It is telling that Simon constructs the constant presence of work as "your own problem", thus taking responsibility for overwork, rather than blaming his company. Simon specifically asked to be allowed to work from home, so it makes sense that he feels he brought any problems on himself. Here, being the active agent who initiated the home-work decision means he cannot complain about the realities of this arrangement. Being influential and a core member of his work practice, who drove the home-work decision, is maybe not always desirable. Both Simon and David are active agents who are in charge of their work and choose to overwork. Their constructions render overwork an individual problem, as opposed to a societal one. Another justification is Mark *blaming his body clock* for his working hours:

> "But I mean it's – that working schedule too is something that's built in from when I used to work in bar work. I'm used to working long hours and function better in the wee hours of the morning than I do in the wee hours of, or than first thing in the morning. I need a lot of coffee to get myself going in the morning, whereas in the evening time I'm more productive" (Mark, interview participant)

His account makes it sound like he has reconfigured his working times to suit his body clock. However, his work hours are actually along the lines of 9am until 2am, so he works a 'normal' 9-5 and then justifies his late work nights by blaming his body. He claims that the

schedule is "built in". This makes him the passive recipient of his schedule, not the individual agents that Simon and David were above.

Another way in which participants justify their constant work is by *referencing the pressures associated with their insecure employment*. This is reflected here in the following justification for "staying up all night":

> "Fair enough, you are probably on a flat rate and they have strict deadlines. They will sympathise with your dilemmas, but they want what they want at the agreed time. Sick kid or no. You chose the "flexibility" of being self-employed. You know you are interchangeable with any number of other homeworkers with a broadband connection. You stay up all night." (Newspaper column 4)

The insecurity of freelancing is blamed for working all night; however, the columnist accepts personal responsibility by claiming that it was his choice to be a self-employed freelancer. He therefore positions himself as both active and reactive. His putting "flexibility" in inverted commas displays cynicism towards flexibility and makes it apparent that flexibility is an opportunity to overwork, not an opportunity to achieve a balanced life. The next extract also shows how a participant overworks in order to cope with the insecurities of freelancing and uses overwork as a bargaining tool:

> "The point is, you're making yourself necessary. Without me, you are in trouble. So it's like I'm overworking in a way, just to be able to, you know, bargain. [...] So, but you have to earn points to spend. This is not something that happens in an office, you're not so pushed on performance. There's nobody sitting on your head, "Do this, do that, do this, do that". So, it is actually more relaxed" (Lisa, interview participant)

Lisa explains that overwork is necessary in order to "earn points" that she can spend in negotiations with her employer. Overwork is not her personal choice. One gets a sense of a constant pressure to deliver, which drives Lisa to work hard. It is noteworthy that she constructs office work as the other of home-work, stating that office work is more relaxed. This contributes to a dichotomy between office and home-work; but more importantly, it demonstrates that flexible forms of work are more prone to overwork than traditional forms of work. Flexibility in this case is thus not a strategy that leads to a balanced life.

Constant work is further justified by *constructing it as necessary for career advancement* and by *bringing in larger societal factors* that remove individual choice in the matter:

> "I: How is she about the fact that you might be working until 2 in the morning?
>
> P: Less than overjoyed, but she appreciates the fact that this, like everyone, like you, we put in the long slog now in the hope of not having to do such toxic hours later on. So it's a means to an end" (Mark, interview participant)

> "It tilts more towards work, but I think everyone's does at an early point in their career. It's later on you can talk about work-life balance and bring something like kids into the equation, well then then you're going to have more motivation to strongly delineate between the two. But now is the time you put down the time to be able to do that later on. In my opinion [...] I mean if I spend give or take six days a week and many – 80 up to a hundred hours in that office upstairs, well then clearly my work-life balance isn't quite right. Ahm, it's not – despite what the contract says it's not a 40-hour working week and they knew it when they signed it. Or they knew it when they get you to sign it that it's never gonna work out like that, ahm just like any job I know, even the friends that work in the private sector, as far as I can tell. Like my brother works with (food retailer) and the hours are toxic [...] So I mean it's I think it's everyone's work-life balance is screwed, a product of capitalism" (Mark, interview participant)

In these two extracts, Mark offers a variety of justifications for overwork. To begin with, he normalises his constant work by constructing it as something that everyone does: "Like everyone, like you, we put in the long slog now". The use of the word "we" positions him as one of many people who overwork; he does not stand out as unique. This legitimises his working pattern. The words "like you" assume that the interviewer is the same as him, again positioning everyone as constant workers. He then construes his hard work as "a means to an end", excusing overwork by making it a necessity for career advancement. In the second extract, overwork is something that everyone does early on in their career. By comparing himself to friends who work in the private sector and his brother whose hours are "toxic", he further normalises his own schedule. He aligns himself with others and makes sense of his own pattern by comparing it with others, which shows how the social and the individual meet within participants' accounts (Wenger, 1998). He also excuses his schedule by the fact that he is a non-parent, implying that it is ok for non-parents to overwork, while parents have a

greater need for non-work time. This suggests that non-parents have no real need to use the flexibility of home-work for anything other than overwork. If flexibility is used to overwork particularly by non-parents, then future research must begin to focus more on this group of people and try to understand where the pressure to be constantly available comes from. The justifications presented here are a beginning. Mark further blames his employers by claiming that they made him sign a contract for a 40-hour week, knowing that the job would require more. A very interesting justification emerges at the end of the extract: "everyone's work-life balance is screwed, a product of capitalism". Mark points the finger at our capitalistic society for forcing people to spend an inordinate amount of time working, as opposed to engaging in leisure. This is in stark contrast to earlier justifications that constructed overwork as an individual problem. Here, overwork becomes a societal issue for which individuals are not responsible. According to this construction, then, the threat of flexibility would have to be tackled as a society, rather than offering individual people individual balance solutions. The ambiguity in regards to whether individuals or society are to blame for the threat of constant work indicates that home-work boundaries operate at the cusp between individual and social, which justifies the need for a practice stance (e.g. Wenger, 1998) towards boundaries. The active agent – passive recipient ambiguity will be incorporated into my version of boundary theory.

*Is Flexibility an Opportunity for Balance?*

In this section on flexibility, it has been demonstrated that far from offering balanced and integrated lives, the flexibility of home-work can be misappropriated (through overwork or e.g. the strategies of compensation and postponing) and pose a threat to both work and home. Both can become eroded, with the home domain in particular suffering through home-

workers' constant work. This reflects the power difference between home and work, where work is privileged over home concerns. The construction of flexibility in participants' accounts casts doubt over the ability of home-work to bring about balance, as in the following example:

> "The work is endless, you could be here till nine or ten and I just have never done that. I say ok that's it that's as much as I can do today, tomorrow is another day." (Dee, interview participant)

The participant's portrayal of flexible work (as "endless") highlights a significant home-work paradox: The only way of coping with the flexibility of home-work is by imposing strict boundaries, as shown by Dee refusing to work beyond certain hours, which is similar to traditional office work boundaries. Strict boundaries undermine the purpose of home-work (e.g. to avoid the shackles of office work – see drivers). Having to continually cope with the threat of flexibility however means it could be easier to work in an office, with its externally imposed boundaries. This resonates with Tietze (2002) and contrasts previous perspectives such as Kinsman (1987) and Baruch (2000), where the potential of home-work to lead to balanced home and work lives was praised. Instead, the possibility that home-work flexibility undermines the freedom sought by workers raises questions over its existence as a family-friendly way of working. Flexibility is a strategy that needs to be managed carefully, which questions its purpose. Home-work is however as much of an opportunity as it is a threat – it simply depends on how it is used. If the flexibility of home-work is used to overwork, then we cannot praise its potential to facilitate balanced lives. In contrast, such praise is appropriate where home-work is used to flexibly schedule home and work demands around each other as befits the person and their circumstances and actually enhances their experience of negotiating the home-work interface. This is reflected by Kelliher & Richardson (2012b), who warn of the 'dark side' of flexibility, as well as acknowledging that there is room for optimism about flexible working.

In this section, I have explored two qualitatively different strategies that home-workers use to negotiate boundaries: First, I showed that boundaries are negotiated through joint effort between home-workers and others. Second, I discussed the strategy of appropriating flexibility, which was conceptually different because it was about how home-workers positioned home and work towards each through the use of flexibility. I showed that participants positioned themselves ambiguously in each of the strategies: as active agents and as passive recipients. This shows that to understand boundary negotiation, it is necessary to pay close attention to contextual factors. That is why I began the chapter by outlining the different home and work contexts that constrain the kinds of boundaries that can be negotiated. I will build on the analysis that I have developed in this chapter by delving further into how home-workers are positioned in their home and work domains in the next chapter.

## 5.4. Chapter Conclusion

*Interim Summary and Discussion*

I began the chapter by situating boundary negotiation within its context. I explained that work-related aspects, home-related aspects and other aspects shape the boundaries between home and work that are possible for home-workers and therefore need to be understood at the outset. While negotiations occur within complex dynamics of positioning and influence, which I have begun to discuss and will pursue further in the next chapter, I argue that we must not neglect factors such as the home-worker's profession, family situation, etc., as shown in the following table.

Boundary Negotiation Contexts

1. Work-Related Aspects:
    - Employment Type
    - Freelancing
    - Professional Work

2. Home-Related Aspects:
    - Resources
    - Children and their Ages
    - Relationships

3. Other Aspects:
    - The Nature of the Activity that is to be protected

Table 12: Overview of Boundary Negotiation Contexts

To pay attention to a range of influences on the boundary negotiation process is to make explicit the context within which boundaries are produced. This research views home-workers as participants in a variety of home and work practices, which have an impact on how they manage the interface between them. Beginning with the home-worker's work context, the influences listed here confirm findings reported by Warhurst et al. (2008), Henninger & Papouschek (2008) and Cohen (2008). The type of occupation a home-worker engages in makes certain kinds of boundaries possible or impossible. The family-related factors listed here also resonate with propositions made by Tietze (2002; 2005), Sullivan (2000), Halford (2006), Felstead et al. (2005), Kylin & Karlsson (2008), Ahrentzen (1990), Dart (2006), Warhurst et al. (2008) and Seymour (2007). Family members are particularly important in the boundary negotiation process because they share a location with the home-worker. Furthermore, the additional influences proposed here, such as the nature of the activity to be protected by a boundary, confirm earlier research by Cohen et al. (2009), Seymour (2007), Kylin & Karlsson (2000) and Clark (2000). The combination of existing literature with the findings reported here makes a strong case for the necessity of studying

boundary negotiation as a social process that occurs within the home-workers' work and home practices.

Keeping in mind structural constraints, I proceeded to explore the strategies that home-workers use to negotiate boundaries: 1.) Home-work boundaries as joint effort; 2.) Appropriating flexibility. I proposed that the first strategy was about how home-workers negotiate boundaries with their social others that satisfy their mutual aims. In order to do this, they bargain or trade time and spaces with each other. Their negotiations gave insight into how home-workers positioned themselves in regards to their social others. The second strategy, appropriating flexibility, was conceptually distinct, because it was about how home-workers positioned home and work towards each other through the use of flexibility. I showed how flexibility is appropriated as a strategy to meet home and work demands, but can also be misappropriated and lead to work concerns taking over a home-worker's life.

Both boundary strategies demonstrated that home-workers have varying degrees of agency in how they negotiate their boundaries. The ambiguity of being in charge, while at times being constrained reflects earlier research by Cohen et al. (2009), Seymour (2007), Clark (2000) and Brannen (2005). Cohen et al. (2009) identified three strategies for establishing boundaries where people are in charge and consciously choose the level of home-work interaction, as well as three strategies where control over the home-work boundary is challenged. A strong case for investigating the home-workers' positionings in their home and work practices emerges, because I have shown that individual negotiations depend on how home-workers are positioned. I seek to build on the individual examples of negotiations given here and develop a fuller account of home-workers' levels of participation at home and at work. This shall be addressed by the next chapter.

The analysis of the strategy 'appropriating flexibility' showed that flexibility can be used positively, but can also be 'misappropriated' (though I use the term without assigning blame). Flexibility can lead to the home domain threatening work and vice versa. Richardson (2012) talks of home and work selves threatening each other, which is similar. The more salient threat however is work taking over the home and resulting in constant work. I discussed the ways in which home-workers accounted for their overwork: at times, they took personal responsibility for it, other times they constructed themselves as mere respondents to work and capitalistic pressures. Kelliher & Anderson (2010) suggest that flexible workers exert additional effort in order to show their employers gratitude for granting them the privilege of flexible work, meaning that they take responsibility for their overwork, but also feel obliged to work harder. This ambiguity in the perceived pressure to overwork needs to be better understood in the future. I showed that when flexibility is 'misappropriated', it undermines any opportunities for work-life balance that working from home creates. The findings here reiterate earlier research that has suggested work's prioritisation over the home domain in our society (Runté & Mills, 2004; Mirchandani, 1999). They are also in line with the observation that home-work is a form of work intensification and results in the feeling of being 'always on' (Russell et al., 2009; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010; Greenhill & Wilson, 2006; Mirchandani, 2000); as well as Tietze & Musson's (2003) suggestion that work can take over the home domain and dominate it with features of industrial production. In short, my findings imply that working from home is not to be equated with a more life-enhancing lifestyle than that offered by traditional work. My findings also imply that just because home and work take place under the same roof, it does not mean that the subordination of the home by work has been resolved.

*Where to from Here?*

I have addressed the primary research question 'How do people who work from home negotiate the boundaries between their home and work practices?'. I outlined the strategies that people use to negotiate boundaries. This discussion was informed by analysis of the different kinds of boundaries that home-workers draw between home and work, boundary functions, the reasons why people work from home, and the contexts in which home-workers are situated. Throughout the last two chapters, one important thread has continued to transpire: positionings. The notion of positionings is relevant in two ways. Firstly, the data has shown that home-workers are constructed ambiguously. They are active agents and passive recipients. They are core and peripheral members of home and work practices. They are influential and lack influence. These ambiguities were apparent in their decisions to work from home, in their efforts to set different kinds of boundaries and in their negotiations. The use of practice concepts has highlighted issues of influence, agency, and different categories of membership. Therefore, I will delve further into how home-workers are positioned in each of their home and work practices. I will examine the tensions between their different levels of participation and consider what new insights about home-work are to be gained. The step of 'positioning/levels of participation' in my discourse analysis template specifically allows for further insight into this issue. Secondly, the notion of positionings comes into play in the home-work relationship. Through their boundary negotiations, home-workers construct configurations between home and work. I have already mentioned instances where home and work threaten each other (when flexibility is 'misappropriated') and where dichotomies are strengthened (through rigid boundaries). I have also begun to gather evidence for defining home and work domains as practices. I will investigate whether practice is an appropriate framework to apply to the home and work domains and I will then consider how home and work practices are positioned towards each other through participants' accounts.

# Chapter 6

# Positionings of Home-Workers

## 6.1. Introduction

Boundary negotiations are shaped by the positioning of home-workers and others within home-workers' accounts. If home-workers are positioned as core participants in their home practice, they are influential in determining the kinds of boundaries that they negotiate. This is how positioning relates to boundary negotiations. In previous chapters, I briefly mentioned positioning in regards to individual extracts. In this chapter, I will foreground positioning by exploring home-workers' levels of participation at home and at work. Positioning is important because it represents a stance from which to contribute to the debate over home-workers' control over their boundaries. It allows me to explore ambiguities identified above, e.g. the finding that home-workers are both active and passive in shaping their boundaries. This chapter explores how home-workers participate in their associated home and work practices.

Working from home removes participants from their office work practices. Working from home also complicates participants' membership in their home practices. At times, the home-working arrangement brings them closer to their home practices; other times the fact that they are working while at home prevents them from fully engaging with the home practice. This chapter is structured as follows: I will begin by investigating participation at work, particularly in the office practice. I demonstrate that home-workers can be conceptualised as peripheral office participants, which shapes their home-work experiences. I will then consider the paradoxes of home-workers' participation in their home practices, as it emerged that they are both central and peripheral at home. In doing so, this chapter will contribute to the third research question: How are home-workers positioned in each domain?

## 6.2. Peripheral Participation in the Office Practice

When home-workers negotiate the boundaries between home and work, they position themselves relative towards home and work. Home-work changes how home-workers participate in their home and work domains. This section highlights that when people work from home, their participation in their work domain, particularly the office setting, is disrupted. As shown in the driver 'escape from the office and its associated nuisances', home-work removes workers from the social context of the office. Home-workers aim to avoid the stresses that accompany office work, such as distraction and office politics, and instead seek a greater degree of freedom. In this section, I explore the implications of becoming removed from the office practice through the concept of 'levels of participation' (Wenger, 1998).

According to Wenger (1998), each practice affords different levels of participation or different categories of membership. People can be situated at the core of a social practice, at the periphery, or at the margin. Participants situated at the core of a practice are characterised by mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoires (Wenger, 1998). They have the legitimacy to influence the development of a practice. Those on the periphery are neither fully inside nor fully outside of the practice, emphasising the fluidity of the boundaries of a practice, such as the office practice. Being at the periphery means that engagement with the practice is looser, but that there are opportunities for casual participation or observation. Peripheral participation implies possibilities for full participation in the future and a trajectory inwards. Marginality offers no possibility of full participation in the future. Marginal members are members who are kept at the very edge of a practice and who are not allowed to participate. Peripheral office work practice participation is most salient for home-workers who have an employing organisation to refer to, as opposed to self-employed home-workers. However, even those who work for themselves still refer to this form of work and construct

home-work as removing them from a former office practice, because the notion of the office is a salient reference point.

Instead of participating at the core of the office practice, which would require mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoires, home-workers become physically and socially removed from this practice. They begin to edge toward the outer layers of the office work practice, only participating casually. The following home-worker's case describes how his peripheral status commenced shortly after departing from full-time presence at the office. He states that,

> "It didn't take them too long to fill my office with other people" (Mark, interview participant),

which indicates that his physical and social departure from core towards periphery was exacerbated by the organisation's act of 'filling his office with other people'. The fact that his office was taken over when he began to work from home seals his positioning of not fully belonging to the organisation any longer. This is despite the fact that he is still a full-time employee. All that has changed is his work location. He further explains how his social participation in the organisation has changed since working from home:

> "Socially, yeah it is a bit isolating. You only meet the lecturers you know or your co-employees you only meet them once a month if even. You still keep in touch with emails if they have queries but the emails with queries are much less frequent when they know you're not there" (Mark, interview participant)

It seems that core participation was characterised by being sought for queries, while his current peripherality means he is nearly forgotten about. 'Out of sight, out of mind' captures the move from core to peripherality. Mark explains that email queries have become less frequent since his departure, which is curious. Email communication does not depend on him being present at any particular location. Yet being physically present at the office coincided with a greater volume of queries. It is plausible then that physical presence is necessary for a worker to be recognised as a core participant in the office practice. Being a core participant

meant that people turned to him with questions more frequently. The same status is impossible to maintain while physically absent. The points made here result in the proposition that how one is positioned in a practice and how one participates in a practice depends partly on social availability and visibility. This means that traditional criteria for judging work performance, such as visibility, are not obsolete yet. Far from it, they are actually an important means of establishing the fabric of a practice. This means that physical and social elements of a practice depend on each other. This proposition raises questions about the ability of technology to replace face-to-face communication in work settings.

The following two extracts support the interdependence of visibility and belonging. Core membership at the office practice is associated with presence and visibility, while invisibility complicates processes of belonging.

> "I generally got on quite well with them. There was a few people that I was in regular contact with on a daily basis on the telephone. I I built up quite a nice rapport with them. And everyone was quite pleasant to me. Ah, I certainly did miss out on a bit of the office kind of banter and the kind of getting to know people maybe as well as I could have if I had spent more time in the office. But ah, I certainly, when I was there in the office, there was a feeling that [...] I wasn't there on a daily basis, that I wasn't as…I don't know what way you'd describe it. There wasn't the banter. There was a friendliness and a "hey, how are you, how are things?" you know there was a friendliness but there wasn't a banter you know." (David, interview participant)

David's absence from the office prevents him from building meaningful relationships at the office and denies him the status of core participant. In his account, core participation would be characterised by shared banter (or shared repertoires, in the Wengerian sense) and getting to know people better (mutual engagement). David experiences "a feeling that I wasn't there on a daily basis", instead of a feeling of belonging. However, peripherality also encompasses the possibility of an inwards trajectory. For David, it appears that he would have had the opportunity to become a core member if only he had been able to spend more time in the office. So he was not marginalised by his office work others. He simply did not have the opportunity to become a member. A similar example is that of Dee, who technically should

be a core member of her organisation because she is on the management team (and thus is influential), yet struggles with invisibility.

> "I was actually involved in a different role for about a year ahm and I had two admin staff working kind of for me. And at the start that was a bit difficult, saying "Oh you know she's never here and she's coming and going" [...] but it is I think more difficult. I actually then changed roles in September ahm and that suited me really because there's two of us now and there's a kind of team of admin, but where I'm not specifically responsible for anybody and that kind of suits me." (Dee, interview participant)

It becomes apparent that the invisibility and lack of constant physical presence makes Dee's admin staff uncomfortable. Dee voices the opinions of her admin staff, thereby socially constructing her invisibility. Her struggle with invisibility is not an individual one – she makes sense of being away from the office through her encounters with her admin staff, who are uncomfortable with having a boss who is away from the office. To participate fully at core member level, Dee would have to be visible. Her example also highlights that it might only be appropriate for visible core members to rely on admin staff. This would explain why she is more comfortable in her current role where she is not explicitly responsible for admin staff any more. Again, this extract shows that it is hard to become socially embedded in the office work practice without being there all the time. Dee further makes sense of her peripherality by calling on her manager's point of view:

> "I suppose it's you know it's probably not ideal from my own manager's point of view cos you're not on hand and they've to ring and sometimes then if you go the loo or make a coffee and your phone goes. I used to be like, "Oh my God, they think I'm..." (Dee, interview participant)

This is a further example of how participants' individual sensemaking is informed by imagining the perspective of social others. Dee's home-work occurs within a social office environment and affects not just her, but also others within the practice, such as her manager and admin staff. While I only have Dee's account to interpret, she introduces other actors' perspectives in her office practice and offers a fuller picture of the social fabric within which home-work takes place.

The experiences of the home-workers cited here show that peripherality in the office practice means not belonging at the core of this practice any more. Peripheral participation means that one does not experience the mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoires, which bind people to the core of a practice. However, the home-workers cited here still casually engage with their office practices by communicating with others when necessary. This shows that while they are peripheral and invisible, they continue to participate in the office practice somewhat.

In contrast, people who are restricted from participating even casually in the office practice, but have a connection to it, are marginal members (Wenger, 1998). Unlike peripherality, marginality offers no possibility for participation in the future. The following participant portrayed herself as a marginal participant in her work practice. Unlike the home-workers quoted above, she had never physically met any of her co-workers or been present at the head office, which contributes to her marginal status.

> "I think that the best thing is to get the chance to work from home and then from time to time to go back to the office. For anything, it could be a training, or planning the future, I mean what you want to happen in the future or ah share something. That really ties you to the job. And you feel part of something. Well, my case is something different. See I've never met anybody else in my company other than my boss for two days. But that is because the company is very small and whatever. Ahm, so but I yeah – yeah there is this ahm possibility to feel very cut out, very alone…you know, lonely. There is this chance to be alone." (Lisa, interview participant)

> "So, for example, now we have a new let's say procedures, a new work process. But all the people in India got a training double day. For me it was just like, "This is the intranet and this is the checklist"…ahm, "Thank you". You know? In that situation it would have been nice to go to the office" (Lisa, interview participant)

> "I think there are some very bad points with this for me, like you actually start speaking with, you know, the furniture [...] But I miss the social environment a lot. It's very tough to to learn when you're alone." (Lisa, interview participant)

Lisa only experiences virtual relationships with the company, which means that she does not feel a sense of belonging or embeddedness in this social practice. However, she is painfully aware of the potential for office work to create a social practice: "That really ties you to the

job. And you feel part of something". She mentions feeling "cut out" when the rest of the company were given training days, leading to her positioning of being marginalised. In contrast to the other home-workers cited above, there does not seem to be a possibility for an inwards trajectory. Since Lisa is based at home in Ireland and her company's head office is in India, it is unlikely that she will be able to participate even casually. She constructs home-work as a lonely and isolated pursuit, to such an extent that she resorts to 'speaking with the furniture'. Lisa's extract also indicates that participation in an office practice serves an important function other than simply human contact: It acts as a source of learning, which home-work inhibits. The role of practice in learning was suggested by Wenger (1998). Lisa constructs home-work as an individual pursuit, which counteracts the social nature of learning. Her example shows that marginal participation is characterised by a lack of belonging and a feeling of being ignored by core participants in her work practice.

When a home-worker's participation in the office practice is disrupted by home-work, it is not just processes of belonging that suffer. The actual work carried out can be compromised, too, because the *monitoring function* that comes with participating in a work practice ceases to exist. Being invisible and away from the office practice means that nobody (work-related) witnesses the work that participants engage in. Nobody monitors their pursuits, which while implying freedom, poses a challenge for participants' discipline. If invisibility is an obstacle to work, then visibility enables it. Home-work is invisible, office work is not. This leads to a construction of home-work as the other of office-based work.

> "I don't think I would have been able to get as demotivated if I wasn't working from home. If I was having to go into an office every day and see somebody else, I would have had to have been making more of an effort to look like I was doing work. So it would have forced me to keep chasing it (a sale) and chasing it and chasing, even though I knew it was flogging a dead horse. I would have kept chasing it. Whereas the fact that I was at home and there was no one monitoring me" (David, interview participant)

> "It takes a certain amount of discipline. I mean it takes, well it's back to the motivation thing. You have to be motivated enough to get up in the morning if you have worked late. Or, when you are working late to actually continue working late as opposed to go on to google or something like YouTube or just generally blatant jackassery online. Ahm, it takes discipline especially when there's not technically someone looking over your shoulder. And if it's not technically someone looking over your shoulder, be it a fellow employee who'd notice that you're on facebook or something like that." (Mark, interview participant)

These examples demonstrate that participation in an office practice serves important functions such as monitoring people's effort and driving people to work hard (or at least to look like they are working hard), as well as securing people the status of 'workers'. Invisibility and periphery, in contrast, facilitate non-work and can cast doubt over the home-workers' efforts.

> "How can this guy know that I'm doing the job? He doesn't know actually. I mean, he actually gives me some task and then, ok, I could also give part of my work to somebody else. Get the job done, put it online or whatever, send an email just to show that I've done the job and nobody knows. So I always think, and I don't know why this idea came to my mind, ahm, but yes, I can take a day off [...] It's criminal, but I was thinking, how can this guy know that I'm doing this?" (Lisa, interview participant)

Here, Lisa demonstrates that because home-work is not performed in an office work practice where others witness the worker's efforts, it would be possible for somebody else to do her job without her company knowing. Her marginal status means that the company do not specifically depend on her as a person in their office practice. She is not needed as a visible core member. The company only requires her output, which might make her feel somewhat redundant. Lisa's example shows that the invisibility of home-work makes non-work possible. In the next extract, this opinion is adopted by a home-worker's boss who questions the work done at home.

> "BF's boss summoned him up to the office on the basis of BF's reports being submitted late [...] When BF and P, his boss, sat down to talk about the issue, P asked BF if he had anything to say about the accusations. BF asked whether any of the other sales reps were submitting reports on time (knowing very well that they don't). P replied "Well no they don't, but I can see them here in the office. I know that they are working away." (Researcher's diary)

In this example, a discussion between the home-worker and his boss is reiterated. This is a representation of how the worker's office work practice is understood by a member of the home practice. In this example, home-workers and office-based workers are treated differently by the boss, whereby failure to meet a deadline by a home-worker arouses suspicion, while the same failure by an office-based worker does not. This shows that presenteeism is still necessary for the establishment of trust in an office practice.

Being peripheral and removed from the office practice therefore has consequences for the individual home-worker. Since the work that they engage in is invisible, it means that a) they have to be disciplined in order to produce work without the pressure of being monitored, and b) they also have to prove their work more so than people who are visible. The latter point highlights the difficulty of legitimising home-work. I will now briefly discuss some of the strategies that home-workers adopt in order to legitimise their work.

Home-workers try to find ways of remaining visible. They also attempt to reconceptualise notions of performance in order to prove they are legitimate workers. Some try to prevent any associations of home-work with the home domain. However, the next section 'participation at home' will show that this is rather difficult. Another strategy is the telling of white lies in order to achieve the positioning of a more serious, legitimate worker.

The following is an example of how one participant tried to prove her legitimacy by clinging on to office presence, but then realised that there are other ways of *being visible*:

> "At the start I suppose I was going up to kind of be seen and then I was thinking, you know, if I have to go up, if there's a meeting I'll go but otherwise ahm – and I do a lot of teleconference meetings, so I work very closely with my colleagues and we'll do, we'll arrange meetings on the phone." (Dee, interview participant)

This shows that teleconferencing can replace office presence and prove that the home-worker is actually working. The next example draws on videoconferencing as a form of visibility;

however, this time it was initiated by the company, not the home-worker, and is not received enthusiastically:

> "Since the introduction of videoconferencing, BF has had to get up earlier, shave, shower, put on his suit and sit there at our kitchen table looking proper, all for the benefit of his boss. It's a bit ridiculous really because he works from home on a Monday and doesn't leave the house to meet customers, yet he's expected to be in his business suit. The first thing he does when the conference finishes is to take off his tie and loosen his shirt so it's all a bit of a farce." (Researcher's diary)

In this example, videoconferencing as a new form of visibility is constructed as a pointless exercise of managerial control and questions are raised about the necessity of formal work attire for achieving the positioning of a serious worker.

Some of the home-workers in this study deliberately move away from the traditional association of visibility as proof of one's work legitimacy. Instead, they create a new association of work legitimacy and actual productivity, not visibility. From their perspective, what really matters is the *output of their work*, not who sees them doing it.

> "Stuff either gets done or it doesn't ahm so now if I miss a call, I just think well I could be at my desk you know, at work I could be gone to the loo or gone to make a coffee. And equally, you'd miss a call so you know you're, it's ahm but at the start, you know. And I think before we had a formal policy in work ahm I used to be kind of you know paranoid, nearly afraid to leave my desk in case you know." (Dee, interview participant)

> "I was taken on because of my technical expertise more than anything so I mean, again, they don't really know what I do or how I do it, they just like to see the end results and want to make it as functional as possible, so as long as I'm still productive, they don't care where I am." (Mark, interview participant)

In Mark's case, he claims that his employers perceive his location as irrelevant and evaluate him purely on his results. He voices the opinions of social others in his work practice, thereby assuming knowledge of others' perspectives. Dee also prioritises whether things are done, not whether she is at her desk and available at all times. However, what is interesting is the statement that she used to be "paranoid, nearly afraid to leave [her] desk" prior to the introduction of a formal home-working policy. The policy seems to have legitimised her home-work and made her more confident that it is productivity, not visibility, that counts.

Her case indicates that the employing organisation plays a role in legitimising home-work by making it a formal arrangement.

Another strategy that home-workers engage in when attempting to legitimise their work is strictly *protecting work from home-related interruptions* or noises, i.e. anything that could lead work others to associate the home-worker with domesticity. The containment of home is also a form of boundary setting, which highlights a link between legitimacy, strong boundaries and a dichotomous relationship between home and work. The association with domesticity devalues the home-workers' work; hence anything home-related is contained, particularly during work calls.

> "I started pottering around in the kitchen, getting pots and pans ready and boiling the kettle, which is pretty loud. BF's phone rang again - one of his colleagues. He waved at me as if to say, "Turn the kettle off!" and started to shush my kitchen noise. I just shrugged my shoulders, left the kettle boiling and said, "What do you want me to do? Do you want dinner or not?" I just thought, "F*** this, it's my kitchen, too. If he wants dinner he better not complain about the noise". (Researcher's diary)

> "I've two little dogs. You know the dogs bark in the garden where they – there's practical stuff like that but ahm, you know, you've just got to lock them in the utility room" (Dee, interview participant)

It seems that the home-workers represented here fear that if colleagues or work others hear any home-related noise, their home-work will not be taken seriously. However, the home-workers' efforts to contain work can be contested by others, e.g. spouses, as shown in the first example, where she resists his boundary attempts by shrugging her shoulders and refusing to turn off the kettle. This implies a battle between him trying to legitimise his work by denying the home sphere and her trying to reclaim space as a home space. It shows that attempts to contain work may not always be successful. Another legitimising behaviour is the *telling of white lies* to work others.

> "I: How do people on the other end of the phone react (to the fact that your daughter is at home while you work)?

P: Ah most of them react positively. Well, you apologise, tell them that there was a childminding emergency or something else, find a nice way of talking about it and ahm, most of the time the customers or partners don't see it as a problem. [...] You quickly explain that you're at home at the moment, that your wife is at work." (Simon, interview participant)

Making the presence of his daughter during work sound like an emergency means her presence during work becomes acceptable, as opposed to actually admitting that his daughter is always there when he works from home. If he did the latter, he might be associated with childcare, rather than being perceived as a serious worker. The phrases "find a nice way of talking about it", "you're at home at the moment", and "your wife is at work" imply that a merging of home and work has to be justified and that this is done by making home-work sound like a temporary arrangement and implying that his wife is only temporarily away at work. The following excerpt similarly portrays home-work as a temporary arrangement:

> "I have received tel orders at home and if the customer hears my son in the background, I normally say I'm working from home today." (Cara, online discussion 1)

Instead of telling customers that she always works from home and that her son could potentially always be heard, she pretends that she is only working from home on that particular day. This legitimises Cara's work. The same participant also tells of another woman in a similar situation:

> "She received a phone call at home from a customer, she had 4 children screaming in the background so she said "can you just wait one moment until I go into my office" then she ran into the utility and shut the door, the children tried to follow, so she sat on the washing machine with her foot against the door..... "and then proceeded to take the order!!!" (Cara, online discussion 1)

Here, the home-worker pretends to have an office, but actually conducts the customer exchange from her utility. Suggesting the existence of an office makes her home-work sound more serious and legitimate; and positions her more firmly in the work domain. The following is another example of a deception, where the home-worker legitimises his work by pretending to his boss that he is busy:

> "But he'd [the boss] ring me at a particular time. So I'd make sure that I was not lounged in front of the telly or not asleep. Or you know, I'd make sure I was maybe outside my apartment. Standing out near the traffic on the road, to make it sound like I was out on the road somewhere. And I quite often would lie to him and tell him I was somewhere when I wasn't. Ah, cos I knew he was calling at a particular time. Ah, which felt kinda wrong, but that's what I did, whereas I wouldn't have been able to do that if I was having to go into an office environment." (David, interview participant)

The participant creates an image of himself as a busy worker by using physical cues, such as noise. Earlier, participants tried to contain home-related noise so that they would be taken seriously as workers. Here, David deliberately wants his boss to overhear traffic noises in order for the boss to think that he is on the road, working, rather than at home. The finding that home-workers tell white lies and deceive work others highlights two things: 1.) The fact that home-workers are able to tell lies and deceive others shows that invisibility allows home-workers to construct images of themselves that are fictional. Because home-workers are not at the core of an office practice where they are visible to others and where their efforts are apparent to others, they have the freedom to frame accounts in ways that enhance their worker image. 2.) However, the fact that home-workers feel it is necessary to tell white lies in order for their work to be taken seriously indicates that the struggle with legitimacy is quite significant. It hints at the possibility that the way in which our society rigidly defines work devalues flexible forms of work. The finding that home-work is constructed as less legitimate than office-based work suggests that a dichotomy between home-work and office work continues to be salient.

To conclude, this section has considered how home-workers are positioned in their office work practices. The office is a powerful practice that home-workers continue to use as a reference point, regardless of whether they still attend this practice or not. Home-work is constructed as the other of office work. As a result, home-workers position themselves as peripheral and even marginal participants in the office in their accounts. Their peripheral positioning means that home-workers struggle to legitimise their work. Home-workers

attempt to position themselves as workers, but their organisational invisibility makes this difficult. In the next section, I will investigate the home-workers' participation in the home practice.

## 6.3. Participation at Home: Paradoxes

The above section addressed how home-workers position themselves in the work domain by investigating their levels of participation. Because positioning is important in boundary negotiation, in this section, I will discuss how home-workers position themselves in relation to their home practice. I will explore whether working from home means participating in the home domain to a greater extent, or indeed the opposite. In this section, the term 'home practice' refers to a wider notion of 'home' and a conglomerate of different kinds of home practices, e.g. family practice, co-habiting practice, childcare practice, flatshare practice, and friendship practice; the differences between which I will discuss in the next chapter in regards to the configurations of home and work.

Interestingly, home-workers participate ambiguously in the home domain: home-workers position themselves both as being core participants in the home domain (this is the case when home-work enables them to participate more fully in family life), as well as peripheral participants. Peripheral participation at home happens because home-workers may be physically present at home, yet unavailable for home-related interaction. Home-workers can be caught between being physically at home and mentally at work, which is aptly described by the concept of uprootedness (Wenger, 1998). Participation in the home practice while working also gives rise to two interesting home-work dynamics: Firstly, by being located

within the home, home-workers are positioned as non-workers. Their association with family life acts as a barrier against being perceived as a serious worker, which adds to the difficulties of invisibility discussed above. Secondly, by moving work into the home, family members become witnesses and peripheral participants in the home-worker's world of work. Core participation at home reflects the motivations of the driver 'childcare'; however becoming peripheral at home is unintended and not desirable, as will be shown below, because it leads to feelings of being caught in between work and home. Core participation therefore positions home-workers as active agents in charge of their arrangement, while peripheral participation positions home-workers as passive.

### 6.3.1. Core Participation at Home

When home-work is sought in order to be able to play more of an active role in the home domain ('childcare' driver), core participation can indeed ensue. Core participation at home is displayed when home-work is constructed as an opportunity to be present at home. Frequently, core participants portray their presence at home as a privilege. The home-worker as a core participant at home is influential, in charge of the domain, and prioritises home demands over work demands.

> "Let's say in terms of household etc., if you compare it, I'm at home for that one day, so of course…I have more of a domestic role." (Simon, interview participant)

> "The elder (child) mentions that one of her friends is always picked up by her mum. 'Does that mean her parents are divorced or is her dad dead?' she asks. 'Because her dad doesn't pick her up?' 'Yeah.' 'It could just mean her dad has a job and he's not around during the day.' 'Oh right. You mean he's never around during the day?' 'That's right.' I wonder, not for the first time, if my kids' view of the world is skewed because they see too much of me. Both their parents now work from home so they have this impression that work is something one does around a child's demands." (Newspaper column 4)

Simon's statement "I have more of a domestic role" positions him at the centre of the home practice. The columnist's example is similar, with him arguing that his 'kids see too much of him'. The columnist's example in particular gives the impression that home is prioritised over work for him, leading to the children adopting the perception that "work is something one does around a child's demands". In his example, it appears that home has to be privileged in order for the home-worker to be positioned at the core of the home practice. Because he is at the core of the home practice, his actions influence the perceptions of his children: they believe that it is odd if a child is not picked up by his or her father. When home-workers are core participants at home, they fully engage with home others, shape the development of this practice, and establish shared repertoires or routines at home.

While the experience of 'core participation at home' reflects the driver 'childcare', it is important to mention that non-parents appreciate the chance to participate to a greater degree at home, too. Of course, participation in home practices is open to all home-workers, not just parents. This relates to my earlier critique that the scope of boundary theory needs to be broadened to include non-parents. For some of the non-parents in my sample, the chance to spend more time with their spouses was appreciated:

> "Best bit about working from home? BF and I are both spending the morning working from home, and he just came over to me and literally picked me up (he's a tall guy), so I could wrap my legs around him and give him a big hug and a kiss. Best thing about working from home. Put a huge smile on my face!! Better than your average day at the office." (Researcher's diary)

> "She's (spouse) actually seeing a lot more of me [...] than she pretty much ever did before. So, I mean it's positive. I think for everyone." (Mark, interview participant)

> "I am a man and all my friends envy my position even the moms look with envy as their hubbies are at work long hours and sometimes away for days" (Gil, online discussion 2)

These non-parent examples highlight that home-workers can have similar experiences (core participation at home) regardless of whether they are parents or not. The words used in the

above extracts indicate that home-workers construct the opportunity to be present at home as a privilege: “Better than your average day at the office” (Researcher’s diary), “it’s positive” (Mark), “all my friends envy my position” (Gil). Participants’ construction of home-work as a privilege indicates that being at home while working is still rather special and marks them out as unique workers. Core participation at home reflects notions of work-life balance and the opportunity to better manage work and childcare, as proposed by e.g. Felstead et al. (2002) and Furnham (2006). While all three extracts are told by one person, each of them constructs a home practice where home others are appreciative of the home-workers’ presence at home. These acts of ‘othering’ support the idea that individual accounts draw on the reactions and expectations of others in how they make sense of home-work.

While core participation at home is experienced by some home-workers, it is also possible for home-workers to be positioned ambiguously in the home practice. The next section discusses the paradoxical experience of being at home, yet being a peripheral participant in the home practice. Whether one’s presence at home leads to core or peripheral participation depends on the level of engagement of the home-worker with home others and the power relationship between the home-worker and home others.

### 6.3.2. Peripheral Participation at Home

Many of the home-workers in this study recounted the paradox of being at home, but not really being there for home interactions because they are working. Peripherality in the home practice is therefore a common consequence. Being physically at home but not fully there means that home-workers often participate at the edges of the home practice. They engage with home others, but not to a level sufficient enough to be core members. Home-workers

complain about the painful situation of not being able to be there for home duties, despite their physical presence. Peripheral participation at home is frequently associated with guilt:

> "The biggest pain that I had to overcome was the whole emotional side. Feeling like a bad mother because you cannot be there for the children 24 7" (Sarah, online discussion 1)
>
> "I too feel like I've neglected the household, working into the small hours and not spending time with the family [...] the stress has lead to me not being well..."(Kiera, online discussion 3)

It must be strange for these home-workers to be at home and to have to explain to family that despite the fact that they are physically there, they are not always available as a parent. As these examples show, working while at home does not only prevent full participation in the home practice, it also inhibits the construction of a positive mother identity. The first participant equates her peripheral participation in the home practice with being a bad mother, the second one talks about neglect. I argue that their peripheral participation at home leads to these women evaluating their mother competences negatively. This indicates a link between our embeddedness in social practices and individual perceptions of the self, which strengthens Wenger's (1998) duality of the social and the individual. How we evaluate our level of competence in a practice depends on our level of participation in a practice. If we participate at the core, we feel competent. If we are peripheral, we feel incompetent, as shown in the above examples.

What is interesting is that peripheral participation in the home practice not only leads to constructions of incompetence at home, but also at work. This results in peripheral participation in both practices, with neither the work nor the home environment receiving full attention. As the following example demonstrates, peripherality means becoming an all-round 'bad' participant:

> "The kids give out, claiming "you're always working!" when you know that's simply not the case. Clients roll their eyes when you offer child-related issues as an excuse for another deadline swooping by" (Newspaper column 6)

It seems that by participating in the work practice while at home, one participates in two practices, but not to a level that ensures one is a good worker and a good parent (or husband, girlfriend, etc.). This is reminiscent of the concept of 'uprootedness' (Wenger, 1998), referring to the experience of being caught between two practices, never fully participating in either. In the columnist's example, one gets a sense of the home-worker as being positioned in between work and home. From the perspective of work (as voiced by him), he is a parent who falls behind in his work tasks because of childcare duties. From the perspective of his family (also voiced by him), he is constantly working. The home-worker engages in 'othering' by using others' opinions to construct his account of home-work. One has to wonder about the emotional consequences of being stuck between two practices and their associated actors, and possibly being misunderstood from both sides. The following example describes a similar dilemma:

> "I do worry about it as I am here but not!!! And always feel guilty, either not doing enough as a parent or doing enough with the business." (Maya, online discussion 1)

The phrase "I am here but not" aptly captures peripherality at home. It highlights the paradoxical experience of physical presence and mental absence. The example further acts as support for the association of peripherality at home and parental guilt or incompetence. The next extract also gives a flavour of the home-workers' construction of inadequacy at both home and work, due to their 'kind of' presence at home.

> "And one of the first things that you're told is that "Do not use working from home as an alternative to childcare". That's very bad, like because it doesn't work for either. Because you're not getting the work done that you need to get done. And also you're not minding the kids, so you're a bad worker and you're not a particularly good parent" (Malcolm, interview participant)

Again, it becomes evident that being peripherally present at home while working leads to neither home nor work demands being fulfilled in a satisfactory manner. Malcolm cites others' advice to make this point. Peripheral participation at home results in the perception of being a bad worker and a bad parent.

In each of the examples quoted in this section, the home-worker is positioned as a person who reacts to competing demands from home and work. The home-worker does not have control over the two practices. Instead, the home-worker becomes a juggler who must try to be a good worker and a good parent at the same time, which is portrayed as an impossible task. As a result, the home-worker feels inadequate. The positioning of the home-worker as peripheral means that he or she is not in charge of either the home or the work domain. Peripherality thus means being quite reactive, which is in contrast to the previous category of home-workers as core participants.

Interestingly, both levels of participation (core and peripheral) are available to home-workers. Core participation at home is facilitated by prioritising the home domain over work, while peripheral participation results from trying to be a good worker and family person at the same time. In line with Marsh & Musson (2008), I question whether it might be emotionally easier for home-workers to focus fully on one sphere, rather than to try to be everything to everyone at the same time. Trying to do everything leads to peripheral participation. Peripheral participation coincides with feelings of inadequacy about one's role as a worker and a parent. It also contributes to feelings of uprootedness or never fully belonging anywhere. These findings indicate that home-work must be approached with caution and that the life-enhancing potential of this arrangement must be analysed critically. Working from home is far more complicated than a simple change in work location that facilitates meeting home and work demands in a more flexible fashion. The re-location into the home upsets the spatial dimension of work that we rely on in our sensemaking. The physical space of the domestic house is incompatible with the dominant discourse of work that guides our sensemaking, which goes some way to explain experiences of uprootedness and inadequacy on the part of the home-workers. This relates to the literature on home and work as domains and how places are always places for 'something' (Kompast & Wagner, 1998). Home and work are different

spaces that invoke different norms, sets of people, behaviours, subjectivities, etc. (Halford, 2006; Tietze, 2002), which explains why being located at home while working acts as a source of uprootedness.

As this section has shown, peripheral participation in the home practice is intricately tied to peripheral participation at work. This is because a home-worker's 'sort of' presence at home prevents them from being fully at home and fully at work. Home-work affects participation both at work and at home. This sets the scene for the next section, where I will address in more detail the consequences of presence at home for participation in the work practice. The next two sections are framed in the context of positionings in the home and work practices interacting.

### 6.3.3. Presence at Home as Non-Work

Participants' accounts show that being a participant in the home practice while working can result in their being associated with non-work and being positioned as a non-worker. The domestic location of home-work carries with it connotations of the home as a haven (Greenhill & Wilson, 2006), not a place of work. It is not surprising, then, that some of the home-workers report that other people believe that they are not really working, i.e. refuse to acknowledge that they belong in a work practice. This misconception of home-work as non-work is common amongst home-workers' friends, neighbours and family, as in the following examples.

> "I recently had a conversation with a friend's neighbour who popped into to her while I was visiting. Over a cuppa she asked me did I work. I replied that I work from home which I love as I get to spend more time with my girls. She then said "Oh so you don't have a job, your a stay a home mum" to which I replied "Yes I do have a job I just work on my computer at home in my house as opposed to an office away from my house" She actually said to me "That's not like having a proper job though is it?" I nearly choked on my tea!" (Linda, online discussion 2)

> "When I'm working, I'm at home. For some reason, everyone presumes then that I am available for whatever little request they might make. I have friends who think I am standing by with golf clubs in hand all day, waiting for the call when the sun peeps out. My darling wife assumes that the house will be tidied each day, simply because I am in it. Sure, what else would I have to be doing?" (Newspaper column 1)

> "They (my friends) were in that particular mindset of like, you either work 9 to 5 or you just don't. You just don't do anything else. But ahm, but yeah like, some of them would say "Why don't you just go and get a proper job, like?" [...] Proper job as in like, sit in your car, drive to an office or drive to a building site, do like, 8 or 9 hours work in a row and go home. Do that for 5 days a week and chill out at the weekend. Earn your money on Friday, you know?" (Jake, interview participant)

In all of the examples, home-workers engage in 'othering' by voicing others' expectations and evaluations of home-work. Linda cites the opinion of a friend's neighbour, who regards home-work as non-work, the columnist articulates other people's expectations of him as available for home activities, and Jake repeats friends' perceptions of home-work as not a proper job. These prejudices inform the home-workers' own evaluations of home-work. These examples emphasise the level of disrespect displayed by home-workers' friends and families, as perceived by home-workers. Due to the location at home, friends seem to believe that home-workers are available for interaction at any time. This firmly positions the home-workers in the home practice, which indicates that the home-workers' jobs are not taken seriously by others and are not categorised as work. At the core of the misunderstanding lies the home-workers' engagement with and presence at home while working, which is incompatible with traditional definitions of work, as shown by Jake's example. Traditionally, home and work are separate and we participate in them sequentially, rather than synchronically (Halford & Leonard, 2001). This is what causes others to position home-workers in the home practice and associate them with domesticity rather than work. The same misconception happens amongst co-workers of participants and can tarnish their relationships with them.

> "Ahm, I find with work colleagues, some of them can – some of them sometimes feel like you're not doing an honest day's work. And even though sometimes they would say it jokingly, you feel like there's an underlying current there. Colleagues that don't

> work from home for example, that work from the office. [...] Some colleagues seem to be of the opinion, and it's quite difficult to get it around to them that you are actually working, that you don't do as much as they do. They're a little bit resentful of it" (David, interview participant)
>
> "There was a bit of conflict. There were one or two people in particular who were kind of "How come she's allowed to do that?" and you know, "She's not here and we've to be in here" and ahm and I don't know did they think we were off – ahm I think I said one day "Do you think I'm off down in Tesco's or I'm sitting in bed making toast and jam for the day?" you know!" (Dee, interview participant)

Here, home-workers frame their arrangements in the social context of office work interactions and voice colleagues' perceptions of home-work. In these examples it becomes apparent that participants have to face colleagues' misperceptions of them as not being 'proper' workers. Home-workers construct themselves (through the voices of others) as not belonging in the work practice; instead, the colleagues' impressions position them as members of a domestic practice. However, as the previous section showed, home-workers are portrayed as peripheral at home, too; which means that they do not experience core membership in either the home or the work practice. The above examples therefore deal with positioning at work *and* at home. The next example shows that the home-workers themselves can come to accept their positioning as non-workers:

> "It didn't feel like a job. It didn't feel like a proper job to me, you know." (Jake, interview participant)

This indicates that the home-workers' evaluation of their arrangements is informed by how their social environment appraises home-work. Overall, it emerges that far from being idyllic, home-work can pose serious difficulties to those who engage in it. The perception of home-work as non-work is a salient theme for the participants, as reflected in Mirchandani (1998a) and Halford (2005). Again, the life-enhancing potential of working from home is questioned. The home-workers' struggles with legitimacy emerge out of their peripheral office participation and their increased participation at home: This implies that experiences in the work and the home domain combine to lead to legitimacy issues.

It further emerged that it is not just the home-workers' presence at home that complicates their status as workers. Their presence at home also leads to engagement with home others during work; which acts as a barrier against being positioned as a worker, as evidenced in the following extracts:

> "Our dear beloved daughter has a strong need for attention. And she doesn't like it when dad is working on the laptop. Or talking with customers on the phone. At that very moment, she gets it into her head that she urgently needs to play. With dad." (Simon, interview participant)

> "I wipe up pee, I scoop poo, I feed, water and soothe brow. At times I work, but with each demand from the couch my deadlines loom larger." (Newspaper column 3)

In these extracts, it is evident that children's demands in particular can prevent any work from happening. Their demands make it impossible for home-workers to engage with work and concentrate fully. The engagement with home others during work follows on from the earlier discussion of 'social boundaries', where participants negotiated levels of interaction between domains, and the section on 'children and their ages' as a contextual factor in boundary negotiation. Here, from a perspective of participation (Wenger, 1998), it is highlighted that it is difficult to be present in the home practice without engaging with home others. This shows that the negotiation of boundaries outlined earlier is complicated by processes of belonging. This needs to be incorporated into my new version of boundary theory. Processes of participation, positioning and belonging shape negotiations and the kinds of boundaries that home-workers can set between home and work. This clarifies how boundary negotiation and participation relate to one another.

This section has highlighted that the paradox of physical presence at home and mental engagement with work causes problems in regards to how home-workers are positioned by others. Their presence at home leads many social others, including friends, family, and colleagues, to locate the home-workers in the home sphere instead of taking them seriously as workers. This demonstrates that their participation at home affects how they are perceived as

workers, indicating a degree of overlap between these two practices. The following section remains with the theme of overlap. I will discuss the potential for participants in the home practice, such as family members, to witness the home-worker's work practice and participate peripherally in this practice. This is an important theme because it shows that it is not just the home-worker's participation in home and work practices that is affected by working from home. Since home-work takes place in the home domain, the people who inhabit this domain are also affected and their participation in practices can change.

### 6.3.4. Home Others Becoming Peripheral Participants in the Work Practice

According to Wenger (1998), peripherality encompasses opportunities for casual participation in a practice. The accounts of the home-workers in this study showed that because they work from within the home, family members often witness work processes. This allows family members and home others to become peripheral participants in the home-workers' work practices. Family members gain an insight into work norms, work relationships and the work content itself. This moves them from outsiders, who do not understand any of the jargon or shared references in a work practice that they are not part of, to peripheral participants. They participate in the practice through their relationships with the home-worker. Of course, the argument can be made that even in a traditional working arrangement, family members may become peripheral participants because they listen to the worker talk about the employing organisation and the people in it. However, this is intensified in a home-work setting. Not only do family members hear of the home-worker's work, they also physically witness the work processes that the home-worker engages in. Phone conversations are overheard, work artefacts are visible, and sometimes work clients

even visit the home. The following examples demonstrate how family members become peripheral participants:

> "If they feel they have a part of it they won't feel as resentful if they think it's taking up time for you that they want. I get my 10 year old to do data entry work for me sometimes and it works great!" (Donna, online discussion 1)

> "They do enjoy helping me in the garden, growing and harvesting plants and when the cabin is built I will bring them in and do some treatments for them, this may help them understand that clients will be coming for the relaxing atmosphere and that they are not to go running out and overpower any client that may arrive...my lot are a friendly bunch...at least the wolfhound sized friendly dog will be controlled by his electric fence...don't think they have licensed any for children yet " (Maya, online discussion 1)

> "Family is manageable. They see your stress levels rise occasionally and gain an insight into the machinations of your mind. As such, they will accommodate you in times of need. They will accord you some freedom from demands to either entertain, feed or wipe them down when they see your angry work-head begin to rise more regularly than usual." (Newspaper column 4)

In the first example, the home-worker's child actively participates in her work life by helping with duties such as data entry. In this way, the child gains an insight into the home-worker's work practice and becomes a peripheral participant. The statement "if they feel they have a part of it they won't feel as resentful if they think it's taking up time for you that they want" raises the question whether letting the children participate in her work practice is in some way a means to make up for her own peripheral participation at home. Because of her home-work, she does not have as much time for the children, but inviting them to engage in work with her counteracts that problem. In the second example, the home-worker hopes that by involving her children in the business, they will gain an understanding of the norms surrounding customer service, which will prevent the children from overpowering clients. The example shows a dilemma between wanting to involve the children on the one hand, and on the other hand wanting to fence them in (see the dog analogy, which is quite severe). In the third example, it becomes apparent that the family is more understanding of work demands because they witness the stresses that the home-worker experiences. In all three

examples, the home-worker assumes knowledge of how children and family members feel by speaking on their behalf. While one-sided, this allows for insight into how the various actors in a home practice enact home-work.

At certain times in this research, I was also able to gain first-hand insight into home-work from the perspective of home others. The diary data provided an opportunity to delve into how home-work is experienced by a home-worker's girlfriend (myself). Some of the online forum entries also offered first-hand family members' perspectives on home-working. These are particularly valuable when discussing family members' peripheral participation in the home-worker's work practice:

> "We could never have friends over to the house as it all depended on what dad was up to at work. And at times it was extremely frustrating having to stay with granddad or one of the aunties rather than our own home. But we were always included in everything and always introduced to colleagues and clients so we learned at a young age how to conduct and comport ourselves." (Fiona, online discussion 1)
>
> "I have always had to be as quiet as possible during these (conference) calls, making it difficult for me to have breakfast and get ready in the morning but now (that they have videoconferencing) I have to really watch where I go to make sure his camera doesn't catch me." (Researcher's diary)
>
> "I told him that his work schedule is not just his business because it affects me and my mood nearly as much as his. If he is stressed, that transfers onto me. When I told him this he said, "Just walk away from it and don't let it affect you". Easier said than done, especially when you live together and love someone – you don't like when they are abrupt or tired and stressed. He told me that he has been a lot more considerate about his work schedule since we started living together. He says, "I've stopped working weekends and nights since we've started living together". Hm. I wonder exactly how much he was working before we lived together if he has already cut down" (Researcher's diary)

The first extract represents a child's perspective on home-work and shows how peripheral participation at work impaired her enjoyment of the house as a child, but also acted as a valuable learning experience. Her peripheral participation at work was not voluntary; she did not have a choice in the matter. Her dad worked from home, so work assumed a presence in family life. His home-work resulted in the children having to conform to work norms when clients were present. This raises questions over the colonisation of life by work when people

work from home, which is a concern that has been echoed elsewhere (e.g. Runté & Mills, 2004; Russell et al., 2009). It shows that family members do not have a say in the taking over of their home lives by work. This positions them as lacking influence. The second and third example demonstrate how a girlfriend gains an insight into the work processes, relations and stresses of her partner. By adopting his work norms and being quiet during conference calls, she participates in his work practice and accepts the presence of work at home. Her peripheral work participation impairs how she uses the home space. It is interesting that she is a peripheral work participant, yet hides her physical presence at home from her partner's work practice, which suggests that she has adopted the home-worker's work norms. The third example indicates that the work stress experienced by a home-worker is observed and absorbed by his partner. It appears that home others do not voluntarily become peripheral participants in the home-worker's work practice. Instead, it simply comes with the territory of working from home. The home-worker's work practice permeates the home and affects all those living in it. The family's participation in work accommodates the home-worker (through relieving them of home duties when stressed, etc.), as opposed to benefitting the family. Again, it ought to be emphasised that this indicates a colonisation of home life by work concerns. It also highlights that the positioning of actors in a practice is of importance. The positioning of home others as not influential means that work can dominate the home. The positioning of actors within a practice shapes the positioning of domains towards each other and thus the boundaries between practices, because each actor represents the concerns of practices that are important to them.

By exploring the theme 'participation at home', I have demonstrated that working from home enables a number of positionings within the home-workers' home practices. It would be misleading to simply praise the ability of home-work to allow for greater participation in family life. While this is one available subject position, I have shown that there is far more

complexity to it: home-workers can become core members at home if they privilege home concerns over work concerns. If they attempt to 'have it all', home-workers will likely experience peripherality in their home and work practices. Their lack of proper engagement with either practice means they never fully belong anywhere, which has consequences for how they perceive their individual competences. Being at home and work at the same time also means that other people position home-workers as non-workers. This is because the home domain is associated with domesticity, not work. Lastly, I discussed that presence at home also has implications for home others and their participation in practices. By witnessing the home-worker's work pursuits, home others can become peripheral participants in work practices that are not their own.

## 6.4. Chapter Conclusion

After brief examples in previous chapters of how the positioning of home-workers shapes their boundary negotiations, this chapter aimed to construct a fuller account of the positionings that were available to home-workers in relation to home and work. The following positionings were evident in participants' accounts and emerged during the discourse analytic step 'positioning':

- The peripheral office work participant
- The marginal office work participant
- The core home participant
- The peripheral home participant
- The home-worker as non-worker
- Home others as peripheral work participants

This chapter has delved into the complexity of different positionings at home and at work. I began by exploring participation at work and found that the notion of the office was used as a reference point in order to construct a positioning in relation to work. Home-workers are positioned as peripheral office work participants, both by themselves and by others in their accounts. Peripheral participation in the office practice can be experienced as a sense of isolation and invisibility. Isolation and invisibility as day-to-day experiences of home-work are reiterated by Tietze et al. (2006), Tietze (2002), Haddon & Lewis (1994), Mann & Holdsworth (2003) and Mirchandani (1998a). Peripherality and invisibility also mean that home-workers struggle to prove their work to others. To cope with these challenges, home-workers at times redefine the notion of work performance. They move away from associations of performance with visibility and instead focus on the output of their work. They also develop intricate strategies and tell white lies that minimise the effect of their presence at home on their work processes. Visibility and legitimacy struggles have been previously discussed by e.g. Mirchandani (1998a, 1998b), Halford (2005), Kylin & Karlsson (2008), and Richardson (2012). However, my research shows that the legitimacy challenge can be conceptualised as occurring within a home-worker's participation in his or her practices: because home-workers participate peripherally in the office practice and move towards participation in the home practice, the legitimacy of their work can be questioned. This highlights the value of adopting a practice approach to home-work boundaries.

Peripheral participation in the office practice denies home-workers core membership and thereby an important source of belonging, learning, and motivation. These effects of peripheral participation confirm Wenger's (1998) contention that practice is situated at the cusp of the social and the individual. The findings here have further shown that the difference between peripherality and marginality is important: peripheral participation at the office practice at least allows home-workers to participate casually, whereas marginal participation

keeps them away from the practice altogether. These levels of participation constitute different experiences of working from home. Applying the 'levels of participation' concept (Wenger, 1998) shows that home-work experiences operate at the level of home-workers' participation in social practices. Working from home disturbs people's embeddedness in one of the most fundamental practices of their lives: the office work practice. This is why investigations of working from home should consider the social context of the arrangement and theorise about home-work in relation to its social practices.

In the section 'participation at home: paradoxes', I showed that home-workers are positioned ambiguously in the home practice. At times, their working from home enables them to play a more active role in the home practice, thus reflecting the driver 'childcare' and literature that endorses the potential of home-work to contribute to work-life balance (e.g. Felstead et al., 2002; Furnham, 2006). It was also shown that home-workers who are positioned as core participants in the home practice tend to privilege their caring duties. This echoes one way of positioning in Marsh & Musson (2008). It appears to be less emotionally demanding to prioritise one sphere than attempting to have it all. This could be one reason why some of the home-workers in this study aligned themselves with their parenting practice.

However, because of the paradoxical experience of being physically at home, but mentally engaging with work, home-workers also become peripheral members in the home practice. They hover at the edge of the home practice, never properly participating at home or work. They can be caught in between their home and work practices: At home, they are associated with work; at work, they are associated with domesticity. This incites feelings of uprootedness (Wenger, 1998), or the ambivalent experience of belonging to many practices at once, yet never fully belonging anywhere. Instead of simply mirroring the claims of participants that they feel like bad parents and bad workers, I chose to analyse this experience

through the framework of 'levels of participation'. The result is that those feelings of inadequacy might not have much to do with the performance of roles, but with how embedded in a practice home-workers are. Their lack of proper belonging at home or at work is key to their inadequacy, not actual bad parenting or inadequate work. This means that perceptions of our own competences are influenced by social participation.

The home-workers' presence at home also acts as a barrier against being taken seriously as a worker, which shows how their involvements at home and work interact with each other. Participation in the home practice complicates participation in the work practice. The finding that home-workers are associated with non-work and domesticity reflects similar indications by Mirchandani (1998a), Mirchandani (1998b), Halford (2005) and Tietze (2005).

I also explained that when home-workers bring their work home, family members witness the work that they do and become peripheral participants in the home-worker's work practice. Family members do not appear to have a choice in this process. Being drawn into the home-worker's world is an inevitable part of working from home. However, their lack of choice raises questions over the colonisation of life by work when people work from home, which is a concern that has been echoed elsewhere (e.g. Runté & Mills, 2004; Russell et al., 2009). It also corresponds with the rather critical approach adopted throughout this thesis regarding the ability of home-work to lead to balanced lives, as shown in the analysis of how flexibility is appropriated.

To conclude, this chapter has answered the third research question 'How are home-workers positioned in each domain?' by adopting the Wengerian concept of 'levels of participation'. I showed the kinds of positions that are available to home-workers (and their home others). In doing so, I contributed to debates raised in the review regarding the level of control that home-workers have over their boundaries. Home-workers' influence and control is related to

their positioning: if home-workers are core participants in a domain, then they are in charge and influential. Conversely, if they participate peripherally, they are not as influential and are more reactive to demands instead. I also showed that when home others become peripheral participants in the work practice, they have very little control over this process. These insights lead to the proposition that boundary negotiation is underpinned by the positioning of actors within the home and work domain. This explains the ambiguities regarding control: Home-workers can be both active and reactive in their boundary negotiations, depending on the level of participation that they construct for themselves. These propositions will be incorporated into my version of boundary theory in chapter 8.

At this stage in the thesis, there is only one question remaining to be explored: 'What home-work configurations are constructed by participants as they negotiate the boundaries between work and home?'. Boundary negotiation is not just related to how home-workers are positioned within home and work domains; it also has implications for the positioning of home and work as practices. I will build on existing debates on how home and work are configured by viewing home and work as fluid practices. I will use the Wengerian concepts of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoires to assess whether home and work can indeed qualify as practices. If this is the case, I will propose a more flexible relationship between home and work as practices that are inhabited and enacted in different ways by individuals, which moves away from the narrow focus on two-parent families. I will analyse the kinds of home-work relationships that are relevant to participants.

# Chapter 7

# Positionings of Home and Work

## 7.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will address the second of the two positioning issues that have been identified as underpinning boundary negotiations. I will consider whether it is useful to conceptualise home and work as practices and how this might affect boundary theory. I will then explore the positioning of the home and work practices towards each other. I will show that by negotiating boundaries between home and work, participants construct relationships (e.g. dichotomy, blurring, etc.) between home and work. I will explain that participants construct home-work configurations that are more complex than either integration or segmentation (Nippert-Eng, 1996). This complexity requires the application of a theoretical framework that is better able to shed light on home-work configurations than existing boundary theories. To this end, the Wengerian concepts of multimembership, uprootedness, brokering, and boundary objects are utilised. A particular contribution of this chapter will be to explore how blurred home-work configurations emerge.

## 7.2. Conceptualising Home and Work as Practices

I argue that it is appropriate to conceptualise elements of 'home' and 'work' as practices in the Wengerian sense because each domain is characterised by actors engaging with each other, having similar aims and sharing similar repertoires (e.g. skills, resources, ways of talking). Recall the earlier examples given for home-work boundaries as joint effort in chapter 5. I quoted participants who constructed boundaries around work and home together with their partners (mutual engagement), with the aim of accommodating two careers and their caring duties (joint enterprise), drawing on both their skills and resources (shared

repertoires). Judging by these criteria, the relationship between home-workers and their partners can be conceptualised as a practice. Whenever the three criteria 'mutual engagement', 'joint enterprise' and 'shared repertoires' (Wenger, 1998) were evident in how participants constructed their home and work domains, it was apt to view these as practices. It also became evident that there are sub-practices within the home and work domains. Participants spoke of not just one work practice, but of e.g. a traditional office work practice that they used to belong to, their current home-work practice and their partner's work practice, which some used as a reference point. The work and home sub-practices that were identified in participants' accounts are shown in the following table:

| **Work Sub-Practices** | **Home Sub-Practices** |
|---|---|
| Office Work Practice/Traditional Work Practice | Family Practice |
| Organisation Practice (larger company practice) | Childcare Practice |
| Freelancing Practice | Co-habiting/Relationship Practice |
| Partner's Work Practice (reference point) | Flatshare Practice |
| Home-Work Practice | Friendship Practice |

Table 13: Sub-Practices

There is a plurality of practices at play when we talk about the home-work interface. I will demonstrate that home and work practices are not configured the same way for everyone by briefly presenting evidence for the different home and work sub-practices.

### 7.2.1. Work Sub-Practices

When participants talked about work, it emerged that there were different practices within the 'work' label that they used as reference points. The following kinds of work practices were salient for participants: the office practice, the organisation practice, the partner's work

practice, the home-work practice, and the freelancing practice. I will briefly describe each of these.

*The Office Practice*

The notion of 'the office' is prominent in participants' accounts, as shown in the last chapter. Some participants still spend some of their working week in an office; others have completely departed from the office setting, but continue to use it as a frame of reference. The office practice does not refer to the participants' entire employing organisations. Instead, it is the more immediate setting of work relationships in which they are embedded. The following extracts portray the office as a practice which is built on interaction:

> "Yeah chats here and there in the office which can be a huge distraction and I find, I go up usually on Mondays. Monday's just manic cos I go from meeting to meeting, cos I'm up there then I've got to try and meet everybody, just kind of update and see where we're at ahm so the days I go in are just manic" (Dee, interview participant)

> "When people know you're in the office, they call you in the office, they'll email you with their problems on the basis that they'll know that you're in front of a computer and you'll get back to them with the solution pretty fast. It led to some degree a heavier workload" (Mark, interview participant)

For both Mark and Dee, the office is a source of social relationships, where one is at the centre of this practice, constantly being sought for queries and meetings. Note that while the office practice is a work practice, this aspect of it is not emphasised by Mark and Dee. Instead, they highlight the interaction aspect of the office (i.e. mutual engagement), which leads to it being conceptualised as a practice. Joint enterprise is particularly evident in Dee's extract because the meetings she attends presumably are held to achieve a common aim. Shared repertoires are implied because each office has their own culture, ways of doing things, and discourses; which participants must understand in order to engage with others in a practice successfully.

*Organisation Practice*

The organisation or company practice is apparent when participants align themselves with their employing organisation as a whole and talk about the company as 'we'. This is evident in the following examples:

> "The last couple of years that I was there I looked after their online publishing program. We didn't have one, we were trying to develop one." (Malcolm, interview participant)
>
> "We're the awarding body for further education [...] So we do all the awards for the whole vocational sector, for the education sector." (Dee, interview participant)

The construction of the company as 'we' means that participants in the company practice have shared aims (e.g. "we were trying to develop one") and a mutually dependent identity (e.g. "we're the awarding body"). The company can therefore also be viewed as a work practice, which creates social relationships. However, in terms of how home and work practices are positioned towards each other, the broader organisation practice is not drawn on by participants as much as the office practice and does not serve as an important reference point as much.

*Freelancing Practice*

One particular type of practice of work relations is experienced by freelancers. They are not part of a fixed office or company practice; yet they still build relationships that are based on shared aims, shared repertoires and mutual engagement.

> "Ok, so I was just working for them and they were paying me. So we didn't have any paper, nothing. I mean, we spoke about it so they told me we expect from you to do these things every day, so let's say I work based on targets. But there was nothing written" (Lisa, interview participant)
>
> "I communicate with a couple of guys ahm one is the web designer and we coordinate the web design. Some parts are graphic parts, but they are text, so they need to be in Italian or whatever, ok, so he needs my help [...] And the other guy is a guy that is

> taking care of the English content, but sometimes I also do the English content. So yeah, I talk with him. Or if I find mistakes in the English website, then I have to tell them "This is no proper, this is wrong, this is ok". [...] You know, four eyes are better than two. I can see other people's mistakes, they can see my mistakes, of course. Yeah so there are two people who I talk to. It can actually feel like a kind of chain work, so that something that happens before what I do, then I do something, and something happens after my work" (Lisa, interview participant)

Lisa's first example demonstrates that while she is embedded in work relations, where she is expected to meet targets, her practice is not formalised by written contracts. Still, she uses the word 'we' to demonstrate the mutuality of her work exchanges. Lisa and her company rely on each other and have expectations of each other, which help to meet their shared aims. In the second example, she constructs a practice consisting of herself and the people she collaborates with in order to achieve their joint targets. She communicates with them (mutual engagement) about the web design and content, trying to avoid mistakes (joint enterprise) and draws on a shared repertoire of web design jargon that enables them to understand each other.

*Partner's Work Practice*

Some participants use their partners' working lives as a guide when making sense of their own home-working arrangements. Often, the partner's work practice is pitched against home-work as its polar opposite:

> "My wife, I imagine, is ensconced in her air-conditioned office, drinking green tea (the executive's choice these days), making extremely important sounding phone calls and writing important emails. There is no sound but the tapping of keys and the mumble of voices. Adult voices. Discussing important things."(Newspaper column 3)

The partner's work practice is often similar to traditional office work practices. As this example shows, the partner's traditional work practice is serious, adult, executive, important, and clinical, which is the opposite of a home-work practice, where elements of home and work collide. Participants in this partner's work practice 'discuss important things' (mutual engagement), share the aim of meeting their work targets by writing those important emails

(joint enterprise) and draw on a shared repertoire of keeping their voices down, drinking green tea, and other norms or routines that might exist in this practice.

*Home-Work Practice*

The home-work practice refers to the social environment of home-work. The actors that are involved in this practice are the home-worker, family members or flatmates, friends and work others. The home-worker engages with a variety of actors in order to facilitate his or her home-working arrangement. The section 'home-work boundaries as joint effort' in chapter 5 gives examples of the mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoires that are evident in home-work practices. The following is a brief reminder:

> "It was sometimes a bone of contention. If I wasn't finished work when she came home, ahm, I would still be in work mode and not quite be there. Or she'd be looking to come in and be busy doing other things, ahm making noise and distracting me, and I'd find myself getting distracted from doing work. Or I found myself being very much, I won't say cranky, but very much in work mode, and kinda focused on trying to get finished, cos I was a bit stressed over trying to get stuff out for a particular time or, and I found myself kinda being a bit narky. At the fact that she was coming in and making noise. Ah, sometimes it was difficult" (David, interview participant)

This shows that home-work is not about the simple mechanics of moving one's work location into the home. Instead, home-work is situated within social practices and relationships, where actors have to negotiate their varying demands through mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoires. The aims of actors in the home-work practice are not necessarily the same. However, they do try to bridge their divergent aims by negotiation. Next, I will present an overview of the home practices that were constructed in participants' accounts.

### 7.2.2. Home Sub-Practices

Within the 'home' label, participants refer to a variety of practices that reflect their circumstances. The home sub-practices identified in this research are: family practice, childcare practice, co-habiting/relationship practice, flatshare practice and friendship practice.

*Family Practice*

The family practice refers to relationships between family members that are based on mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoires. Even though family and cohabiting practices are quite similar, in that in both kinds of practices a couple tends to be central in determining the direction of the practice, I distinguish between them based on the presence of children. This is because the presence of children exerts particular pressures on a practice, as in the following example:

> "For a couple of years in particular, we were really skint. All the time. At a time when we couldn't. We didn't need to be. You know we could have chosen to, you know, have stayed where we were and you have – when you have, when kids come along, your income gets cut hugely. And you've a lot more expenses. Ahm, but we could've been quite comfortable if we'd stayed the way we were. But, by us choosing to like leave and start off by myself it really did, you could feel the pressure and that kind of leads to its own stresses." (Malcolm, interview participant)

A family practice is created here by Malcolm demonstrating that he and his wife engaged with one another (mutual engagement) to make the joint decision for him to go freelance (joint enterprise), drawing on their shared resources and skills to make the arrangement work (shared repertoire). He portrays his wife and himself as a tightly-knit unit who adopt one voice.

*Childcare Practice*

On the surface, it seems that a childcare practice should be situated within a family practice. However, this is not necessarily the case because childcare often involves non-family members. Childcare as a practice then is a set of social relations between people who have as their aim the provision of care to specific children. Such a practice often consists of a set of parents and a childminder; or a set of parents and grandparents; or any other configuration of actors caring for a child.

> "And as I said they always had a childminder. I've had a childminder for the last ten years even though I was working at home because it just meant – now you've got flexibility with the childminder, if they're sick it's not the end of the world. You can manage the odd time, but just you know I paid full childcare costs" (Dee, interview participant)

This example shows that people who have as their shared aim the care of specific children interact with each other and manage this aim together, thereby creating a practice.

*Co-habiting/Relationship Practice*

A co-habiting or relationship practice is similar to a family practice except that there are no children present. What characterises a relationship practice is evidence of having shared goals, doing things together (mutual engagement) and shared repertoires. All three are present in the following example:

> "A good part of Saturday and Sunday is personal time. Ahm with planning weddings and what not, we need time to actually look on the internet, book people, so like last weekend we – Saturday and Sunday was spent in Galway booking a band, that kind of a thing." (Mark, interview participant)

Mark and his fiancée have as their shared goal their wedding and the planning of it. They engage in this process by evaluating options together, drawing on the same resources. This means that they enact a relationship practice.

*Flatshare Practice*

Flatshare practices are home practices that move away from the focus on family and relationships. It is rarely acknowledged that work-home negotiations do not just take place within the family setting. Clark's (2000) narrow focus on work-family balance is an example of this oversight. In my research, the notion of 'home' is more inclusive. The negotiation of work-home boundaries is just as relevant to people who are non-parents. The following is an example of a flatshare practice, where people who live together try to accommodate each other's work and living needs in terms of space and noise (joint enterprise):

> "I have one flatmate – very strange timing – he works during the night, because he works in a restaurant. So during the day he sleeps, so he's locked into his bedroom and I have the whole living room to myself. Nobody comes in so that's very convenient. Otherwise, it'd be really tough." (Lisa, interview participant)

The practice of sharing a flat entails consideration for each other and the shared aim of creating a living scenario that is agreeable to all involved, though the mutual engagement element of a practice might not be as strong as between members of a relationship or family practice, because Lisa's example demonstrates that boundaries are anticipated, not openly negotiated.

*Friendship Practice*

The notion of 'home' is also open to stakeholders who do not share a living space with the home-worker. This is because the concept of 'home', by virtue of being the other of work, includes all aspects of life that work is not, e.g. leisure, community involvement, friendship, hobbies, etc. Some of these practices are beyond the scope of this research and did not seem salient to participants in regards to the home-work interface. However, participants did report

on their relationships with friends and how their friendship practices were affected by their working from home:

> "Friends simply don't believe that you do any actual paid work at home. They think you've found the golden goose. That you gambol around the house in a Brady Bunch idyll, with the kids winding behind you singing and dancing, while some sucker sends you regular payment. They phone and tutt because they can hear the radio in the background. They presume you've just turned down the Bacchanalian orgy that is your daily home-working life for a moment to take their call. When you wind up working the occasional Sunday they give out to you for not being efficient during the week." (Newspaper column 4)

Working from home can be seen as a disruption to friendship practices because home-workers no longer share similar experiences of work with their friends. Instead, they engage in a working arrangement that is alien to their friends and disturbs the shared constructs of work. When friendship practices were discussed in participants' accounts, it was mostly in a negative way. Home-workers reported that friends had become suspicious of home-working arrangements, which confirms that home-work can be a disruption to the processes of friendship.

The aim of this section on home and work as practices was to outline the different practices that are possible under the labels of 'home' and 'work' and to show that it is indeed appropriate to talk of practices because the criteria of mutual engagement, shared aims and shared repertoires are fulfilled. It is important to highlight the plurality of home and work practices. Home-workers have differing circumstances, which indicates that 'home' and 'work' do not mean the same thing for every participant. It was necessary to make the case for viewing home and work as social practices, because my answer to the second research question 'What home-work configurations are constructed by participants as they negotiate the boundaries between work and home?', will be approached through practice concepts. A practice stance towards home and work will contribute to the debate on whether home and work continue to constitute a dichotomy, because instead of viewing domains as static, this

stance facilitates investigation of how relationships between practices are actually established. After providing evidence that it is appropriate to talk of home and work as practices, I will now consider in detail two kinds of positionings between home and work practices that were dominant in participants' accounts: dichotomy and blurring. I will pay particular attention to how blurred relationships between home and work are constructed through boundary negotiation.

## 7.3. Positionings of Home and Work

I argue that in negotiating the boundaries between home and work, participants construct relationships between these two domains and position them towards each other in certain ways, which builds on the research question 'What home-work configurations are constructed by participants as they negotiate the boundaries between work and home?'.

It emerged that the relationships between home and work in participants' accounts can be divided into both dichotomous and blurred configurations. This suggests a co-existence of traditional and new configurations between home and work. As such, a semblance of integration/segmentation à la Nippert-Eng (1996) remains. However, the blurred relationships between home and work go beyond what has been defined as integration in the literature so far. Integration refers to home and work domains freely overlapping with each other (Nippert-Eng, 1996). This is supposedly evident when a person uses one diary for home and work purposes, for example. Here, I will go beyond this superficiality. Through the utilisation of the Wengerian concepts of multimembership, uprootedness, brokering, and boundary objects, I will explore what integration or co-presence of home and work actually means for

the people involved and the results of blurring on home-workers' participation in their practices. The following positionings of home and work are discussed below:

1. Dichotomies
    - Home-work versus office work
    - Home versus work practices

2. Blurring of home and work practices
    - Micro-level blurring
    - Macro-level blurring

### 7.3.1. Dichotomies

Dichotomous relationships between practices are still evident in participants' accounts. One configuration that remains salient is the juxtaposition of office-based and home-based work. This dichotomy helps participants to make sense of and evaluate their home-work, as shown in the driver 'escape from the office'. A dichotomous construction of home and work as larger-scale practices is also displayed. This shines through particularly in cases where participants draw strong, rigid boundaries around home and work. Working from home therefore does not render the work-home dichotomy obsolete. However, working from home does bring with it the potential for new relationships between home and work. Because the dichotomy has been analysed extensively elsewhere (e.g. Mirchandani, 1999), I will only provide a brief reiteration of this kind of relationship and go into more detail in regards to blurred configurations.

#### 7.3.1.1. Home-Work versus Office Work

The section on the different home and work practices has shown that home-work and office work are both practices under the label of 'work'. All of the participants in this study participate in home-working practices. Most have worked in an office setting at some stage, with some participants still occasionally engaging in this type of work. As a result, the notion of 'office work' is used as a frame of reference which informs home-work and is used as a tool of evaluation. Office work is a rather traditional form of work, where the boundaries of space and time are relatively clear and stable. Home-work is constructed as the opposite of office work. Home-work, as shown by the driver 'escape from the office' and the section 'peripheral participation in the office practice', allows for a way of working that is everything the office is not. Office work is constrained; home-work is free and autonomous. Office work means being monitored and visible; home-work means being invisible. This leads to a dichotomous relationship between home-work and office work in participants' accounts. Ample evidence has already been given in other sections, so at this point I will only provide a few short quotes to confirm this construction:

> "If you are working from home, make sure you have the same amount of childcare as you would have in a normal job. The thing is, you're not in a normal job. You, like I said, the amount of work you have varies, the amount of money you're earning varies, so you have to be flexible." (Malcolm, interview participant)

> "When you are in an office, everybody can see that you are sitting and working, ok. So you actually don't need to prove that that task was very tough and it took longer than what was expected and bla bla bla, ok. When you are at home, nobody sees, so you actually have to demonstrate that that thing was ah special or difficult." (Lisa, interview participant)

> "I'd still love to be able to work from home, do you know. Because I mean who wants to get up in the morning, put on a suit that they don't want to wear, drive in a car for an hour, sitting in traffic. Nobody wants that! I mean, the ideal job for anyone I would imagine is having a job at home, that you're getting paid for. [...] You know, getting paid for like, actually staying at home, you know." (Jake, interview participant)

The first example emphasises that home-work is not a normal (office-bound) job. Home-work is constructed as different and special. The second example confirms the portrayal of home-work as invisible versus office work as visible. The third example creates an image of home-work as the ideal way of working, as allure; while an office-based job evokes associations of tediousness. The invisibility of home-work contributes to legitimacy issues and results in home-workers' efforts being taken less seriously than those of traditional office workers. The dichotomous construction of home-work and office work exacerbates this struggle, as does the construction of home-work as abnormal. This shows that home-work is subordinated to office-based work and is taken less seriously. Home-work becomes the 'other' of office work. The act of setting strict boundaries between home and work could therefore be an attempt to render home-work more like office work, with its fixed times and places. Boundaries are a means of regaining work legitimacy. The frame of reference 'office work vs. home-work' is important because participants continue to compare their home-work to office work. Participants locate their accounts within the discourses of 'home-work' and 'office work' to help them make sense of and evaluate their experiences. The next section discusses another salient dichotomy – that of home versus work practices on a larger scale.

#### 7.3.1.2. Home versus Work Practices

A dichotomy between home and work practices arises as a result of participants' boundary negotiations. Relatively rigid or traditional types of temporal, spatial, psychological and social boundaries reaffirm the dichotomy of home and work. In this section, I will briefly present some examples that confirm the pervasiveness of the home-work dichotomy.

> "For the last sixteen years I have had a home office, now a purpose built office/stores/studio in the back garden. So when in office mode I'm out in the office and when in Mum mode I'm at home in the house. This works best for me and helps me to "switch off" when its out of hours." (Maureen, online discussion 2)

> *On being asked if he could imagine working from home if he was a parent:* "I don't think so, no. I couldn't imagine anyway because, like there would obviously have to be someone else there to mind the kids [...] No, it couldn't work. It's too much of a mix then, or it's too close to – you can't divide like between family life and work life. I don't know – or sorry you have to divide it. It's way too close I think. Because like, there's just too many distractions while you work. If you had a kid roaring, you know, I mean that would, that's not a work place at all, like. That's definitely not a work environment. I don't think so anyway. If you send them to a crèche or a school, fine, but if they're in the house, even if there is like, a nanny looking after them, like it's not gonna work because – ok, unless your office is detached from the house itself, you're gonna hear everything that goes on, you know. Sure I mean, everything that happens is going to be a distraction. So that can't work, I'm sorry." (Jake, interview participant)

In both examples, there is an underlying assumption that the separation of home and work is necessary. The dichotomy is constructed as the norm to follow, e.g. "you have to divide it" (Jake). Similarly, Maureen's reiteration of "the office mode" and "the mum mode" confirms that home and work ways of being are different from each other. Traditionally, the dichotomy has preserved the status attached to work and has continued to subordinate the home domain (Mirchandani, 1999). This is apparent in Jake's example: The statement "that's definitely not a work environment" when he talks about the possibility of children and work under one roof shows concern for keeping work intact as a domain, rather than worrying about the home. Most of the time, the dichotomy therefore prioritises work and subordinates the home.

However, one participant, while still relying on a dichotomy between home and work, has upturned the power relationship between these practices. His work practice has become subordinated to his home practice.

> "But for the sake of being able to work at home within earshot of a sick kid on the days she can't get to school I've learned to smile and take it. Instead, I walk away from the computer without pressing "send" on the furious response I've just composed. I make some toast and sit spreading crumbs all over the floor while enjoying an episode of Peppa Pig with my giggling, suddenly not-so-sick daughter. For that privilege, I'll allow someone else vent a little at me. What you've got in that scenario is something that's necessary, the job, and something else that's important, the kid. Until the hand of lottery strikes, work will always be required. Work governs large chunks of how we live, it informs our identities, that's undeniable, annoying and unavoidable. In the past, I've let work have a disproportionate influence on how I feel. Not any more. Now my bosses are small and loud. They get sick in my bed and

> inflict questionable TV programming on me. They never make me feel bad, and I try to return the favour." (Newspaper column 5)

In this example, childcare becomes the important domain, while work is merely "necessary". The author strengthens the positioning of family as more important than work by teasing out the idea of children as bosses. This attaches value and legitimacy to childcare, as opposed to work. In this extract, the author talks of making a conscious decision not to "let work have a disproportionate influence on how [he feels]". He constructs childcare as the new work, the new source of his emotional well-being. His example demonstrates that even within the home-work dichotomy, it is possible to achieve changes; however, his example was an exception. The implication is that even a deep-seated dichotomy can be changeable. The next section will continue with the theme of upsetting the dichotomy. I will demonstrate that home-work also enables participants to re-configure the relationship between home and work and move beyond dichotomous rigidity.

### 7.3.2. Blurring

This section analyses relationships between home and work where the boundaries between domains become blurred. The practice of working from home by its nature implies that one performs home and work duties under the same roof, in close proximity to each other. At times, this means that the home-worker is simultaneously a worker and a parent/husband/flatmate, etc; which can result in the experience of home and work practices becoming blurred. Blurring can be experienced on a micro level, i.e. temporary instances of boundary invasions and occasionally performing home and work at the same time, or on a macro level, where home and work as spheres become intermeshed, sometimes to such an extent that home and work are not recognisable as separate practices any more. I will explain

what makes blurring a temporary or permanent experience. The blurring of home and work is explored through the Wengerian concepts of brokering, boundary objects, multimembership, uprootedness and boundary practice. These concepts capture what happens when home-workers experience a sense of being caught in between practices. Wengerian concepts also help us to understand the phenomenon of complete intermeshing, as it goes beyond existing observations of home-work being integrated (Nippert-Eng, 1996). The concept of integration has actually illuminated very little about how home and work interact and how connections across domains are established. The following sections on micro and macro-level blurring attempt to address this gap.

#### 7.3.2.1. Micro-Level Blurring

In order to achieve new theoretical insights into boundaries, in this section, I will explain how connections across domains are achieved. When home and work are flexibly bounded, it can lead to a temporary experience of overlap, where home and work are performed simultaneously. Home and work overlap for a short period of time, but do not necessarily become completely intermeshed as spheres. Home and work activities are still recognisable as such. Temporary blurring happens because participants want to (or have to) fulfil their responsibilities in both spheres at the same time. Performing both domains simultaneously means that both domains are important to participants and it allows them not to have to make a choice between home and work. The following is an example of both domains being performed at the same time:

> "This week he said he wanted to be able to cuddle up with me, so would I mind if he took work to bed. Not great for my sleep, but good to have him there. So he's started using a little folding coffee table, which he puts next to the bed with his laptop on it..." (Researcher's diary)

In this example, the home-worker does not want to choose between having to work and spending time with his girlfriend. His solution to the conundrum is taking work to bed, which allows him to be present in the home and the work domain at the same time. This example displays elements of 'brokering' and 'boundary objects', two concepts proposed by Wenger (1998) as means of establishing connections across practices. Brokering relies on participative connections. A person who is a member in multiple practices transfers elements from one practice into another. When connections across practices are established through reification, the term 'boundary objects' applies. Note that the term 'boundary objects' in the Wengerian sense differs from how it was used earlier in regards to spatial boundaries. In the context of spatial boundaries, 'boundary objects' referred to artefacts that helped participants create *distinctions* between home and work. In the Wengerian context, 'boundary objects' are those artefacts that help participants establish *connections* across home and work practices. The act of bringing work behaviours into bed in the above example can be viewed as an example of 'brokering' (Wenger, 1998). The home-worker is a participant in his home and his work practice and transfers elements of one practice into the other. The laptop and folding table, objects that normally belong in a work domain, are brought into the bedroom, a definite home domain, because of its connotations of sleeping, relaxation, and intimacy. These boundary objects, especially the laptop, connect the home and work practice to each other. According to Wenger (1998), brokering requires influence. The home-worker must be powerful enough in the home domain in order to be able to bring 'foreign' elements with him. This means that the home-worker in the above example is positioned as being an influential participant in his home practice, who is able to shape the development of this practice. Being influential at home resonates with being a core participant in this practice. Thus, a link between levels of participation and the ability to establish connections between practices becomes evident. The ability to establish connections could also be related to the

direction of brokering. Bringing work to bed is consistent with work's primacy, whereas bringing home to work would probably be more contentious and less legitimate. The following is another example of home and work being performed at the same time and connections being established across practices:

> "As I write this my son is lying asleep across my legs. I was at Open Coffee this morning […] Had meetings with some people regarding some very exciting future developments. And I am sitting here typing up the proposals and outlays with these businesses that I cannot wait to start. All from my couch in my sitting room. I have an office upstairs that my Husband is forever encouraging me to use. But I have always said my first job is Mum." (Cindy, online discussion 1)

This example also displays a home-worker who refuses to choose between home and work and hence performs both at the same time. She is typing up business proposals while sitting on the couch with her son. She engages in brokering by transferring work activities into the home sphere, but also by bringing her son into her working life. It can be argued that her laptop is the boundary object because it allows her to connect work and home. However, another interpretation is that the couch is the boundary object because it accommodates both childcare and work. It is telling that there is an office available to her, yet she chooses to work in her living space because her "first job is Mum". This relates back to the privileging of parental duties discussed in regards to the driver 'childcare' and to core positioning at home. Her ability to engage in brokering indicates that she is a powerful participant in the home sphere, who has the freedom to bring work elements into the home practice. Furthermore, it is possible to suggest that Cindy has the freedom to temporarily overlap her work and her home life because she is self-employed, which allows her to actively shape her working life. The last point highlights once more the relevance of context. However, an alternative interpretation is that she feels pressure to be a good mother and fit her work around her childcare; rather than use her office and shut herself off from her child, which

makes it difficult to establish whether she is positioned as the active agent in charge of her home-work or the passive recipient responding to societal pressures.

So far, temporary instances of blurring have been described as participants not wanting to choose between home and work. However, temporarily performing both home and work duties happens not just because home-workers refuse to choose between the two spheres. It also happens as a result of *boundary invasions* that are largely outside of the home-workers' control. This positions home-workers as lacking influence.

> "Sometimes I'd even be in bed in the morning, talking to customers, while I'm still in bed with my girlfriend. I'd often be called before technically work hours, ah so I would have customers, sometimes just calling me at half past 8 when I'm technically not supposed to start work till 9. And I would still be in bed and I would take their call and I would talk to them."(David, interview participant)

A work phone call breaks into the cosy home bubble of David and his girlfriend being in bed together, leading to him participating in both domains. His example could be termed 'involuntary brokering' because he is the passive recipient of work phone calls while in the home sphere. The fact that he takes work calls while in bed could mean that he either does not experience it as disruptive or that he feels he has no choice but to answer his phone. The phone acts as the boundary object that allows work others to invade David's home practice. It is plausible that work others are also the brokers because they have the power to bring their work concerns into someone's home sphere. This reiterates the notion of home-workers not being in control of their boundaries and work colonising the home sphere.

Examples at the other end of the spectrum include participants in the home sphere invading the boundary around work, leading to cross-domain duties:

> "They (children) realise that at times we need to be left alone, but recently they have taken to ascertaining if I am definitely engaged in a job-related phone call before storming into the room and demanding that they get to know whoever is on the other end of the line. Fortunately, whoever is on the other end of the line is usually willing to tolerate their infractions but it doesn't make for a professional atmosphere." (Newspaper column 4)

The children in this example, while generally respectful of the work boundary, do at times interrupt by "storming into the room and demanding that they get to know whoever is on the other end of the line". Their "infraction" breaks the boundary around work and inhibits a professional work atmosphere, leading to work and home happening simultaneously. Having to negotiate with the children while on a job-related phone call means that job others witness the columnist's parenting behaviour. This is a further example of brokering, even though it is also involuntary: The columnist brings his home ways of being into his work setting. He is stuck in the middle of demands coming from powerful work others and powerful home others. He seems to be trying to accommodate two spheres. The children can also be viewed as brokers who bring their concerns into their dad's work practice. Similarly, the caller is potentially a broker who unknowingly invades the columnist's home space. The telephone is the boundary object that enables a connection across practices. It is only through the telephone that home and work are performed simultaneously in the example. This confirms that ICT use in home-work mediates people's boundary work in interesting ways, justifying studies such as Golden & Geisler's (2007) that have focused on the role of technology in home-work boundaries. The above extract operates around a discourse of 'juggling', where the home-worker attempts to deal with invasions from home and work others at the same time, constantly trying to keep everyone happy.

However, it needs to be highlighted that boundary invasions are not necessarily experienced as negative or terribly disruptive:

> "I am a mother to a 4 year old girl and since starting my business I worry all the time that I am not spending enough time with her, but reading all the posts in this thread has really helped me to put things into better perspective. She rambles in and out of my studio when I work in there (its a room in the house) or brings her toys in, or just comes in to watch me work or offer opinions so when I look at the bigger picture, it isn't really as bad as I thought it was!" (Jane, online discussion 1)

Here, the participant's studio becomes a boundary object that connects her work and home practices. Her daughter is the broker who invades her mother's workspace and brings her objects, such as toys, into work. The connection across practices is experienced as positive, even as enabling her to spend more time with her daughter, which relates to 'childcare' as a home-work driver. This shows that boundary invasions can be experienced both positively and negatively, depending on whether they are perceived as enabling or constraining a desired lifestyle. To conclude, performing home and work at the same time is a consequence of the home-workers adopting flexibility as a strategy for boundary negotiation. Performing home and work simultaneously establishes connections across practices, but does not necessarily result in home and work becoming blurred to such an extent that they are not identifiable as separate practices any longer. Performing home and work at the same time describes blurring at a micro-level, i.e. temporary instances of blurring that are *necessitated in a specific situation*. The Wengerian concepts of brokering and boundary objects have highlighted ways in which connections across practices are established. To summarise, common boundary objects that connect home-workers to their work practice while at home are: laptops, email, and the telephone; in short, means of communication that allow work others to access home-workers while at home. Home offices and entire houses also serve as boundary objects that accommodate and connect home and work practices with each other. Brokering is further evident in many of the participants' accounts when work behaviours are transferred into the home practice and vice versa, both by the home-workers and powerful home and work others. In the following section, I will deepen my understanding of blurred home-work relationships by investigating what happens when home and work become completely intermeshed or indistinguishable.

#### 7.3.2.2. Macro-Level Blurring

The flexibility experienced by home-workers can lead not just to home and work practices overlapping temporarily, it can also lead to home and work becoming intermeshed to such an extent that home-workers are not sure any more whether they are at work or at home. This section investigates macro-level blurring, where home and work become intertwined and at times even mesh to form a completely new practice. Again, Wengerian concepts are used to frame the analysis; this time I will draw on the ideas of 'multimembership', 'uprootedness' and 'boundary practice'. The aim of this section is to illuminate an interesting configuration of home and work that emerges through boundary negotiation.

The following examples give a flavour of what happens when work and home practices become intertwined on a macro-level and home-workers struggle to distinguish between home and work:

> "What started out as a definite choice to leave the workplace has morphed over the years into a conglomeration of job and home life, where one doesn't end where the other starts. Rather, the two interweave constantly so neither I nor the people I am dealing with are ever quite sure if I'm working or not. These people include family, friends and colleagues." (Newspaper column 4)

> "So it's a constant mix between proper work, childminding, and somewhere in between." (Simon, interview participant)

Words like "morphed", "conglomeration", "interweave constantly", "constant mix", and "somewhere in between" portray working from home as a messy situation, where the worlds of home and work become blurred to such an extent that one does not know where work ends and home begins. The boundaries between home and work have become eroded; the relationship between home and work is unclear. This reveals a degree of ontological uncertainty. Participants do not know whether they are working or not. In the first example, the ontological uncertainty is even transferred onto other participants in home and work practices (family, friends and colleagues). In the second example, while the participant still

distinguishes between work and childminding as entities, he acknowledges that he operates in a no-man's land "in between" the two spheres. The ambiguity in both accounts can be understood with regard to the concept of 'multimembership' (Wenger, 1998). Multimembership means belonging to a number of practices at once and according to Wenger is *"the living experience of boundaries"* (Wenger, 1998: 161). The next example also displays uncertainty as to whether a couple's house is a workspace or a home:

> "I don't think his boss would appreciate me pottering around in the background – but again what does he expect to happen in our home? It's supposed to be all business-like and everything but after all it is still the place where we live" (Researcher's diary)

Similarly to the earlier newspaper column example, this extract shows that the home-worker's membership in multiple practices does not just confuse the person who is situated at the cusp of two practices, but also other participants in the practices, such as spouses. Here, the home-worker's partner tries to make sense of the co-location of home and work. She tries to hold on to her understanding of the house as a home, whilst managing expectations that the house ought to be a serious workplace. The home-worker, who does not speak directly in this extract, is positioned as belonging in two practices, with a participant of one practice wanting him to be the serious worker and a participant of the other practice claiming him for the home domain. Home-work thus invokes complex dynamics of having to negotiate one's level of participation with two practices. Multimembership in home and work practices can lead to the ambiguous experience of belonging to both practices, but not fully belonging in either. This experience is termed 'uprootedness' (Wenger, 1998). Participants are never fully at work, yet never fully at home either, as shown in chapter 6 in regards to peripheral participation. Home-workers are constantly available to demands from both spheres, which renders them caught between spheres:

> "Without the distinct boundary of leaving the house to go to the office each day, where does 'Work' end and 'Life' begin?" (Newspaper column 1)

The lack of boundaries between home and work makes it difficult to distinguish home and work from each other. Any time or place is a potential home or work place, meaning that the home-worker is constantly available for demands from both spheres, but does not know where he belongs. The concept of uprootedness demonstrates that there is an overlap between how home and work are positioned as practices and how home-workers participate in these practices. The difficulty in distinguishing between home and work is reflected by the home-worker's uprooted level of participation, in that the home-worker does not know where home and work begin, as well as not knowing where he belongs any more. This shows that home-work configurations and the positioning of home-workers can be related to each other.

When work and home become blurred to such an extent that they are not distinctly recognisable any more, it can result in the formation of a 'boundary practice'. The purpose of a 'boundary practice' is *"to deal with boundaries and sustain a connection between a number of other practices by addressing conflicts, reconciling perspectives, and finding resolutions"* (Wenger, 1998: 114). Home-work can become a boundary practice for participants if it is utilised to manage competing home and work demands. Instead of separating these demands into distinct times and spaces according to a dichotomy, a boundary practice connects home and work spheres into a new practice where demands interweave. Work and home take place anywhere in the house, at any time. This builds on the flexible types of boundaries discussed in chapter 4. The following extracts demonstrate how home-work can become a boundary practice:

> "Kitchen tables, living room armchair, worktop all make very good offices in my opinion!!! Turns out it's a method that fits in nicely with my life right now" (Joanne, online discussion 2)

> "And then, well, at some stage the little one wakes up so I take care of her, make breakfast. And then she'll either sit on my lap while I work or she'll play while I'm working. Or I don't do anything and just play with her, or yeah, that's how we pass the day." (Simon, interview participant)

> "By the time you approach a work desk (in reality, the space where you drop your laptop cleared of laundry and last night's late snack) you have already dealt with clothes, hair, teeth, breakfast and school lunch negotiations." (Newspaper column 6)

> "Like Cindy, I prefer to use my laptop in the living room. I do switch it off to give my kids my undivided attention at times but I do like the fact that I am working, yet as far as they are concerned, I am there. As Maureen pointed out, it does make the boundary between work and relaxation more difficult" (Laura, online discussion 2)

In each of these extracts, it is evident that the gap between home and work as spheres has narrowed. The participants' home-work practices become boundary practices *designed to facilitate the demands from two spheres*. Over time, home-work merges the two spheres into a unique boundary practice, where home and work demands interweave freely. The columnist's example highlights the physical dimension of a boundary practice: spaces within the house become available for all aspects of the boundary practice, meaning that home and work objects begin to intermingle. The development of a boundary practice to facilitate home and work demands reflects the driver 'childcare'.

A boundary practice, or macro-level blurring, is identified by the generalised nature of home-work interaction. Home and work are blurred on a relatively permanent level. In contrast, micro-level blurring relates to singular instances of blurring that are necessitated by a specific situation. Naturally, over time those singular instances can multiply and eventually lead to generalised blurring. However, the two categories are still distinct because macro-level blurring reflects a merged relationship between home and work, while micro-level blurring means that home and work are still recognisable and connections between domains need to be made through boundary objects and brokering. The development of a boundary practice might well help participants to reconcile the competing demands of home and work. However, the following example serves as a word of caution and highlights that the intermingling of home and work can take its toll on the home-worker. In this example, the home-worker recalls how he has adjusted to home and work becoming blurred:

> "It's getting better. But there have been days when I was, well, close to having a breakdown." (Simon, interview participant)

Simon equates having to work and mind his daughter at the same time with being "close to having a breakdown". The indication that the blurring of home and work could be breakdown-inducing raises questions over how feasible it is to work and care at the same time. It also casts doubt over whether it is possible to fully engage in childcare and work at the same time, which was discussed in my earlier analysis of the levels at which home-workers participate in their practices, where I showed that trying to have it all means never fully belonging anywhere. In this section, the possibility for home-work to effect macro-level blurring between home and work has been explored. When home and work practices become blurred, participants struggle with uncertainty over whether they are working or not. It has been demonstrated that working from home can lead to participants belonging in home and work practices at the same time (multimembership), but never fully belonging in either (uprootedness). Home-work can become a unique boundary practice that is enacted in order to reconcile home and work. It merges these two domains into a new configuration.

## 7.4. Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I conceptualised home and work as a plurality of practices. I then outlined positionings of home and work under the headings of 'dichotomies' and 'blurring'. In demonstrating the plurality of practices, I explicitly wish to critique the idea that 'home' and 'work' as domains are predetermined. I follow Nippert-Eng's (1996) caution that *"social scientists have written about 'home' and 'work' as if we all know what these terms mean, as if the territories they encompass and the ways they are related are the same for everyone"*

(4). In the current chapter, I have shown that home and work are indeed not the same for everyone. I am particularly critical of approaches that automatically equate the home domain with the notion of family (e.g. Clark, 2000; Desrochers et al., 2005). As I have shown here, family is one possible practice within the home domain; however, it is not the only one. I understand that family is the most obvious 'other' of work and of course, it is one home practice that is very relevant to my research. However, people's circumstances determine the kinds of home practices that are available to them. Non-parents participate in home practices that may have nothing to do with parenting, yet they still negotiate the work-home interface. My proposed version of boundary theory in chapter 8 reflects these concerns about scope.

The plurality of practices that I add to boundary theory is somewhat reminiscent of Felstead et al.'s (2005) notion of 'workscapes', which describes *"the total network of workplaces and workstations that are occupied by individuals and groups in the course of their employment"* (Felstead et al., 2005: 16). Home-work is a network of plural workscapes, which means that home-workers occupy a multitude of different work settings and communities. The concept can be extended into the realm of the home: 'homescapes' as a term would then comprise the totality of home practices that home-workers participate in. Felstead et al.'s (2005) concept lends support for my proposition that there is a plurality of practices. After explaining why I chose to conceptualise home and work as practices, I sought to build on current debates about the relationship between home and work. My contribution to this debate is a more nuanced analysis of how blurred configurations emerge.

I began the section on configurations by discussing dichotomous constructions of home and work. The two dichotomies that were presented, home-work versus office work, and home versus work, demonstrate that a) home-work is still the other of office work and continues to be subordinated to what is categorised as 'proper' work; and b) the traditional separation of

home and work is still salient. The dichotomies are constructed by participants in their boundary negotiations. The juxtaposition of home-work and office-work continues to de-legitimise home-based work. The concept of 'work' still appears to be strongly tied to traditional forms of work, including office-based work. This means that 'the other' of office work, home-work, cannot be accepted as legitimate work. Issues of home-work legitimacy are reiterated by Mirchandani (1998a), Halford (2005) and Kylin & Karlsson (2008) and were reflected in how home-workers are positioned within domains.

The implication of the finding that home-work continues to be 'the other' of office work is that to legitimise home-work, we must address how we define work. The narrow definition of work as something that is tied to specific places, and specific times, devalues forms of work that are flexible and that in any way deviate from traditional patterns. A more inclusive definition of work would move towards acceptance of non-traditional arrangements. However, Mirchandani's (1998a) research indicates that it is often the home-workers themselves who refuse to broaden the concept of work and instead of fighting for their work arrangement to be legitimised, attempt to make home-work more like office-work. In order to tackle this issue, I suggest that companies and policy-makers could play a role in formalising home-working arrangements and thus demonstrate that home-work is not the opposite of 'proper' work, but one of the many forms of it.

Further, the finding that home-workers continue to draw upon a dichotomous relationship between home and work is reflected by Halford (2006), Mirchandani (1998b), Butler & Modaff (2008) and Brocklehurst (2001). Often, a dichotomy emerges accidentally. Participants seek out home-work in order to achieve more liberated and balanced lifestyles. They try to cope with the meeting of two spheres by setting strict boundaries and unwittingly end up reinforcing the dichotomy. According to Brocklehurst (2001), the dichotomy creates

meaning and security for workers. Similarly, in this research, home-workers draw strict boundaries in order to protect home and work from each other and maintain order. These strict boundaries create the dichotomy, which then prioritises work over the home (e.g. Runté & Mills, 2004). However, in this section I have shown that while it is the norm to privilege work over the home, some home-workers change the power relationship that is inherent in the dichotomy. Home-work does offer opportunities for a changed power relationship (as in Musson & Tietze, 2004), because home identities are more readily available to participants.

In the section 'blurring', I aimed to contribute to debate surrounding home-work relationships by analysing how blurred configurations between home and work come about. I discussed the difference between micro and macro levels of blurring between home and work. I described how micro-level blurring is used to perform home and work tasks simultaneously. I outlined how participants achieve connections across home and work practices through the mechanisms of boundary objects and brokering, which is a novel contribution. In line with this, I drew on participants' positioning. Cohen et al.'s (2009) work is relevant here: they identified three home-work configurations that positioned people as being in charge of boundaries, and three kinds of configurations that challenged control. Cohen et al. (2009) reflected on experiences of 'seeping' (work or home seep into the other domain) and 'invading' (when unforeseen micro-transitions from one sphere into the other are necessary), which are reminiscent of what I termed 'involuntary brokering'. They also introduced the concept of 'overwhelming' (the emotional dimension of losing control of the boundary), which relates back to the emotional consequences of occupying a boundary practice, e.g. I quoted one participant as stating that he had been close to having a breakdown. Cohen et al.'s work supports my proposition that home-workers are both in control and lacking control over their boundaries, depending on how they position themselves.

Analysing the blurring of home-work boundaries through the Wengerian concepts of brokering and boundary objects represents a move away from simplistic accounts of integration (e.g. Nippert-Eng, 1996). Instead of merely suggesting that people bring their home and work lives into contact with each other, I have detailed the ways in which they do so. This helps us to better understand the concept of blurring and the relationships between home and work that are available to people. My new version of boundary theory will include the aspects of boundary objects and brokering and thus move towards a version of boundary theory that explains how home-work configurations emerge.

Macro-level blurring describes blurring that is experienced on a larger scale. Home-workers struggle to distinguish between their work and home practices. I have used the concepts of multimembership and uprootedness to describe the experience of belonging to various practices at once, but never fully belonging anywhere. I have also introduced the notion of boundary practice to describe a newly formed domain that features both home and work elements. Issues of blurring and struggles to distinguish between home and work reflect earlier research by Tietze (2002), Hill et al. (2003), Russell et al. (2009), and Felstead et al. (2005). Tietze & Musson (2005) describe blurring as an *"ontological limbo of being neither here nor there"* (1344), while Richardson (2012) understands blurring as dis-ease. Positive notions of blurring, where it is used to accommodate home and work demands, are reiterated by Musson & Tietze (2004) who claim that a move away from the traditional work-home dichotomy can be experienced as life-enhancing. My research has highlighted both positive and negative experiences of blurring, depending on how voluntary blurring is and whether this reflects a desired lifestyle.

The different home-work relationships identified here are somewhat reminiscent of Felstead et al.'s (2005) continuum of five configurations of home and work: detachment,

juxtaposition, assimilation, collision and synthesis. The first three configurations resemble the dichotomy between home and work. Collision corresponds to micro-level blurring because it describes a mingling, but not a merging of home and work (Felstead et al., 2005). Synthesis is similar to macro-level blurring because it blends home and work into a new entity (Felstead et al., 2005). However, my discussion of blurring offers a novel perspective by analysing specifically how connections across practices are established in micro-level blurring and how a new boundary practice is constructed in macro-level blurring.

The current chapter has answered research question two ('What home-work configurations are constructed by participants as they negotiate the boundaries between work and home?'). I have shown that boundary negotiations result in both dichotomous and blurred relationships between home and work, depending on the kinds of boundaries that are constructed. My research shows that it is not appropriate to talk of *either* dichotomies *or* blurring, which is reflected by Tietze & Musson (2002). Both kinds of relationships are available to participants and emerge within participants' contexts. Based on my research, I wish to refrain from viewing the relationship between home and work as pre-determined. I argue that the relationship must be situated within participants' processes of boundary negotiation and that when we apply practice concepts to negotiations, we understand how the home-work relationship emerges. The next chapter combines my research findings into a coherent boundary theory.

# Chapter 8

# New Boundary Theory Framework

## 8.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will bring together the findings of this research as reported over the course of the last four chapters, specifically those aspects of my work that suggest new directions for boundary theory. The last four chapters addressed the why and what of boundaries, the how of boundaries, the positionings of home-workers in their practices, and the positionings of home and work towards each other. Each chapter yielded fresh insights into boundary theory. Here, I will organise my new insights into one framework.

## 8.2. Boundary Theory

I propose a boundary theory of practice, by which I mean that boundaries are negotiated within the home-workers' practices of home and work. Boundary negotiations are underpinned by how people participate in each domain and result in particular home-work configurations. The boundaries that are constructed in individuals' accounts are informed by the voices of others, and thus operate at the cusp between individual and social. My boundary theory consists of two main elements: 1.) boundaries, and 2.) positionings. Below, I will discuss each element and then explain how they relate to each other.

### 8.2.1. Boundaries

I adopt a definition of boundaries that is based on participation in practices by concurring with Wenger that boundaries are *"lines of distinction between inside and outside, membership and non-membership, inclusion and exclusion"* (Wenger, 1998: 120). I situate

home-work boundaries in the home-worker's context; I consider the drivers of home-work, home and work-related aspects (such as occupational category), and the positioning of home-workers within their practices. This represents a move away from the cognitive approach to boundaries (Nippert-Eng, 1996; Bowker & Star, 1999).

First, I propose that in order to understand the dynamics of boundary negotiation, it is important to identify the drivers that home-workers cite to account for their decision to work from home. Drivers are divided into pull factors and push factors. Childcare and escape from the office are pull factors that entice participants to work from home. Cost-saving and avoiding unemployment are push factors that leave participants with little choice but to work from home. The implication of this distinction is that agency and choice are core constructs that underpin the home-work experience. Home-work drivers were reflected in home-workers' positionings: the childcare driver translates into core membership at home, while escape from the office reflects peripheral participation in the office practice and informs the home-work versus office work dichotomy. This indicates a link between the different elements of my boundary theory, such that elements of boundary negotiation are shaped by how home-workers are positioned and how practices are configured. The drivers that are conceptualised as push factors did not re-emerge. However, it is argued that the drivers 'cost-saving' and 'avoiding unemployment' are important because they were cited by participants who have quit their home-working arrangement. The link between push factors and home-work failure provides scope for future investigations, but goes beyond the boundaries of this research. Furthermore, I showed that decisions to work from home are socially situated because home-workers draw on others' opinions when accounting for their decisions.

As home-workers engage in their working arrangements, they draw boundaries on temporal, spatial, psychological and social dimensions. The different types of boundaries are fluid and

changeable. Home and work are not segmented or integrated (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Neither are boundaries between home and work a function of individual preference. Instead, boundaries are strict and planned, yet flexible and haphazard. Boundaries are set within people's circumstances and depend on immediate situational pressures. Boundary setting is conceptualised as action, or as intersubjective activity, whereby boundaries occur in the context of social interaction with home and work others. Boundaries are also multidimensional. They compensate for each other and overlap with each other. Tangible boundaries (spatial and temporal types) can be used to support intangible boundaries (psychological and social types). Boundaries continue to serve important functions, such as protecting home and work from each other, which means that boundaries have not become obsolete, despite the potential for home and work to become merged under one roof.

Boundary negotiations are situated in the home-worker's context. Work and home-related factors, such as occupational type, influence the kinds of boundaries and home-work configurations that are available to home-workers. However, because boundaries are 'lines of distinction between inside and outside' (Wenger, 1998), the ways in which home-workers negotiate boundaries are underpinned by dynamics of participation in practices. I argue that home-workers are both passive and active in their boundary negotiations, depending on the relationships that exist between home-workers and their negotiating partners and the levels at which they participate in home and work practices. I propose that home-workers use two strategies to negotiate the boundaries between home and work: 1.) Home-work boundaries as joint effort, and 2.) Appropriating flexibility. These strategies are a departure from integration/segmentation. The first one (joint effort) shows how home-workers negotiate boundaries with others, which positions actors in certain ways. The second one (appropriating flexibility) highlights the strategies home-workers use to cope with the home-work interface,

which positions home and work in certain ways. Both boundary strategies are underpinned by positionings. Both demonstrate the interdependence of boundaries and positionings.

In order to summarise the boundary element of my version of boundary theory, I propose that home-work drivers inform the experience of home-work. The different types of boundaries outlined here are shaped by the negotiations that home-workers engage in and by the home and work contexts that home-workers are situated in, e.g. a person's job and their level of influence during negotiations determines the kinds of boundaries that are available to them. The boundary element of my theory is dependent on the positioning element: Boundary negotiations depend on the level of influence a home-worker has in a domain, i.e. how he or she is positioned.

### 8.2.2. Positionings

When home-workers negotiate boundaries, they construct relationships between home and work. Their negotiations are shaped by and shape the level at which they belong in their home and work practices. Accordingly, I propose that positioning can be used as a theoretical concept in two ways: 1.) it can be used to analyse the relationship between home and work as practices; and 2.) it can be used to explore the ways in which home-workers locate themselves and understand their status within a practice, sometimes through the voices of others.

I base my understanding of positioning on Davies & Harré (1999), who proposed that 'subject positions' describe locations for persons in discourse. I argue that as home-workers construct accounts of their working arrangements, they create a position for themselves and other actors in relation to home and work. This position is partly the home-worker's own

construction, but is informed by the feedback received from other people. This is in line with earlier suggestions that individual accounts are shaped by the voices of others. I suggest that the notion of positioning can be used to investigate Wenger's concept of 'levels of participation', because the latter concept refers to different positions for actors within a practice.

Regarding the home-workers' participation in their home and work practices, I argue that the following positionings for home-workers and home others emerged:

- The peripheral office work participant
- The marginal office work participant
- The core home participant
- The peripheral home participant
- The home-workers as non-worker
- Home others as peripheral work participants

Peripheral and marginal participation in the office happens through a combination of physical absence and the weakening of social ties. The criteria of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire are no longer fulfilled. Home-workers lack influence in the office practice because of their peripherality. In their home practices, home-workers achieve core participation if they prioritise home over work. This positions them as influential at home.

However, engaging in work while at home can also indicate peripheral participation at home. The home-worker is physically there, but mentally unavailable, which acts as evidence for uprootedness. Trying to participate in the home and work practices simultaneously leads to never fulfilling the demands of either practices satisfactorily, which contributes to feelings of incompetence. Feelings of incompetence, as individual perceptions of the self, must be

understood through levels of participation in social practices: it is because the home-workers participate peripherally in each domain that they feel incompetent.

The home-workers' presence at home further means that in the voices of others they are constructed as non-workers. This perception shapes their own evaluations of home-work. By bringing work home, participants also involve home others in their work practices. Home others witness the home-worker's work and can even become peripheral participants in the home-worker's work practice. Home others have little choice in this dynamic, which implies that home-work facilitates a colonisation of the home by work. Applying the notion of positionings to the home-work interface highlights that home-work experiences are rooted in processes of participation in home and work practices, rather than being individual in nature. It is therefore the level at which we participate in a practice (core, periphery, or marginality) that determines how we construct our selves, the level of influence we have in the domain, and the amount of control we have over how the boundaries between home and work are configured.

Positioning also helps to explore the relationship between home and work. Home and work consist of a number of sub-practices. On the work side of things, I identified office work practices, organisation practices, freelancing practices, partners' work practices and home-work practices. Regarding home practices, I found evidence for family practices, childcare practices, co-habiting practices, flatshare practices and friendship practices. The implication is that home and work constitute a plurality of practices, which broadens the scope of existing boundary theories and their narrow focus on the work-family interface.

Home and work practices are positioned dichotomously and in a blurred manner. This suggests that there is no singular relationship between the practices that emerges as a result of boundary negotiation. Dichotomies that are salient for home-workers are: home-work as the

other of office work; and home as the other of work. The first dichotomy is used to make sense of home-work by comparing it to office work. The second dichotomy is a remnant of the dominant discourse of home and work as separate spheres, which participants draw on when constructing strict boundaries around home and work.

Adopting Wenger's concepts in order to develop a new version of boundary theory helps us to understand how blurred configurations of home and work are created. This provides new insights into blurring. Blurring between home and work can be categorised into micro and macro-level blurring. Micro-level blurring refers to temporary instances of home and work being performed at the same time. This can be voluntary (because home-workers do not want to choose between home and work demands) or involuntary (when demands invade the home-worker's work or home sphere). Here, an overlap between positionings of domains and the positioning of home-workers becomes apparent: when home-workers are central in a domain and are in charge, micro-level blurring is voluntary. In contrast, when home-workers are not in charge, blurring is involuntary. This might contribute to whether blurring is perceived as positive or negative.

In order to perform home and work duties simultaneously, a home-worker must establish connections between these duties. This is done in two ways: 1.) By using boundary objects (Wenger, 1998) that can accommodate two spheres, e.g. a laptop. 2.) By engaging in brokering (Wenger, 1998), or the transfer of work ways of being into the home and vice versa. Wenger's concepts of brokering and boundary objects are adapted by this research. According to Wenger (2000), brokers prefer to stay at the boundaries of many practices rather than move to the core of any one practice. This implies that brokering and peripheral membership in practices are intentional. Instead, I suggest that brokering can be involuntary when people are forced to make connections across practices. I also propose that peripherality is not necessarily deliberate. In the case of office work participation, peripherality might

reflect the choice of avoiding office nuisances, but it can also be forced on home-workers. In regards to peripheral participation at home, this is a consequence of trying to be at home and at work at the same time and is unintended. I further argue that boundary objects do not only connect practices, they can also create distinctions between practices by being clearly defined as either work or home objects. This is an extension of practice theory, because the potential of boundary objects to create distinctions was not documented by Wenger (1998). My version of boundary theory provides new insights by specifying how boundary objects and brokering are used to construct and blur boundaries.

Blurring can be conceptualised as macro-level blurring when home-workers struggle to distinguish work and home as spheres. Blurring is not temporary any more, but relatively permanent. Macro-level blurring begins when home-workers experience multimembership in home and work practices, but never fully belong anywhere (which is described by the term 'uprootedness'). The positioning of home-workers as not belonging anywhere coincides with the positioning of domains as blurred. Sometimes home and work can then turn into a boundary practice aimed at reconciling home and work demands. In a boundary practice, home and work become merged and are not recognisable as unique practices any longer.

Overall, my version of boundary theory proposes that boundary negotiations are shaped by and shape positionings of home and work and positionings of home-workers. In the following section, I will summarise my new framework.

### 8.2.3. Framework

The following table summarises the key concepts of boundary theory:

| Boundary Theory of Practice | |
|---|---|
| **Boundaries** | **Positionings** |
| • **Why: Drivers**<br>  o Pull factors (agency): childcare, escape from the office<br>  o Push factors (passivity): cost saving, avoiding unemployment<br><br>• **What: Types of Boundaries**<br>  o Temporal<br>  o Spatial<br>  o Psychological<br>  o Social<br><br>• **Nature of Boundaries**<br>  o Fluid, changeable<br>  o Socially situated<br>  o Multidimensional<br>  o Serve important functions (e.g. protect home & work from each other, maintain order, legitimise home-work, enable work & family life, attach meaning to times & places, induce a mode)<br><br>• **How: Negotiation Strategies**<br>  o Joint Effort<br>  o Appropriating Flexibility<br><br>• **Context**<br>  o Work-Related Aspects<br>  o Home-Related Aspects<br>  o Other Aspects | • **Positioning of Home-Workers in their Home and Work Practices**<br><br>  o Peripheral Participation in the Office Practice<br><br>  o Participation at Home<br>  ▪ Core Participation<br>  ▪ Peripheral Participation: Incompetence<br>  ▪ Presence at Home as Non-Work<br>  ▪ Home Others as Peripheral Work Participants<br><br>• **Positioning of Home and Work as Practices**<br><br>  o Plurality of Practices<br><br>  o Dichotomies: Home-Work versus Office Work; Home versus Work<br><br>  o Micro-Level Blurring<br>  ▪ Brokering & Involuntary Brokering<br>  ▪ Boundary Objects as Connections and Distinctions<br><br>  o Macro-Level Blurring<br>  ▪ Multimembership<br>  ▪ Uprootedness<br>  ▪ Boundary Practice |

Table 14: Boundary Theory

The table presents the two pillars 'boundaries' and 'positionings' side by side, in order to show that these are the guiding concepts in my boundary theory and to demonstrate the interdependence of boundaries and positionings. My boundary theory of practice suggests that boundary work occurs within the practices of home and work, and the positionings of actors this entails.

Below is a summary of boundary theories as presented in the review chapter with my version of boundary theory included in the comparison. This will situate my propositions in the appropriate context.

| Summary of Boundary Theories | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Theorist(s) | Terminology | Key Concepts | Approach | Main Critique |
| Nippert-Eng (1996) | Boundary | • Segmentation – integration<br>• Boundary work | Socio-cognitive | • Individual choice<br>• Rigidity of segmentation – integration<br>• Cognitive emphasis |
| Clark (2000) | Border | • Balance<br>• Border crossers and keepers<br>• Border strength and flexibility<br>• Peripherality | Practitioner | • Outcome-focused (balance)<br>• Narrow focus on parents |
| Ashforth et al. (2000) | Micro role transitions | • Role boundaries | Role theory | • Outcome: role conflict<br>• Rigidity of roles |
| Shumate & Fulk (2004) | Boundary transitions | • Communicative value of transitions<br>• Role transitions | Communication network & symbolic interactionism | • Limited relevance to work and home practices |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Desrochers et al. (2005) | Boundary blurring | • Variables which contribute to blurring | Measuring level of blurring | • Value of measuring blurring<br>• Narrow sample |
| Koslowski | Boundary theory of practice | • **Boundaries:** Drivers, Types, Nature, Negotiation Strategies, Context<br>• **Positionings of home-workers:** Peripheral, marginal & core participation<br>• **Positioning of home & work:** Plurality of practices, dichotomy, blurring, how connections are created<br>• Interdepen-dence of boundaries & positioning | Practice theory | • Practice investigated through 1 person's account |

Table 15: Summary of Boundary Theories 2

In contrast to other theorists, I have foregrounded the notion of positioning in order to contribute to debate on agency/control and I have shown that whether home-workers are in charge of their boundaries depends on whether they are core, peripheral or marginal participants in their home and work practices. My work also differs from that of other theorists in that I have built on debates surrounding the home-work relationship by applying practice concepts, which have shown a) that home and work constitute a plurality of

practices, and b) that connections between home and work are created through boundary objects, brokering, multimembership and boundary practice. Overall, the application of Wengerian practice theory concepts to the study of boundary negotiation is novel. Wengerian concepts have offered a new way of looking at boundary negotiation as dependent on participation in home and work domains, as opposed to remaining at the level of individual, cognitive, or role perspectives. In the next chapter, I will conclude this thesis by evaluating what has been achieved.

# Chapter 9

# Conclusion

## 9.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I seek to conclude this thesis by revisiting and reviewing what has come before. I will address the main research questions and evaluate the insights that the findings have provided for each question. Based on the evaluation of the main findings, I will state what the key contributions of this thesis are, and balance this with its limitations. I will assess the contribution of my boundary theory of practice to the development of this conceptual area. I will draw out the implications of my findings for those people who engage in home-working arrangements and the participants of their surrounding work and home practices. I will also comment on how my thesis might benefit those involved in policy-making in the area of flexible work. I will reflect on the research process and the choices that were made along the way, methodologically and practically. I will conclude by recommending areas for future research.

## 9.2. Addressing the Research Questions

In this section, I attempt to provide a concise answer to the main research question and the sub-questions, based on the findings presented in the previous chapters.

**Guiding research question: How do people who work from home negotiate the boundaries between their home and work practices?**

Boundary negotiation is informed by the reasons why people decide to work from home. These decisions position people as in charge or as passive recipients of home-work, which

sets the scene for boundary negotiations. People who work from home construct temporal, spatial, psychological and social boundaries between work and home. These boundaries are multidimensional: they compensate for each other and are fluid. Boundaries serve important functions, such as to protect home and work from each other and maintain order. Boundary negotiations are dependent on a variety of home and work-related aspects, such as the home-worker's job. Home-workers rely on the strategies of joint effort and appropriating flexibility in their boundary negotiations. When people engage in joint effort, they position themselves and others in particular ways. When people appropriate flexibility, they position home and work towards each other. In answering the main research question, I have combined the various aspects of boundary negotiation into one framework, linking the 'what', 'why' and 'how' of boundaries together.

**Sub-questions:**

**What home-work configurations are constructed by participants as they negotiate the boundaries between work and home?**

By drawing boundaries between home and work, participants construct particular kinds of relationships between these two domains. I have shown that it is useful to conceptualise home and work as practices, and that there are smaller practices within the labels of 'home' and 'work'. It became evident that home-workers construct home-work as the other of office work, which results in a dichotomy. The dominant societal discourse of home and work as a dichotomy also continued to be relevant, despite there being a subtle plurality of practices. However, an ambiguity arose because home and work practices were also blurred by participants. It emerged that blurring can operate on a micro-level, with only temporary experiences of overlap, and on a macro-level, where home and work practices merge into a

congealed practice. The application of Wengerian boundary concepts proved useful for analysing how connections across practices are established through boundary objects, brokering, multimembership, uprootedness and boundary practice.

**How are home-workers positioned in each domain? At what level do they participate? How influential/peripheral are home-workers?**

Boundary negotiations are shaped by the levels at which home-workers participate in their practices. Home-workers construct subject positions within their practices. It emerged that home-workers construct their positions as peripheral, and sometimes even marginal, in the office practice. They become socially removed from the office, which manifests itself in a sense of isolation, invisibility and illegitimacy. The construction of peripherality means that home-workers lose their sense of core membership, belonging, and influence.

Participation in the home practice is a rather complicated process for home-workers. Working from home is constructed as an opportunity for core participation in the home practice, implying greater availability for home demands and interactions, as well as influential membership. However, participating in the home practice while engaging with work tasks has unintended consequences: Home-workers can become peripheral at home because they are physically present but mentally absent. This means that they hover at the edges of the home practice, never fully engaging with home others because they are working. The home-workers' presence at home while working can also mean that others associate them with domesticity and refuse to take them seriously as workers. This confirms their peripherality at the office and their positioning as non-workers. The implication is that home-workers do not fully belong in the home domain or the work domain. Another consequence is that by bringing work into the home domain, the home is colonised by work concerns. Home others

can become peripheral members in the home-worker's work practice because they witness and sometimes participate in the home-worker's tasks. These complicated processes of participation underpin the boundary negotiations that home-workers engage in.

**Reflections**

The data collected in this research enabled me to adequately address the research questions and gain novel insights into boundary negotiation, positionings of home and work domains, and levels of participation in home and work practices. The research aims were met. I developed a framework connecting the 'what', 'why' and 'how' of boundary negotiation. I contextualised boundary negotiations by situating participants within their work and home practices. I established a connection between boundaries and positionings of home and work; and boundaries and positionings of home-workers. Not only was it possible to conceptualise home and work as practices, it was indeed useful for furthering the development of boundary theory. I also broadened the scope of boundary theory to include non-parents, as intended. I explored the kinds of relationships between home and work that were constructed, particularly in regards to how blurred relationships are created, and thus contributed to debate on the home-work relationship. I investigated how home-workers participate in the practices that are relevant to them, and found that their levels of participation determine how influential home-workers are in their boundary negotiations, thereby building on current debates regarding control. In the next section, I specify the key contributions and limitations of my research.

## 9.3. Key Contributions and Limitations

### 9.3.1. Contributions

My thesis contributes to the area of home-work boundaries in several ways. I have developed a new version of boundary theory, which situates boundary negotiation as occurring within the home and work practices that the home-worker participates in. I have moved boundary theory away from its individual focus and its emphasis on cognition and choice. I have also gone beyond a simplistic focus of trying to predict which boundary conditions will be conducive to work-life balance. Instead, I have highlighted the practices in which boundary negotiation occurs, thus allowing for the subtleties of positioning to be explored. By viewing home and work as a plurality of practices, we begin to understand that many home-work issues that are experienced by an individual operate at the level of home-workers' participation in their social practices, e.g. legitimacy is an issue because the home-worker becomes peripheral in the office practice, while participating more actively in the home domain. I therefore argue that the concept of positioning represents a useful and novel addition to boundary theory because it redefines the nature of boundary negotiation and shows the necessity of analysing negotiation as occurring in the context of how home-workers are positioned. I have shown that analysis of positioning can indeed be achieved through individual accounts because individuals draw on the voices of others in their sensemaking.

I have shown that the scope of boundary theory needs to be broadened to include people who do not have caring duties because everyone who works from home engages in boundary negotiation. In fact, some of the most interesting negotiations were observed among non-

parents and non-parents struggled most with being tempted into overwork. The gist is that we ought to stop limiting this area of research to one category of people.

I have contributed to the debate on how home and work are configured. In the review, I explained that home and work are traditionally viewed as a dichotomy, but that arguments for a more layered approach are accumulating. My research has shown that different kinds of configurations between home and work co-exist. While the dichotomy is still used as a frame of reference, there are also examples of participants who arrive at a 'boundary practice', where work and home merge into a joint practice. My contribution is therefore to propose that home-work does not lead to either the continuation of the dichotomy or a new blurred configuration; instead both are available to home-workers.

I have contributed to the development of boundary theory by adopting Wenger's practice concepts. Wenger's concepts have been useful in several ways: 1.) They indicated that home and work can be viewed as practices that are characterised by mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoires; 2.) They have shown that home-workers participate at different levels in their practices: the positions that are available are core membership, peripheral membership and marginal membership. All types of participation are evident. Home-workers have differing levels of influence that depend on their levels of participation. Core members are more influential than peripheral members. 3.) They help us to understand how connections between home and work practices are established. 4.) They demonstrate that individual perceptions of the self are socially situated and that the individual and the social are a duality, not a dichotomy: boundary negotiation operates at the cusp because individual actions and discourses are framed through social interaction. By applying Wengerian concepts, I have proposed a new way of analysing home-work boundaries, which is ready to be adopted and critiqued by other researchers.

### 9.3.2. Limitations

While I believe that this research has made interesting contributions to the area of home-work boundaries, no piece of research is perfect. It could be argued that my own position in regards to home-work complicates some of my findings. I occasionally work from home. I am also in a co-habiting relationship with a home-worker. This has lead to some preconceptions about home-work on my part, which arguably must have found their way into my research. Personally, I appreciate the convenience and comfort of home-work. However, I am very critical of its potential to produce work-life balance. In fact, as my diary shows, my partner is rather prone to overworking because his home-work means that work is always available. Maybe this is part of the reason why my research discusses the colonisation of home by work and the misappropriation of flexibility. However, while my own experiences may have exposed me to these home-work issues, there is ample support for my criticisms among the participants of my research and in existing research.

My thesis is also only one piece in the home-work puzzle. It cannot account for the totality of home-work experiences. My sample was deliberately small in order to allow for rich analysis. However, this limits my ability to generalise. My findings have to be situated in the context within which they occurred: My participants were predominantly Irish or at least living in Ireland, where flexibility is granted at the employer's discretion. This could explain why home-workers positioned themselves as privileged and unique, but also as the 'other' of office work. Therefore, I do not claim to be able to have discovered the truth about every home-worker in every part of the world. In line with the relativist assumptions that underpin my research, that was never the aim anyway. However, I do propose that I have produced a piece of research that has approached home-work boundaries in a novel way and has therefore contributed to the conversation on home-work boundaries.

Some people might also argue that my research contradicts itself because I have analysed social practices through the account of one actor in each practice. They might ask how it is possible to analyse social dynamics if they are recounted by only one person. While I acknowledge that it might seem a contradiction at first to analyse the social through an individual, I cite Wenger's (1998) duality of the social and the individual and suggest that the two are not opposites, but in fact complement each other. Individual actions always imply the social, because we can only make sense of individual actions through our knowledge of the world, which has been acquired socially. In my research, participants represent one actor in their home and work practices. However, implicit and explicit in their accounts were the voices of social others who influenced their constructions of home-work. Had I investigated a practice through each member, I would merely have arrived at a number of different perspectives, none of them closer to 'the truth'. One account that is informed by the opinions of others sufficed to get a flavour of what a practice is like. Furthermore, at some points during data collection, I was able to access family members' tales of home-work. While this provided interesting insights and served as evidence for family members' peripheral participation in the home-worker's work practice, it did not fundamentally change the picture that was painted of home-work because home-workers had been voicing others' opinions all along. That is why I decided to rely predominantly on individual actors as sources of data. However, future researchers might choose to seek a different description of home-work by involving all members of one practice, instead of focusing on individual members of many different practices.

## 9.4. Implications for Theory, Practice, and Policy

### 9.4.1. Implications for Theory

My thesis offers a new development of boundary theory. The key concepts of my theory are 'boundaries' and 'positionings', as defined in chapter 8. I have shown that boundary negotiation is shaped by how people are positioned in their home and work practices. Core members are influential in boundary negotiations, while peripheral members are not. I have also shown that negotiations position home and work towards each other. Strict boundaries contribute to a home-work dichotomy, while boundary invasions lead to a blurred relationship between home and work. I have moved boundary theory away from its individual and cognitive focus, and instead redefined boundary negotiation as a process situated in home and work practices. The benefits of redefining boundary negotiation by adopting Wengerian practice concepts are that we now understand that boundaries are co-created, that boundaries are dependent on how people are positioned at work and at home, and how relationships between home and work are constructed. This contributes to existing debates on home-workers' levels of control and the relationship between home and work. The concepts used in this thesis can be utilised by future research.

### 9.4.2. Implications for Practice

The findings of this research can be applied by people who engage in home-work and the home and work others who surround them. I have shown that the unintended consequences of working from home call into question the life-enhancing potential of this arrangement. In practice, this means that people considering the option to work from home should make the

decision carefully, mindful of the potential rift between what they imagine home-work to be and the day-to-day experiences of it. Home-work does offer opportunities for freedom from the office and for being more involved at home. However, isolation and invisibility take their toll on home-workers and the emotional consequences of home-work blurring can be significant. Without boundaries, home-work is likely to turn into a messy arrangement, where one is never certain whether one is working or not. Work is always available, making it hard to resist the pressure to overwork. My advice for people considering or already engaging in home-work is to draw boundaries around their home and work practices. While this undermines the idyll of flexibility and combining home and work in a more holistic manner, it seems to be the least socially and emotionally disruptive solution. I would also caution that it is probably easier to simply continue to work in a traditional office setting, as it does not bring home and work into close contact. This is not to say that home-work should not be taken up, merely that people ought to be aware of the disconnect between the romantic notion of working from home and the sobering experiences of blurring, isolation, illegitimacy, and so on.

### 9.4.3. Implications for Policy

There are a few insights gained from this thesis that would be useful to policy-makers in organisations and in governments. When home-work is portrayed as a perk or a privilege and is granted to individuals in an organisation, it can lead to conflict and resentment between co-workers. Home-workers are marginalised and viewed as non-workers because they are home-based. This illegitimacy could be prevented by policies within companies that formalise home-work and set out clear, transparent eligibility criteria for home-work. This would normalise home-work and make it an acceptable work arrangement. As for governmental

debates on workplace flexibility, I recommend that different kinds of flexibility should be distinguished carefully from one another, rather than be recommended unquestioningly across the board, as the link between flexibility and work-life balance is far from clear-cut.

## 9.5. Reflections on the Research Process and Methodological Choices

I suggest that the methodological choices made throughout the research process fit with the research questions. The discourse analytic approach enabled me to gain insight into home-workers' constructions of how they negotiate boundaries, how their home and work practices are configured and how they participate in those practices. I found discourse analysis particularly helpful when investigating positioning and levels of participation. However, I do have to admit that it is not an easy method to use – it is quite time-consuming and it is difficult to know whether one's interpretations are 'correct' as such. Confused by the amount of differing discourse analytic traditions and the relative lack of guidelines, I attempted to follow Willig's (2008) steps in performing a discourse analysis. After a while, it became clear that some of her suggested steps were irrelevant to my research focus. I therefore adapted her steps to suit my specific project (see chapter 3), allowing for a focus on practice to be married with the discursive approach. It did take a long time for me to arrive at this process, though, which is why other methods that have clearly established sets of analytic steps (and fewer steps at that), such as grounded theory, might have been easier to use. However, I would not want to change the rich and complex picture of data that emerged through a focus on discourse. The same applies to the kinds of data and participants that were selected. I could have chosen the more traditional method of using interviews alone, with a homogenous group of home-workers. However, I was attracted to the complexity and variety that the different types of data and participants offered.

## 9.6. Suggestions for Future Research

I suggest that future research ought to address issues of power, influence, and agency in home-work in more detail. My research has found that these issues underpin boundary negotiations. The positioning of people shapes their boundary negotiations. However, I did not focus specifically on power aspects; rather I investigated these issues in regards to boundary negotiation, which is why future investigations concerned with only power and influence in home-work would contribute to the conversation.

Future research could also attempt to adopt the practice concepts I have explored here and apply them in a different research context, for example, an ethnographic study of an office work practice, where some people work from home and some people do not, would be useful. That kind of an approach would offer insight into a sample whose work context is similar in terms of their organisation and their type of work. It would allow for a more holistic picture of an office work practice and the dynamics that occur between home-workers and non-home-workers.

It would also be interesting to explore the theme of home-work failure. In my research, some participants had experienced previous home-work failures and some have quit their home-working jobs since participating in the research. I proposed that there was an association between the passivity some home-workers displayed with regard to being forced into home-work and their home-work failure. Future research could examine this association and delve into the various reasons for failure, with the aim of proposing what can be done to ensure home-work longevity.

## 9.7. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has evaluated the ability of my thesis to address the research questions. I have discussed my main contributions and the limitations of my work. I have shared the wider implications of the thesis, reflected on the research process and suggested future research directions. Finding a way of succinctly and adequately ending this thesis, which has been a large part of my life for nearly four years, is a tough task. I would like to summarise the relationship between boundaries and practice as proposed in my research by reiterating Etienne Wenger:

> *"By weaving boundaries and peripheries, a landscape of practice forms a complex texture of distinction and association, possibilities and impossibilities, opening and closing, limits and latitude, gates and entries, participation and non-participation."* (Wenger, 1998: 121).

To me, this quote brings together the elements of my boundary theory of practice and shows that participation in practices implies the existence of boundaries. Practices offer membership and non-membership and thus create boundaries and connections. With my version of boundary theory, I hope to have achieved an interesting contribution to the field of home-work boundary research.