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## In Search of Perfect Boundaries? Entrepreneurs' Work-Life Balance

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## In Search of Perfect Boundaries? Entrepreneurs' Work-Life Balance

### Abstract

**Purpose** – Does the self-employed nature of entrepreneurs' business ventures mean that they have perfect boundaries between their work and nonwork lives? Drawing on border theory, this study examines entrepreneurs' work-life balance (WLB) in terms of how they construct and manage the borders between their work and nonwork lives.

**Design/Methodology/Approach** – A qualitative research approach is adopted to enhance understanding of entrepreneurs' WLB using border theory. The study benefits from its empirical focus on Nigerian migrants in London who represent a distinct minority group living in urban areas in the developed world. Data for the study was collected over a three-month period, utilising semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection.

**Findings** – Our findings indicate that entrepreneurs prioritise 'work' over 'life' and reveal that entrepreneurs have little desire for boundaries as they work everywhere, which makes long working hours prevalent among them. Furthermore, the findings bring to the fore a prevalent social variance of these entrepreneurs preferring to be unmarried, single, and even divorced as a result of or associated with the entrepreneurs' boundaries creation and management.

**Research Limitations/Implications** – The extent to which the findings of this research can be generalised is constrained by the limited and selected sample of the research.

**Theoretical Implications** – The article highlights the fluidity and permeability of the boundaries between entrepreneurs' work/nonwork domains and the frequency of border crossing, which is almost uncontrollable, especially from the work domain to the nonwork domain. We describe this as work/nonwork border blurring.

**Practical Implications** – Research on human resource management (HRM) in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) or businesses in which entrepreneurs operate is evolving. The issue of the size and the nature of an organisation (i.e. labour or product market influences, ownership structures, etc.) have profound implications for human resources (HR) structures, policies, and practices and the quality of the WLB of entrepreneurs. As research on HRM and entrepreneurship is still developing, HRM practice in entrepreneurial business ventures is often organisationally fluid and ad-hoc. The main implication is that there may be little structure in HRM policies and processes in place to support self-employed entrepreneurs in comprehensively managing border crossing and achieving WLB.

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3 **Originality/Value** – This article provides valuable insights into entrepreneurs’  
4 work/nonwork boundaries, which are hugely influenced by the commodification of  
5 time and money. It also enriches work-life border theory and its social constructionist  
6 perspective.  
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10 **Keywords:** Border theory, Work-life balance, Entrepreneurs, Nigeria, Self-employed  
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## 14 **Introduction**

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16 In today’s world of extreme jobs (Hewlett and Luce, 2006), extreme parenting (Jong,  
17 2010), and a fervent search for ‘balance’ (Trunk, 2007), understanding how individuals  
18 construct and manage the boundaries between their work and nonwork lives is critical  
19 (Annik *et al.*, 2016; Gordon *et al.*, 2017; Trefalt, 2013). This is perhaps the reason  
20 boundary management, in the context of the interrelationship between a person’s  
21 work and personal life continues to receive increased attention within organisational  
22 studies (Clark, 2000; Kreiner *et al.*, 2009; Shumate and Fulk, 2004; Munkejord, 2017).  
23 Most of these studies, however, exclusively focused on intersects and the relationships  
24 between employees and their organisations with respect to the boundaries between  
25 work and home/family domains.  
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31 An entrepreneur’s jobs can be very stressful, balancing work and nonwork obligations  
32 is often difficult for them (Forson, 2013). Entrepreneurs are unique in that they ‘take  
33 on the risk’ between buyers and sellers (Barringer and Ireland, 2016). Entrepreneurs  
34 are employers of labour; they are not employed (Fayolle and Gailly, 2008). There are  
35 more than 582 million entrepreneurs in the world (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor,  
36 2018).  
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40 Furthermore, an increasing number of people around the world continue to launch  
41 entrepreneurial ventures to establish themselves as entrepreneurs (Nair and Pandey,  
42 2006). The success of entrepreneurs depends largely on their imagination, their vision,  
43 their innovativeness, their ability to take risks, and sometimes their ability to challenge  
44 traditional cultural and societal etiquettes (Mathew and Panchanatham, 2011). For  
45 entrepreneurs, financial success, personal satisfaction, and the ability to balance work  
46 and nonwork responsibilities are crucial success factors (Kirkwood, 2016).  
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50 Helping employees to achieve a satisfactory balance between their work and personal  
51 lives has been one of the dominant issues in human resource management (HRM) in  
52 recent years (Adisa *et al.*, 2017; Parris *et al.*, 2008). Indeed, research has investigated  
53 employees’ work-life balance (WLB) within the organisational setting (Adisa *et al.*,  
54 2017; Carlson *et al.*, 2009; Eby *et al.*, 2005). Hundreds of academic articles have been  
55 published on employees’ work-family conflict, work-family enrichment, and work-  
56 family interface using diverse samples from diverse countries (Adisa *et al.*, 2016;  
57 Parasuraman and Greenhaus, 2002; O’Driscoll *et al.*, 2006).  
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A dominant percentage of these studies concentrate on the work and family lives of employees who work for traditional organisations. Over four decades ago, Kanter (1977) explained the 'myth of separate worlds' and the inexorable nexus between work and home lives. She argued that organisations are structured in such a way that their leaders are inconsiderate of or ignore employees' lives outside of work. What then are the approaches and attitudes of self-employed entrepreneurs, who constitute the leadership of their various businesses, towards WLB? According to Clark (2000), people shape their environments and they are also shaped by their environments. **This dual status of determining and being determined by one's work and nonwork environments necessitates a study of how self-employed entrepreneurs construct the boundaries between their work and nonwork lives to achieve WLB. This is a gap in the literature that has not been sufficiently explored on an empirical basis.** Self-employment through some form of entrepreneurship has become dominant in most societies, sometimes often associated with the high incidence of unemployment. **Consequently, research on how entrepreneurs create, maintain, or change boundaries (between their work and personal lives) in order to simplify, classify, and make sense of the world around them is timely and valuable.**

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In a European survey, Hatfield (2015) reported that 45% of citizens expressed preference for self-employment over being in paid employment. The desire to find a balance between one's work and personal lives has also been reported as a reason for self-employment (Hilbrecht and Lero, 2014). Some researchers have pointed to the attendant high job demands evidenced through long working hours and job insecurity among others (Annink *et al.*, 2015; Ebberts and Piper, 2017). Annink *et al.* (2015) also argued that job demands and resources operate differently for employed persons compared with those who are self-employed.

This article posits that the WLB of people who are employed by organisations (employees) is not the same as the WLB of self-employed entrepreneurs. This is because self-employed entrepreneurs may enjoy some level of freedom and independence, more than is enjoyed by employees of regular organisations (Sullivan, 2018). This is especially the case now that the physical location of the workplace is blurred and extended by mobile information technology (Adisa *et al.*, 2017). **A clear weakness in most of the previous studies on the conflict and/or balance between employees' work and nonwork lives is that the studies consider the family/home of the employees as their only nonwork duties/obligations (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000; Clark, 2000; Frone, 2003; Kreiner *et al.*, 2009).**

Employees are not automatons whose lives revolve helplessly around work and home/family, as many of these studies assume. Other activities and the location of the work also matter.

Drawing on border theory, this study aims to make two contributions. First, it enriches and advances the understanding of self-employed entrepreneurs' (a unique segment of the labour market) WLB. Second, it contributes to the literature on work-life border

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3 theory with a specific emphasis on self-employed entrepreneurs. The terms 'border'  
4 and 'boundary' are used interchangeably in this article. They are not separately  
5 defined; rather, they are used to refer to the demarcation between work and nonwork  
6 domains. The remainder of this article is organised as follows: there will be a brief  
7 explanation of the relationship between work and private life. Border theory will then  
8 be contextualised. The relevant literature on boundary flexibility and permeability  
9 will be reviewed, followed by a description of the research methods, a report of the  
10 study's findings, and a discussion of the findings. Thereafter, the implications for  
11 theory and practice will be presented, and recommendations for future research will  
12 conclude the article.  
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### 17 **Relationship Between Work and Private Life**

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19 In assessing WLB, it is essential to understand the relationship between an  
20 individual's work and private life. Work is presumed to have negative and  
21 debilitating effects on private life, especially those aspects of work into which  
22 technology is able and has been permitted to creep (Eikhof *et al.*, 2007). Even though  
23 work is a source of satisfaction that gives a person a sense of purpose and  
24 accomplishment (Gambles *et al.*, 2006; Guest, 2001), work can also have a debilitating  
25 effect on a person's private life and this must be contained in order to achieve WLB  
26 (Eikhof *et al.*, 2007). Life or nonwork means life outside work, which a lot of people  
27 misconstrue to mean home/family (Osoian *et al.*, 2011; Warhurst *et al.*, 2008).  
28 According to Guest (2001, p. 8), "'life" means the rest of life after work'. The  
29 aspirations to fulfil one's obligations in these important spheres give rise to 'balance'.  
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35 Parris *et al.* (2008, p. 105) argue that the customary use of the word 'balance', which  
36 gives 'equal weight to work and non-work activities is a misnomer'. The word  
37 'balance' does not mean allotting equal time and energy to activities in both the work  
38 and nonwork domains (Clarke *et al.*, 2004). Rather, it means 'satisfaction and good  
39 functioning at work and at nonwork domains, with minimum role conflict' (Clark,  
40 2000, p. 751). For Kesting and Harris (2009, p. 47), it means 'allowing employees some  
41 degree of flexibility over when, where, and how they do their work'.  
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45 Therefore, answering the question of whether entrepreneurial work is conducive to  
46 WLB might depend on a host of objective, subjective, and temporal factors (Ezzedeen  
47 and Zikic, 2017). In a recent investigation, Ezzedeen and Zikic (2017) sought to explore  
48 whether entrepreneurial work is conducive to WLB or whether it exacerbates conflicts.  
49 They found several subjective and objective factors explaining how entrepreneurial  
50 work is sometimes experienced as conflictive and at other times perceived as  
51 conducive to balance. Entrepreneurial work may be both conflictive and conducive to  
52 WLB (Ezzedeen and Zikic, 2017; Glavin and Schieman, 2012). The 'boundarylessness',  
53 high permeability, and flexibility that characterises entrepreneurship have been noted  
54 in several studies (Ezzedeen and Zikic, 2017; Gudeta and van Engen, 2018).  
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3 There is global evidence of blurring and divide between employee's work and private  
4 life. In Ethiopia, Gudeta and van Engen (2018) showed that female entrepreneurs' jobs  
5 often required them to be everywhere and fulfil all their responsibilities by constantly  
6 integrating work and life roles. Similarly, using global data, Jensen, Liu and Schøtt  
7 (2017) found that the innovative dispositions of Chinese entrepreneurs are hugely  
8 beneficial in terms of satisfaction with the balance between their work and personal  
9 lives, more so than elsewhere. This was justified by the recent steep increases in the  
10 esteem of entrepreneurs and the value accorded to innovation in China (Jensen *et al.*,  
11 2017). Work and life are separate, yet intertwined domains that provide employees  
12 with a meaningful sense of existence (Guest, 2001). Understanding the border between  
13 them, if there is any, is therefore key to achieving desirable WLB.  
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### 19 Contextualising Border Theory

20 The article draws on border theory to frame the investigation of how entrepreneurs  
21 create, maintain, or change boundaries (between work and personal lives) to simplify,  
22 classify, and make sense of the world around them. This is because border theory  
23 provides an excellent framework for understanding the ways individuals construct  
24 and navigate these boundaries (Clark, 2000). It is often assumed that actors are  
25 motivated to manage their work and nonwork borders such that 'balance' is achieved  
26 (Schieman and Glavin, 2008).  
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30 **Border theory focuses on the boundaries between work and nonwork domains, which**  
31 **exist along a continuum of integration of roles to achieve balance (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000;**  
32 **Clark, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996).** Border theory has been applied in diverse contexts  
33 (such as art, architecture, organisation theory, anthropology, etc.) to answer a wide  
34 variety of research questions (see Ashforth *et al.*, 2000; Katherine, 1991; Kreiner *et al.*,  
35 2006). Boundaries are 'physical, temporal, emotional, cognitive, and/or relational  
36 limits' (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000, p. 474) which help people to distinguish one domain from  
37 another (Trefalt, 2013). Usually, boundaries delimit the perimeter and scope of a given  
38 domain for example, a role, a home, a workplace (Kreiner *et al.*, 2009).  
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43 Therefore, the work and nonwork domains exist along a continuum of segmentation  
44 to integration of roles (Nippert-Eng, 1996). High segmentation implies that the  
45 physical and temporal boundaries between work and nonwork roles create separate  
46 and distinct domains; by contrast, high integration is when 'no distinction exists  
47 between work and nonwork domains' (Nippert-Eng, 1996, p. 567). This social  
48 construction of boundaries, in order words, means that 'Segmentors have two key  
49 rings, one for work, the other for the house and integrators affix all keys to one key  
50 ring' (Warhurst *et al.*, 2008, p. 10).  
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54 Boundaries can be constructed in a continuum from flexible and permeable (weak) to  
55 inflexible and impermeable (strong) (Clark, 2000). Weak boundaries are open to  
56 influence and are prone to merging aspects of categories, whereas strong boundaries  
57 are closed to influence and prone to dividing aspects of categories (Ashforth *et al.*,  
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2000; Kreiner *et al.*, 2009). Individuals differ in the manners in which they construct their boundaries (Clark, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996).

A clear weakness of previous works on border/boundary theory is the classification of home/family as forming the entire life domain (see Ashforth *et al.*, 2000; Clark, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996). However, home is just one aspect of life. Life involves more than home (Osoian, 2011). It encompasses 'a myriad of activities including leisure, socialisation, community, and voluntary activities' (Warhurst *et al.*, 2008, p. 10).

Many professionals consider losing control of their time and their inability to disconnect from work as simply a matter of personal choice and free will, and as such, these people consider themselves 'work warriors' and high achievers (Mazmanian *et al.*, 2013). This is typical of today's workers given the high fluidity and use of mobile electronic devices (see Adisa *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, this study's investigation and classification of 'life' are extended beyond the home/family divide. Drawing on the key concepts of border theory, the border crossing both ways from the work domain to the nonwork domain will be examined.

### **Boundary Flexibility and Permeability**

The work and nonwork domains are two asymmetric spheres with a penetrable or permeable space (border) between them (Clark, 2000). The two main characteristic of borders are flexibility and permeability, and borders may differ in their strengths depending on the degree of their flexibility and permeability (Bulger *et al.*, 2007). Border flexibility is the capacity of the border to shift back and forth (Berg and Piszczek, 2012; Cousins and Robey, 2015). Flexibility can also be defined as the malleability of the border between two or more roles (Desrochers and Sargent, 2004) or the ability of the border to expand or contract to accommodate the demands of another domain (for example, an employee working from home takes the opportunity to collect the children from school) (Desrochers *et al.*, 2012). Thus, flexibility addresses the question of when and where a role can be enacted (Sundaramurthy and Kreiner, 2008).

Border permeability, however, refers to the extent to which a domain's border is easily penetrated by the thoughts or behaviour connected with another domain. For Ashforth *et al.* (2000, p. 474), 'permeability is the degree to which a role allows an employee to be physically located in the role's domain but psychologically and/or behaviourally involved in another role'. The permeability of any border determines the extent of integration or segmentation of the content of the bounded domains (Kreiner *et al.*, 2009). For example, an employee who can switch easily from nonwork-related responsibilities to deal with work-related issues and vice-versa is said to have a highly permeable border (Glavin and Schieman, 2011). Permeability, according to Nippert-Eng (1996, p. 280), is part of a boundary's 'structural profile'. It is the ability of one pre-defined role to encroach upon the physical and temporal territory of

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3 another (Pleck, 1984). Permeability is, thus, central to employees' movements across  
4 the border.  
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7 Mazmanian, Orlikowski and Yates' (2013) major contribution to this debate is  
8 understanding how and why workers choose to restrict their autonomy at work,  
9 particularly using mobile email devices. The increased use of mobile phone devices  
10 has contributed to the escalation of engagement (Mazmanian *et al.*, 2013), which has  
11 often led professionals to limit their autonomy over their time. Consequently, this  
12 phenomenon intensifies collective expectations of availability, intensifies engagement,  
13 and reduces a professional's ability to disconnect from work. Rather than being a  
14 negative development, boundarylessness is perhaps a desirable parsimony in the  
15 WLB literature.  
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20 Annink *et al.* (2016) have equally shown that the national context matters in the study  
21 of WLB, suggesting, for example, that a higher human development index and greater  
22 gender equality are negatively related to WLB, which may be due to higher social  
23 expectations and personal responsibility in these contexts. Munkejord (2017) reported  
24 differences in the WLB of mothers and fathers who are self-employed immigrant  
25 parents in Norway. Meanwhile, Ali *et al.* (2017) reviewed the empirical literature  
26 focusing on Muslim migrant women – another disadvantaged and much less  
27 investigated group in the West.  
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31 **The present research contributes to the understanding of work-life boundary**  
32 **management with a focus on disadvantaged self-employed entrepreneurs who are**  
33 **ethnic minorities.** In this respect, previous empirical studies on self-employed people  
34 or entrepreneurs have focused on female entrepreneurs (Ali *et al.*, 2017; Gudeta and  
35 van Engen, 2018) and parent immigrants (Munkejord, 2017).  
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39 This study focuses on disadvantaged ethnic minorities as a sample, thus bringing a  
40 different and fresh perspective to the field. Ethnic minority groups living in urban  
41 areas may experience far less access to paid work employment and, therefore, many  
42 often resort to self-employment. The study seeks to advance knowledge of how these  
43 self-employed immigrant entrepreneurs create and manage boundaries between their  
44 work and nonwork lives. Specifically, the study seeks to answer two interrelated  
45 questions. **First, how does such a special group of self-made entrepreneurs contribute**  
46 **to the debate on the intersection between work and personal life domains? Similarly,**  
47 **how do these ethnic minority entrepreneurs, who have hardly been investigated**  
48 **empirically, contribute to the debates on and understanding of work-life border**  
49 **theory? These questions are significant because despite that extant studies may have**  
50 **covered aspects of them by considering mainstream entrepreneurs, study of a sample**  
51 **of largely excluded immigrant ethnic minority entrepreneurs is rare.**  
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## Research Method

Given the nature of this study, an exploratory qualitative research approach is adopted as it allows for detailed accounts of the *processes* and *nuances* under investigation (Kreiner *et al.*, 2009).

The semi-structured interview method is used, enabling human conversations and interviewees to provide responses conveniently through a discourse of complex interpersonal conversation (Qu and Dumay, 2011). Furthermore, scholars have called for increased use of qualitative methods for studying WLB (Eby *et al.* 2005; Neal *et al.*, 2006).

The research participants are Nigerians domiciled in the UK. This group was chosen because Africans constitute an industrious minority group living in urban areas that may experience unfair treatment and much less access to paid work employment (Adkins and Jae, 2010; Watson, 2009). Although culturally and ethnically diverse, Nigerians share many similarities with the various other ethnic groups (Africans) living in the UK.

The empirical study was conducted in London, where over one million Nigerians live (Olowoopejo, 2013). Two popular African places of worship (a church and a mosque) were selected as sites to recruit the research participants because these sites regularly attract a large numbers of Nigerian migrants to their congregations. While no incentives were offered for participation, 43 people expressed interest in and willingness to participate in the study by completing a short questionnaire detailing their employment status and their availability for interview. Following Patton (2002), purposeful sampling criteria were devised to select the interviewees.

First, the participants were required to be Nigerians and resident in London. Second, the participants were required to be self-employed entrepreneurs whose trading company is legally registered in the UK. Third, the participants were required to have other roles aside from their work roles that would give rise to the need for them to create and manage boundaries between these roles. In all, 23 individuals met the sampling criteria (Table 1). The participants comprised males (10) and females (13) with care responsibilities, aged between 34 and 52 years old. On average, the participants had spent ten years living in the UK and eight years as self-employed entrepreneurs.

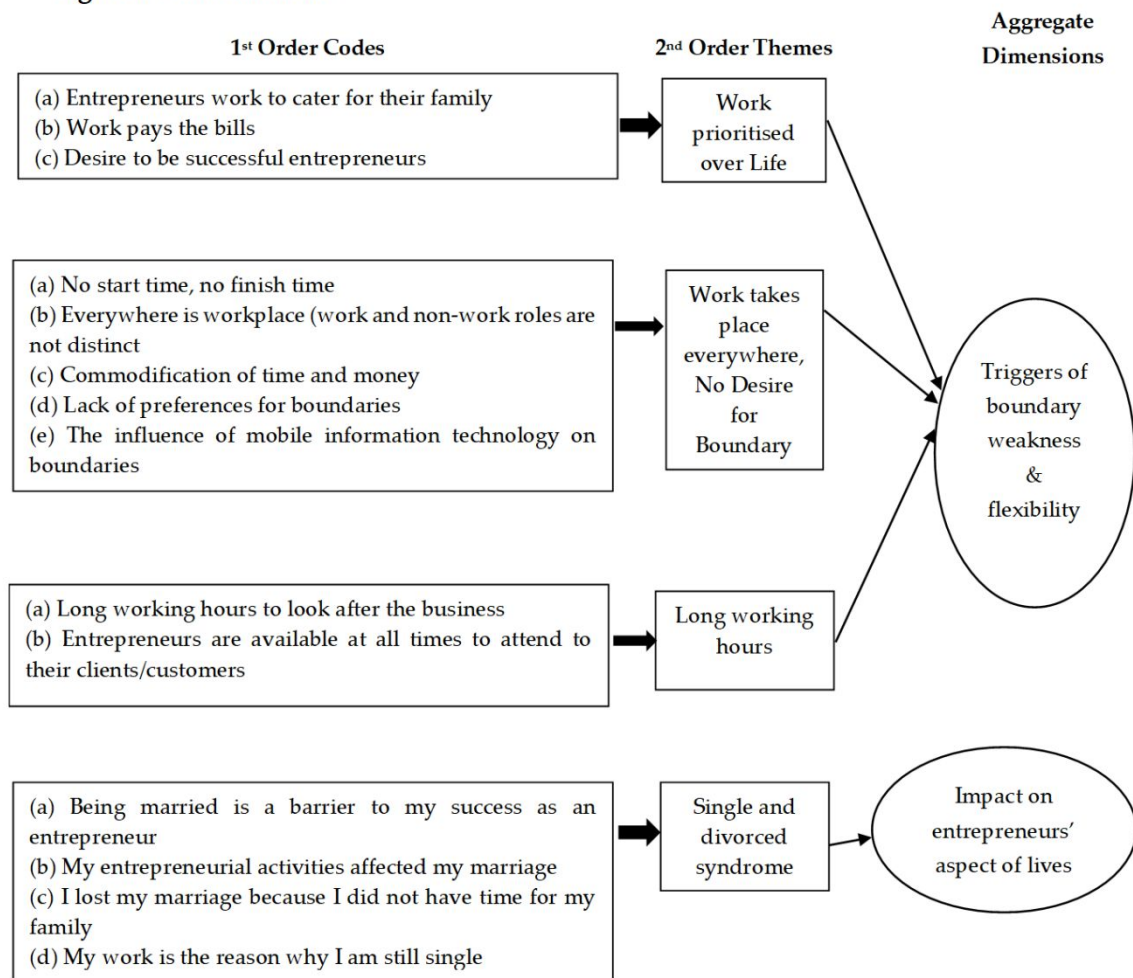
The interviews were conducted over 15 weeks in 2018. The research was approached through the reflective lens of 'microstoria', a narrative turn in contemporary social theory that uses of authentic contemporaneous storylines to illuminate social life (Boje, 2001; Imas *et al.*, 2012; Maclean *et al.*, 2016). Microstoria is an appropriate tool for theorising social order and studying marginalised individuals (Muir, 1991). This makes it appropriate for studying the under-researched area of enquiry: the WLB of self-employed entrepreneurs.

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5 The participants were interviewed at different places and times that were convenient  
6 for them and the interview process. All interviews were digitally recorded, each  
7 lasting approximately 90 minutes. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the  
8 interviewees were given pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality. The interviewees  
9 were invited to relate their experiences of their work and nonwork roles and how they  
10 manage these roles to achieve WLB. This helped to generate reflexive data from the  
11 participants.  
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14 **Insert Table 1 about here**  
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18 The data was inductively analysed, adhering closely to the guidelines for naturalistic  
19 inquiry (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and constant comparison techniques (Glaser and  
20 Strauss, 1967). These approaches provide the basis for the rigorous collection and  
21 analysis of qualitative data. Furthermore, they provide the basis for clear delineating  
22 themes and aggregate dimension (Gioia *et al.*, 1994). The researchers identified the  
23 initial concepts (conceptual coding) in the data and grouped them into categories  
24 (open coding). Axial coding was then undertaken, whereby the researchers searched  
25 for the relationships among these categories, which then facilitated assembling them  
26 into higher order themes. Furthermore, the data structure was developed with the  
27 aggregate dimensions of the triggers of boundary weakness and flexibility in order to  
28 explore the viability of boundary crossing and boundary management explanations  
29 (Figure 1).  
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Figure 1 Data Structure



After the coding process was finalised, the findings were crosschecked thoroughly by three of the authors again. An additional reliability check was undertaken by the **fourth author** and an independent research assistant. This was done to ensure the consistency and reliability of the study. This was then compared with the coding undertaken by the first author based on the same set of transcripts. A satisfactory level of reliability was achieved. Subsequently, reports on the themes were prepared. Finally, similar themes were gathered into different dimensions to form the emergent themes. These techniques form a 'recursive process-oriented, analytic procedure' (Locke, 1996, p. 240), which ensures that saturation has been achieved. The final data structure is illustrated in Figure 1. It is important to note that the quotations below represent the views and experiences of the majority of the participants.

## Findings

Our study focuses on how self-employed entrepreneurs create and manage boundaries between their work and nonwork lives to achieve balance. Drawing on border theory, this study identifies the following themes: *'Work' is prioritised over 'life'; work takes place everywhere, no desire for boundaries; long working hours; and single and divorced syndrome* as factors associated with entrepreneurs' creation and management of boundaries.

### Work is Prioritised Over Life

Employees that work in traditional organisations are naturally expected to experience difficulties in combining their work and nonwork responsibilities due to the required commitments and expectations from their various employers (see Adisa *et al.*, 2017; Adisa *et al.*, 2016; Eikhof *et al.*, 2007). One would expect that entrepreneurs would enjoy the self-employed nature of their business ventures since most of them elected to become entrepreneurs. This study's findings suggest that entrepreneurs prioritise work over life due to their desire to be successful and their various financial commitments, both in the UK and in Nigeria. A participant commented:

"I don't earn salaries from nobody, my work pays my salaries, which I use to sort out my family's financial needs. I also need to support my family in Nigeria. I am physically and psychologically engrossed in my business, I pay more attention and spend more time attending to it than any other thing" (Clara).

Clara values her work and channels most of her time and energy to attending to her work commitments, more so than her nonwork activities in order to be able to fulfil her financial commitments. Another participant explained why he prioritises work over life:

"I migrated to the UK to make money and for that reason my work takes up more than 60% of my time, energy, and attention...I also want to be a successful entrepreneur" (Lookman).

Another participant puts it more succinctly:

"I came to London to make money. My work pays my bills, provides for my immediate family's financial needs, and cares for my parents' and siblings' financial needs in Nigeria. Also, I am determined to make a success of my business...it takes a whole lot of my time" (Ajoke).

Motivated by financial obligations and the desire for success, the participants seem to prioritise work over life. Most of the participants are their family's breadwinners, and they take on many responsibilities. They give precedence to their work over their nonwork lives. This has a major impact on how they create boundaries between their

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3 work and life domains. The border between work and life would be impregnable  
4 because activities in the nonwork life domains are not a priority.  
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### 8 **Work Takes Place Everywhere – No Desire for Boundaries**

9 For most of the participants, work takes place everywhere, and this considerably  
10 negates the 'segmentors' notion of keeping work and nonwork domains separate in  
11 order to create and maintain boundaries between the two domains (Nippert-Eng,  
12 1996; Zerubavel, 1991). Moreover, most of the participants prioritised work over life,  
13 and their desire to create distinct boundaries between work and nonwork domains is  
14 almost non-existent. Even though the participants acknowledged that permeable  
15 borders make them work more, they consciously desired permeable boundaries for  
16 the progress of their businesses.  
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20 An overwhelming majority of the entrepreneurs are 'integrators', who hardly create  
21 clear borders between work and nonwork domains. One participant commented:  
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24 "Well, I don't work 9am to 5pm, and I am not confined to an office. I  
25 am a self-employed entrepreneur. I take credit for my success, and I  
26 accept the blame for my success. For these reasons, I really do not have  
27 boundaries between my work and nonwork activities. I work anytime  
28 and everywhere, and I think I am cool with that" (Flora).  
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31 Other participants also commented on time and work boundaries and their  
32 significance in being successful entrepreneurs:  
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35 "Time is money. I don't have a time or place where I cannot work. I  
36 work everywhere, and I think it is absolutely important for the success  
37 of my business. Placing boundaries between work time and nonwork  
38 time, workplace, and non-workplace will negatively affect my  
39 business....so I don't do it" (Aminu).  
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43 "Time is precious, and it is money. I am always with my laptop which  
44 facilitates my working at anytime and anywhere. Everywhere is my  
45 office" (Laide).  
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49 The commodification of time and money together with the participants' desire to  
50 make success of their businesses do not only depict entrepreneurs as 'integrators',  
51 who essentially remove boundaries between the work and nonwork domains; but also  
52 illustrate the shifts between and the significance of time and place boundaries. DeVoe  
53 and Pfeffer (2011) question if time pressure is directly related to the higher economic  
54 value of time, suggesting that rising income over the past several decades within  
55 many countries can help explain the so-called modern time bind experience. Evans *et*  
56 *al.* (2004), on the other hand doubt whether organisational life is as problematic for  
57 workers' ability to control their time as the literature suggests. Working for  
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3 organisations may, therefore, actually consume less time of a worker than working  
4 freely as contractors in markets does (Evans *et al.*, 2004), which is more akin to an  
5 entrepreneur's work habits and style.  
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9 Regarding the lack of desire for boundaries between work and personal lives, one  
10 participant commented:  
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12 "Look, I want to make a lot of money, so I work more because I work  
13 at all times and everywhere...that's what is required to be a successful  
14 entrepreneur. I don't like boundaries, they will hinder my  
15 entrepreneurial skills and success" (Ola).  
16  
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19  
20 Another participant commented on the impact of mobile information technology on  
21 the creation of boundaries. Mobile information technology enhances the  
22 entrepreneurs' work, ensuring that it is not confined to traditional times and space.  
23 One participant commented:  
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26 "I don't have boundaries. With my laptop and iPad and of course the  
27 wireless Internet service, there are no boundaries...everywhere is my  
28 workplace. For example, I was on the train to Paris last week. I worked  
29 on my laptop throughout the journey" (Ade).  
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33 Another participant commented:  
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35 "I don't do boundaries between work and nonwork, because it will  
36 give my business setbacks. Aside that, mobile information  
37 technology, such as laptops, iPad, iPhone, Blackberries, etc., actually  
38 make working everywhere and anytime easy, and I love it. It makes  
39 me work more, though, but it's fine" (Bambo).  
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44 The desire to have boundaries between work and nonwork domains is not popular  
45 among the participants. All of the participants do not want a demarcation between  
46 their work and nonwork lives. They desire permeable boundaries that will enable  
47 them to work at any time and everywhere. Mazmanian *et al.* (2013) revealed that  
48 professionals, for example, were restricting their autonomy by using mobile email  
49 devices and yet believing these actions were enhancing their freedom and capacity to  
50 perform as professionals. They consequently argued that this autonomy paradox  
51 contributes to the ongoing debate both on autonomy in the workplace and the use of  
52 mobile communication technologies in contemporary organisations.  
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### 56 **Long Working Hours**

57 The data indicated that, on average, the participants spend 13 hours per day, including  
58 weekends and bank holidays, working on their businesses. There was no substantial  
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3 difference between the genders of the participants in terms of the hours that they  
4 work. However, the male entrepreneurs worked slightly more hours than the female  
5 entrepreneurs (see Table 1). Generally, the participants work very long hours to look  
6 after their businesses and to fulfil the 24/7 requirement of the global economy. All of  
7 the participants believe that long working hours is an important requirement for  
8 entrepreneurial success. One participant commented:  
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12 “I told you that I work for 10 hours per day...that is the minimum.  
13 There are times that I work a lot more than that. I need to put in longer  
14 hours to achieve success” (Flora).  
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17 Another participant commented:

18  
19 “I work as many hours at home as I work at the office, otherwise my  
20 business will suffer. The clients want to be able to reach you at any  
21 time, and I have to live up to that. The good thing is that I am my own  
22 boss...I can schedule and reschedule my time and activities” (James).  
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26 Subomi explained the danger of working reduced hours or measuring working time  
27 for an entrepreneur:  
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30 “As an entrepreneur, I normally work for longer hours to attend to  
31 my customers and to put things in order. I can't start to set starting  
32 and finishing work times because it will affect my success. An  
33 entrepreneur may choose to work reduced hours but she may lose  
34 customers because her customers will go elsewhere when she is not  
35 available. So, in this era of a 24/7 economy, long working hours are  
36 required for entrepreneurial success.”  
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40 Long working hours have a huge impact on the creation and management of  
41 boundaries between entrepreneurs' work and private lives.  
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### 45 **Unmarried, Single, and Divorced Syndrome**

46 The participants recounted the impact of their status as entrepreneurs on their marital  
47 statuses, which is important. Four participants attributed their single status to the  
48 demands of their businesses. The participants described their status as entrepreneurs  
49 as very demanding and time-consuming which they dread to combine with marital  
50 responsibilities. The four participants cited this as one of the reasons they are yet  
51 unmarried. One of the participants commented:  
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55 “I have really worked hard to bring my business this far. It takes up a  
56 lot of my time...at the least, I work 12 hours every day. Even when  
57 I'm at home, I am either attending to a client online or talking to  
58 friends who are also entrepreneurs about work. As a Nigerian  
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3 woman, I will definitely not be able to do all of these things when I  
4 am married. That is why I am sort of delaying marriage...yes, my  
5 work is the reason why I am still single" (Joy).  
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9 Joy's comment resonates with other participants' ordeals, which show how  
10 entrepreneurs struggle with combining marital relationships and responsibilities with  
11 their entrepreneurial activities. Two participants, male and female, claimed to have  
12 lost their marriages due to work pressures. The male participant commented:  
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15 "My entrepreneurial activities are time-consuming and very  
16 demanding...they affected my marriage. I did not have time for my  
17 wife, and she often complained about my attitude of bringing work  
18 home and working late. She eventually divorced me when she could  
19 not take it any more" (Ike).  
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24 The female participant said:

25 "I lost my marriage because I did not have time for my family. My  
26 business takes up a lot of my time. I work at all times even at home,  
27 and my husband was really not happy about it. We ended the  
28 marriage when he asked me to choose between my work and the  
29 marriage. Of course, I opted for the former because I have invested so  
30 much of my life in it" (Funmi).  
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36 Out of the 23 participants, 8 are divorced and they all attributed the main cause of  
37 their marriage breakdowns to a lack of time for their families and their attitude of  
38 bringing work home, which eventually ended their marriages.  
39

40 The porosity of the border is termed 'work/nonwork border blurring' and there are  
41 profound overlaps between the entrepreneurs' work and nonwork domains, making  
42 a case for 'boundaryless' borders. There is basically no distinction between  
43 entrepreneurs' work and nonwork domains as work activities occur in both domains,  
44 and so do life activities. A great deal of role integration occurs in order to achieve  
45 entrepreneurial success, thus blurring work-life boundaries.  
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## 49 Discussion

50  
51 Drawing on border theory (Clark, 2000), this study has examined how entrepreneurs  
52 create and manage the borders between their work and nonwork lives. For some  
53 people, whatever happens at work, stays at work, and whatever happens outside the  
54 work domain also remains there. For entrepreneurs, however, the parameters of the  
55 work-nonwork interface are not demarcated. Entrepreneurs experience excessive and  
56 frequent role blurring due to the thin and very weak borders that exist between their  
57 work and nonwork lives. The borders are extremely porous making work-life  
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3 interference among entrepreneurs bi-directional and a norm rather than an exception.  
4 This phenomenon is described by Kreiner *et al.* (2009, p. 719) as 'allowing differential  
5 permeability'. The participants' financial commitments (both in their domicile and  
6 native countries) and their keen desire to be successful trigger their prioritisation of  
7 work over life. This, consequently, results in very weak boundaries.  
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10 Researchers have, therefore, argued that thin or weak boundaries are open to  
11 influence and are prone to merging aspects of categories because flexibility and  
12 permeability happen the most in the border area (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000; Clark, 2000;  
13 Kreiner *et al.*, 2009; Munkejord, 2017). Entrepreneurs characteristically regard and  
14 shift their attention predominantly to the work domain because it is crucial to making  
15 money and being successful, and they tend to move with the work domain  
16 everywhere they go. This is consistent with the boundary theory tenet that individuals  
17 often act proactively to shape the work/nonwork boundary to suit their needs  
18 (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000; Clark, 2000). As described by Nippert-Eng (1996), entrepreneurs  
19 are integrators who keep one key ring for both work and nonwork domain.  
20 Entrepreneurs make no distinction between the domains. Thus, work activities take  
21 place in the nonwork domain and nonwork activities also take place in the work  
22 domain. The notion of 'time is money, and money is precious' has turned everywhere  
23 into a workplace for entrepreneurs, with no start and no finish time for work.  
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30 The success of achieving a satisfactory conception of boundary depends on  
31 individuals' preferences for boundaries (Mellner *et al.*, 2014; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2015).  
32 This is because individuals differ in the extent to which they fence off their work life  
33 from their nonwork life (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Additionally, the establishment of  
34 boundaries by individuals is a matter of personal preference (Rothbard *et al.*, 2005).  
35 The findings of this study reveal that entrepreneurs, regardless of their marital status,  
36 desire permeable boundaries which enable them to attend to their customers/clients  
37 at all times. de Man *et al.* (2008) and Kossek *et al.* (1999) hypothesised that the higher  
38 the preference of an employee for integrating the roles of each domain, the more  
39 permeable the work/nonwork boundary is. Some researchers have shown that self-  
40 employment can be used as a strategy for coping with the competing demands of  
41 work and family lives (Johansson, et al 2015). The study found that preferences for  
42 domain role integration is further enhanced by mobile information technology, such  
43 as laptops, iPads, smartphones, mobile internet service connections, etc. which allow  
44 entrepreneurs to move around and attend to their work activities.  
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51 Furthermore, the entrepreneurs' work characteristics and their tendency to influence  
52 boundary permeability have been found to stretch the traditional working times and  
53 workspace, leading to increased working hours (Peshev, 2017). This is further  
54 compounded by the requirement to meet the needs of the 24/7 economy, which  
55 requires entrepreneurs to be reachable at all times. Separation of domain roles may  
56 put entrepreneurs at a disadvantage in terms of meeting these requirements. The  
57 findings presented in this study add further conceptual thought and empirical  
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3 evidence to the work-life boundary debate, which has heavily been concentrated on  
4 work and home/family.  
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6 Based on empirical evidence from this study, we argue that entrepreneurs' work-life  
7 boundaries are imperfect and extremely porous, such that work indiscriminately  
8 intrudes into nonwork life. This, in essence, means that a great deal of overlap occurs  
9 through the dismantling of boundaries. This is consistent with previous research that  
10 suggests that blurring increases the risk of work invading nonwork (for example,  
11 Gambles *et al.*, 2006; Olson-Buchanan and Boswell, 2006; Gudeta *et al.*, 2017).  
12 **Nonetheless, these findings make an important contribution to the debate on border  
13 theory using a unique sample of ethnic minority entrepreneurs. The self-employment  
14 drive here brings personal satisfaction, providing an opportunity to spend more time  
15 on the non-work sphere, which in turn positively energises and reinforces further  
16 work sphere achievements. The reported challenges surrounding work seem largely  
17 self-inflicted, yet enjoyed.**  
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23 An intriguing result of this study is that there are complications associated with  
24 balancing work and nonwork roles among entrepreneurs. For example, some  
25 participants explain that their status as entrepreneurs is the reason they are not  
26 married. This is because being married would negatively affect border crossing, which  
27 in turn would be detrimental to their entrepreneurial success. Furthermore, some  
28 participants attributed their failed marriages to excessive intrusion (frequent border  
29 crossing) of work activities into nonwork lives.  
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33 Consequently, the entrepreneurs experience much work-family conflict because their  
34 spouses did not appreciate work intruding into family lives. It is noteworthy that  
35 marriage is quite important to Africans. African societies frown upon prioritising a  
36 career over and above family or the possibility of starting a family, or if a career  
37 negatively affects a person's family (Mordi *et al.*, 2010). **Nevertheless, this  
38 phenomenon does not seem to be a deterrent to making a success of an entrepreneurial  
39 career.**  
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43 According to Perlow (1998), negotiating the boundaries between work and nonwork  
44 lives involves patterns of a relational process, which could either proclaim border  
45 crossers' spouses as 'acceptors' or 'resisters'. 'Acceptors' tolerate frequent border  
46 crossing, while 'resisters' detest it (Perlow, 1998). In this context, the participants'  
47 spouses are 'resisters'. Boundary flexibility and permeability are often identified as  
48 emancipatory means through which individuals balance their work and nonwork  
49 responsibilities (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000; Clark, 2000; Kreiner *et al.*, 2009). Yet, this does  
50 not fit with the accounts of the participants of this study. **It would, therefore, seem  
51 there are significant derivable benefits enjoyed by these self-employed entrepreneurs.**  
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56 Entrepreneurial success is predicated on the entrepreneurs' ability to move freely  
57 across the borders which includes working at home, in the car, in a place of worship,  
58 etc., and at any time. Paradoxically, border flexibility and permeability, which are  
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3 supposed to be a source of achieving perfect WLB, actually drift entrepreneurs  
4 towards a perfect imbalance. This, therefore, raises a salient question: Do perfect  
5 boundaries exist? It is herein argued that achieving perfect work-life boundaries, for  
6 entrepreneurs, is implausible. **The self-employed nature of their business ventures,**  
7 **purported to help them achieve good WLB actually exerts pressure to achieve**  
8 **entrepreneurial success.**  
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## 14 **Conclusions**

15  
16 This study provides a holistic and nuanced picture of work/nonwork boundary  
17 management, using unusual self-employed entrepreneurs as the study sample. The  
18 study has discussed the asymmetrically permeable boundaries between  
19 entrepreneurs' work/nonwork domains and the frequency of the ruthless, almost  
20 uncontrollable, intrusion especially from the work domain to the nonwork domain.  
21 As argued earlier, the majority of previous research on border theory has focused on  
22 the construction of boundaries between work and home/family (Ashforth *et al.*, 2000;  
23 Clark, 2000; Kreiner *et al.*, 2009; Nippert-Eng, 1996). Furthermore, the samples of these  
24 studies were employees who work in traditional organisational settings. In contrast,  
25 this study introduces the discussion about self-employed individuals in the context of  
26 work/life border theory and argues that perfect boundaries for self-employed  
27 entrepreneurs are difficult to achieve if not impossible. It is important that this gap is  
28 filled.  
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34 Several significant implications for practice emerge from this study. First, the findings  
35 of this study highlight an important **barrier** to the achievement of WLB among  
36 entrepreneurs and other self-employed individuals. It demonstrates some practical  
37 realities concerning the establishment of boundaries between work and nonwork  
38 domains, including potential challenges that may inform planning. It also provides  
39 researchers with direct opportunities that can inform future studies, thereby helping  
40 entrepreneurs to achieve WLB. The specific findings with respect to the prevalence of  
41 marital separation are key in this sample. These findings highlight the importance of  
42 cultural expectations and normative values. While this study may require deeper  
43 interrogation in future studies, yet it adds richness and depth to the discussion of  
44 work-life border theory.  
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50 Second, engaging in any occupation requires managing work and nonwork demands  
51 to varying degrees, depending on the status of the employees/workers. However,  
52 understanding the nature of these demands and the tactics required for managing  
53 them has many practical implications (Kreiner *et al.*, 2009). Research on HRM in SMEs  
54 or among businesses in which entrepreneurs operate is still evolving (Cassell *et al.*,  
55 2002; Wilkinson, 1999). Based on the data presented in this study, the researchers posit  
56 that there seems to be little or no structure of HRM policies, processes, and practices  
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3 to help self-employed entrepreneurs manage boundaries between their work and  
4 nonwork lives and thereby achieve WLB.  
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6  
7 There are lessons to be learnt from the application of several WLB and employee  
8 friendly initiatives applied in large corporations. Wang and Verma (2012) established  
9 that industries vary in their adoption of WLB initiatives, thus supporting the  
10 institutional theory of organisational responsiveness to WLB issues. It is essential that  
11 self-employed entrepreneurs are guided by appropriate HRM policies, processes, and  
12 practices as well as HRM best practices. This will help them harmonise their work and  
13 nonwork lives.  
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16  
17 The potential limitations of the study provide opportunities for future research  
18 agenda. First, the extent to which the findings of this research can be generalised is  
19 constrained by the limited and selective sample of the research. Therefore, future  
20 research may study a diverse sample of entrepreneurs perhaps in different contexts,  
21 developed and developing nations, following the suggestion made by Dobbs and  
22 Hamilton (2007). This may reveal the dynamics of the boundaries and boundary work  
23 tactics among different groups of people potentially in different contexts. Second,  
24 future research may use a quantitative approach using cross-sectional or longitudinal  
25 data to examine the construction and management of boundaries between work and  
26 life among self-employed entrepreneurs.  
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30 Third, understanding the different types of entrepreneurs and their entrepreneurial  
31 characteristics are essential – from the very micro-level business venture managed for  
32 basic survival (worth a few hundreds or thousands) to well-known billionaire  
33 entrepreneurs whose businesses are worth several billions. Such an understanding  
34 may enhance the management of their WLB. Future studies might carefully categorise  
35 entrepreneurs to determine at what size an entrepreneur might, for example, be  
36 considered more like a paid employee than the borderless and boundaryless worker  
37 that this research has examined.  
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**Table 1 Participant Biographical Sketch**

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Number of Children	Years Domiciled in London	Years as Entrepreneurs	Hours Worked Per Day
Clara	Female	36	Single	1	6	5	12
Cecilia	Female	41	Married	1	8	6	12
Joy	Female	42	Divorced	3	13	10	12
Ade	Male	51	Married	5	14	12	15
Laide	Male	46	Divorced	3	9	5	14
Lookman	Male	42	Single	2	6	4	13
Shade	Female	34	Divorced	1	7	6	10
Funmi	Female	48	Divorced	4	6	3	11
Oyin	Female	35	Single	2	10	8	12
Deola	Female	48	Married	5	8	6	10
Ike	Male	52	Divorced	3	15	12	14
Aminu	Male	50	Married	5	7	5	14
Folu	Female	39	Single	2	10	9	11
Subomi	Female	37	Single	1	6	4	10
Ola	Male	46	Divorced	3	20	18	14
Gladys	Female	37	Married	3	2	1	11
Ngozi	Female	36	Divorced	1	5	3	10
James	Male	40	Married	2	15	14	15
Rimi	Male	47	Married	2	12	9	14
Rauf	Male	41	Divorced	2	16	14	15
Flora	Female	40	Single	2	9	8	10
Ajoke	Female	50	Married	3	12	10	9
Bambo	Male	34	Single	2	4	3	14