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Successful Boundary Management Strategies for Optimal Fit and Minimal Role Strain

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Successful Boundary Management Strategies for
Optimal Fit and Minimal Role Strain

by
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Abstract

This study investigated successful individual strategies for creating optimal fit and minimal role strain between work and non-work spheres through boundary work, specifically in regards to identification on the integration-segmentation continuum (Nippert-Eng, 2006). This research extends the work of Kreiner, Hollensbe, and Sheep (2009). Survey and interview with nine individuals identified as highly skilled in boundary work revealed eleven successful strategies and five key observations, many of which were interconnected. The vast majority of interviewees identified with the integration end of the continuum. Change in strategy over the life course was evident, but change in integration-segmentation preference identification over the life course varied.

Chapter 1: Introduction

"Hi honey, I'm home!" What comes to mind when you hear that phrase? Are you walking through the door into your home, relief in your voice as you leave work behind and greet your family? Are you removing your heels or tie and changing into sweats to take the dog for a walk? The work left undone vanishes from your mind as you fully relax and engage in non-work life. While admittedly idyllic, this image is becoming increasingly out of touch with the reality of working Americans. The once clear boundaries between work and life outside of work are now indistinct. Technology has drastically reduced separation of home and work. No longer is physical space an obvious determinant in indicating what type of activity takes place in what type of area. A study from the Boston College Center for Work & Family noted that "productivity tools have enabled people to work anytime and anyplace, but have also invaded people's personal lives and turned their homes into 'satellite offices,' thereby blurring the boundaries between work and home" (Harrington, 2007, p. 12).

I observe this blurring firsthand – as my husband travels to another building at his workplace to visit our son at daycare, as I check my email before bed to see what I will be dealing with the next morning when I enter the office, as my sister-in-law exercises during lunch at her employer's gym, as my husband receives a call from his boss while out on a walk with the family, or as large corporations offer on-site services such as dry cleaning to their employees. We live in what Hecht and Allen (2009) term a "culture of availability" (p. 858). Work and non-work life are now inextricably

intertwined. The question isn't *if* this is happening, but what it means for our society.

Role strain, which Goode (1960) defined as "the difficulty of fulfilling role demands" (p. 483), can lead to many negative physical and psychological consequences, such as unhealthy levels of stress. As the mother of a one-year old, full-time employee, graduate student, wife to a spouse who sometimes works 60+ hour weeks, and daughter to parents struggling with eldercare decisions about my grandmother, I can certainly understand this theory firsthand. It can manifest, for example, in a feeling of distress or inadequacy when I am unable to carve Halloween pumpkins with my son because I am at the library doing homework: I have difficulty in fulfilling the role demands of mother and student at that particular time. While role strain is not a new theory, I believe its relevance is increasing for a growing number of workers.

One of the ways that individuals seek to lessen role strain is through the creation and management of boundaries, also called boundary work. Nippert-Eng (1996a) describes boundaries between work and non-work as existing on a continuum (p. 567). At one end of this continuum is integration, which involves a complete immersion of work and non-work, such that "'home' and 'work' are one and the same, one giant category of social existence, for no conceptual boundary separates its contents or meanings" (p. 567). At the other end of the continuum is segmentation, where there is "no conceptual overlap between realms and their contents," nor any "physical or temporal overlap between them" (p. 568). While we

may not do so consciously, all of us are engaged in a certain amount of boundary work at any given time. This boundary work most often focuses on the two spheres of work and non-work, although boundaries can be created between any set or number of roles.

According to boundary theory, "individuals create and maintain boundaries as a means of simplifying and ordering the environment" (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000, p. 474). Boundaries are created and managed in order to reduce role strain and facilitate optimal well-being and role performance. Individuals may fall at any point on the integration-segmentation continuum, or at a number of differing points throughout their life course. Individuals vary in how they prefer to integrate or segment their work and home spheres (Kreiner, 2006; Nippert-Eng, 2006b). The goal is to seek boundaries that provide an optimum "person-environment fit" (Kreiner, 2006; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999) for an individual at a given point in time. This fit could change over time. For example, the boundaries created between work and non-work at one's first job out of college are likely quite different than the boundaries created if one finds oneself a single parent to two teenagers and the primary caregiver for an aging parent.

Ashforth et al. (2000) propose that "there is likely an optimal fit between an individual and his or her workplace regarding the balance between segmentation and integration" (p. 488). This is a key point, since an individual who prefers to highly segment work, for example, would not find a good "fit" in a workplace that requires around-the-clock access. Similar to individuals, workplaces also vary in the extent to which they

encourage segmentation or integration. Kreiner (2006) describes this as variance in the degree to which workplaces "'supply' the conditions and resources that enable a given level of segmentation or integration" (p. 486).

The purpose of my research is to determine the strategies that individuals use to establish customized boundaries that create optimal fit and minimal role strain. More specifically, I sought to learn how the strategies employed vary for individuals based on their identification on the integration-segmentation continuum. The aim of my research was to allow readers to gain insights from the strategies employed by those who had been identified as successful in boundary management. This knowledge is vital to ensure one's own endurance as a leader; it is also necessary in order to manage employees in an ethical and effective manner. Long-term, it is important for organizations to understand that one-size-fits-all "flexible" workplace policies may not be equally beneficial for all employees. Understanding the range of successful strategies could lead to more effective employee work environments. Ashforth et al. (2000) note that "organizations benefit with increased member commitment when they provide a workplace that accommodates members' preferences" (p. 488).

Our society today is changing faster than we realize. The definition, form and structure of work are vastly different than they were just 10 years ago. Without thoughtful and intentional focus on what this change means, we run the risk of overlooking the well-being of the organization, family, and individual. By providing examples of effective boundary management strategies, I offer leaders and organizations models that may be used to

most effectively and ethically manage themselves and others as holistic

individuals and entities.

Chapter 2: Analysis of Conceptual Context

Technology has drastically changed the way that we view home and work. It has long been possible to bring a stack of papers home in one's briefcase or to receive a phone call from a family member while at work. Kreiner, Hollensbe, and Sheep (2009) describe the profound changes that technology has brought to the work-family interface "with boundaryless organizations, virtual workspaces, and the potential for constant wireless connection to one's work" (p. 704). Barnett and Gareis (2006) point out that by the 1970s, "the clear boundaries between what had previously been seen as two distinct arenas of life – work (primarily the domain of men) and family (primarily the domain of women) – were eroding" (p. 210). Kanter (1977) described a myth of separate worlds, wherein "work life and family life constitute two separate and non-overlapping worlds, with their own functions, territories, and behavioral rules" (p. 8). Kanter argued against this myth, suggesting that "work and family are connected in many subtle and unsubtle, social, economic, and psychological ways" (1977, p. 89).

Since Kanter's publication, new tools such as email, cell phones, and smart phones have taken the blurring of boundaries between work and home to a whole new level. Chesley (2005) goes so far as to say that "the question of 'blurred boundaries' may become an irrelevant one for the next generation of workers, spouses, and parents because they cannot imagine life any other way" (p. 1246). Yet, she also notes that concern regarding the impacts of this blurring will not disappear. Chesley and Johnson (2010) predict that as technology use "continues to rise in American workplaces, it is

highly probable that work extension and blurring of work-family domains will become more prevalent" ("ICT and Non-Traditional Work Arrangements," para. 2). The changing demographics of America's workforce also play a role in blurring boundaries: There is an increasing number of dual-earner households and more women in the workplace (Hecht & Allen, 2009, p. 839). Additionally, practices such as on-site daycares or gyms bring individuals' non-work lives to work, while practices such as telework, other alternative work arrangements, and technological advances allow individuals' work lives to enter the non-work sphere (Hecht & Allen, 2009, p. 840).

Researchers in the work-life field, coming from disciplines including sociology, psychology, occupational health, economics, family studies, anthropology, communication studies, and industrial/organizational psychology are examining this topic through varying lenses. The terms used to define work and life outside of work are varied: work/life, work/family, work/non-work, work/home, etc. For the purposes of my research, "work" refers to time spent in paid employment. When the term "family" is used, I encourage the readers to consider a broad definition of the term: a wife, husband and children; two brothers living together; a husband and wife; a granddaughter and grandmother; committed lesbian partners; or a very tightly-knit group of friends that assumes the role of family. When the term "partner" is used, this signifies a two-person relationship that encompasses spouse, significant other or companion.

Boundaries

Many researchers focus their studies on the ways in which boundaries (or a lack of boundaries) between work and non-work spheres influence individuals. "Boundary theory proposes that individuals manage the boundaries between work and personal life through processes of segmenting and/or integrating the domains" (Bulger, Hoffman, & Matthews, 2007, p. 365). Clark (2000) proposed the work/family border theory to explain "how individuals manage and negotiate the work and family spheres and the borders between them in order to attain balance" (p. 750). I will borrow a definition of boundaries from Ashforth et al. (2000), who use a multidisciplinary perspective to explain boundaries as the "physical, temporal, emotional, cognitive, and/or relational limits that define entities as separate from one another" (p. 474). Borders, the term used by Clark (2000), are defined as "lines of demarcation between domains, defining the point at which domain-relevant behavior begins or ends" (p. 756). Borders or boundaries are most commonly physical, temporal, or psychological in form. Ashforth et al. (2000) also provide a useful definition of role transitions, "the psychological (and, where relevant, physical) movement between roles" – in other words, a "boundary-crossing activity" (p. 472). Boundary blurring has made role transitions both constant and almost instantaneous (as an individual cooks dinner while singing to her small children in the next room and texting her boss simultaneously), or entirely nonexistent (in the example above, is it even possible to delineate when the shift occurred between the roles of family provider, mother and worker?)

Integration-Segmentation Continuum

A prevalent idea in work-family literature is an integration-segmentation continuum. Most frequently the idea is attributed to Nippert-Eng (1996a, 1996b), although the general idea has been articulated by many over time. In 1977, Kanter noted that "individual preference for separation or integration of work and family" (p. 21) plays a part in how accurate or inaccurate the myth of separate worlds may be, and acknowledged that "there are great differences in the degree of work-family connectedness even in advanced industrial society" (p. 21). She also noted a continuum of the absorptiveness of occupations on workers' lives, where some jobs involved little of a person and did not provide a "central life interest" (p. 25) for workers, and others are highly demanding of the worker and "define the context for family life" (p. 26), which could include job-related tasks or specific role expectations for family members.

Nippert-Eng's (2006a) continuum of highly integrated to highly segmented roles represents both positives and negatives for each individual; neither end of the continuum, or any location in between, is universally ideal. Ashforth et al. (2000) argue that "high segmentation and integration each have 'costs' and 'benefits' associated with the creation, maintenance, and crossing of role boundaries" (p. 475). Most individuals exist somewhere between the two ends of the continuum and exhibit some segmenting and some integrating behaviors. In fact, Kreiner et al. (2009) suggest that individuals are nuanced in their selection of integrating or segmenting in different situations. Termed "allowing differential permeability" (p. 719), the

authors point out that individuals can determine precisely what may pass

through the boundary between work and home (or, home and work). Clark

(2000) notes that "happy, productive individuals, as well as people who

describe their lives as less than ideal, can be found on all ranges of this

spectrum" (p. 755).

Ashforth et al. (2000) found that "segmentation decreases role

blurring but increases the magnitude of change, rendering boundary crossing

more difficult" (p. 472). An engineer who works three days a week and is

the primary caregiver for a chronically ill sibling two days a week may have

little blurring between those roles, but would find it exceedingly difficult to

explain to the sibling why he or she needed to take required medication while

on the job at an engineering work site, or to take on a work project that

required devoted time on one of the days when he is in his caregiving role.

He would also likely find it more difficult to "switch gears" from one role to

the other.

On the other end of the continuum, "integration decreases the

magnitude of change but increases blurring, rendering boundary creation and

maintenance more difficult" (Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 472). In other words,

highly integrated individuals are able to cross role boundaries with relative

ease. However, it becomes very challenging for these individuals to create or

maintain boundaries. This could be represented by a photographer who

works out of a home office. She may be able to easily transition from the

role of photographer editing images to the role of wife preparing a family

meal for dinner mid-afternoon, then transitioning back to the role of

photographer to continue editing images until it's time for the meal.
However, it may be difficult for her to explain to a client why she can't have
an appointment at her home office during the working day due to her need to
simultaneously supervise a kitchen remodel.

Spillover

Role spillover describes the idea that "moods, stress, and thoughts
that are generated in one role domain often influence or spill over into other
domains" (Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 477). Spillover can occur in both
directions, from home to work or from work to home (Grzywacz & Marks,
2000). It can also be either positive or negative. Chesley (2005) points out
that "negative spillover in both directions is linked to higher distress" (p.
1238), while the minimal research on positive spillover shows that it is
"positively correlated with several indicators of life quality" (p. 1239).
"Research also shows that negative forms of spillover are linked to
problematic outcomes. For example, negative work-family spillover predicts
family dissatisfaction, whereas negative family-work spillover predicts work
dissatisfaction" (Chesley, 2005, p. 1238).

Thus, the goal is to have either non-existent spillover (if boundaries
are very strong and firm, as when an individual is high on the segmentation
end of the continuum), or spillover that is positive in one or both directions
(if boundaries are weak and permeable, as when an individual is high on the
integration end of the continuum). The latter option could also be described
as the feeling that spillover from one role enhances the other, such as a
working mother who feels that the intellectual stimulation of work

reinvigorates her and provides energy and compassion that carries over into her role of mother.

Boundary Flexibility and Permeability

As described above, boundaries can vary greatly in the manner in which they affect integration or segmentation. Hall and Richter (1988) describe two dimensions of boundaries: flexibility and permeability. Boundary flexibility is defined as "the extent to which the physical time and location markers, such as working hours and workplace, may be changed" (Hall & Richter, 1988, p. 215). A role with a highly flexible boundary could be performed anyplace, anytime. Permeability is the "degree to which a person physically located in one domain may be psychologically concerned with the other" (Hall & Richter, 1988, p. 215). Clark (2000) calls impermeable, inflexible borders "strong" and flexible borders that allow permeations and facilitate blending "weak" (p. 758).

It is important to note that boundaries may be asymmetrically flexible, inflexible, permeable, or impermeable. One may have a highly flexible work-to-home boundary (a teacher who can grade papers at night from her home) and an impermeable home-to-work boundary (while physically located in front of the classroom presenting to students during the school day, a teacher cannot easily compose a grocery list in his or her head). Individuals can also create a unique set of boundaries for each given role. For example, Ashforth et al. (2000) note that one may "create more flexible and permeable boundaries around the favored role and reduce the contrast between the role and others" (p. 483). A college track athlete may favor his

or her athlete role to the student role; he or she may happily miss a class to attend a track meet (highly flexible athlete-to-student boundary) but would find difficulty in missing practice to study for a test (inflexible student-to-athlete boundary). Hecht and Allen (2009) found that those who were more highly involved with work had weaker boundaries at home, and those more highly involved with home had stronger boundaries at home.

Role Strain

Role strain was first defined by Goode (1960):

> The individual is thus likely to face a wide, distracting, and sometimes conflicting array of role obligations. If he conforms fully or adequately in one direction, fulfillment will be difficult in another . . . . He cannot meet all these demands to the satisfaction of all the persons who are part of his total role network. Role strain—difficulty in meeting given role demands—is therefore normal. In general, *the individual's total role obligations are over-demanding.* (p. 485)

Thus, Goode concludes that "the individual's problem is how to make his whole role system manageable, that is, how to allocate his energies and skills so as to reduce role strain to some bearable proportions" (p. 485). Role strain assumes that there are limited resources that can be devoted to any given set of roles, similar to the way that a budget assumes limited dollars that need to be allocated across a range of bills. This would include resources such as time, energy, or emotions (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000).

Ashforth et al. (2000) point to an example of a child who calls his mother during a work meeting – the mother must choose between the parent or work role, and will experience "interrole conflict and strain" (p. 481). Hecht and Allen (2009) found that this "resource drain model" (p. 856) held true for their study: When scarce resources are devoted to one role they are no longer available for other roles, which results in interrole conflict.

Work-Family Conflict

The phrase "work-family conflict," which adds an assumption that work and family are separate spheres and are at competition for the limited resources noted above, is also frequently seen in the literature (Barnett & Gareis, 2006, p. 210). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) define work-family conflict as "a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect" (p. 77). The authors suggest three forms of this conflict: time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based (p. 77). In other words, the time devoted to a role, the strain resulting from a role, or the behaviors demanded by a role make it difficult to fulfill obligations of another role. Their definition of work-family conflict builds on Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, and Rosenthal (1964), who defined role conflict as the "simultaneous occurrence of two (or more) sets of pressures such that compliance with one would make more difficult compliance with the other" (p. 19).

Ashforth et al. (2000) note that "highly flexible and permeable boundaries, coupled with overlapping role identities and associated role sets and contexts, may foster confusion and anxiety about which role identity is

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or should be most salient" (pp. 480-481). On the other hand, very rigid and impermeable boundaries can cause role strain on the rare instance when overlapping role identities do occur, since the transitions are rendered exceedingly difficult. It is also important to note that work-to-family conflict is distinct from family-to-work conflict, wherein the first instance describes difficulty fulfilling a family role due to a work role, and the latter describes difficulty fulfilling a work role due to a family role (Hecht & Allen, 2009).

Role strain, or role conflict, can lead to a number of detrimental effects in both the work and family spheres (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000, p. 112). These effects can be lasting: Kinnunen, Feldt, Mauno and Rantanen (2010) found that "work-family conflict led to poor well-being outcomes or increased perceived work-family conflict later on" (p. 119). Barnett and Gareis (2006) describe negative effects including "psychological distress, decreased marital and job satisfaction, and such organizational outcomes as burnout and intention to leave one's current job" (p. 209). Kinnunen et al. (2010) point to research showing that work-family conflict has been linked to psychological strain, depression, the emotional exhaustion dimension of burnout, and fatigue at work.

Role Enhancement

It is generally agreed upon, however, that having multiple roles is beneficial (e.g., Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Hecht & Allen, 2009). A theory called role enhancement postulates that energy is not limited or fixed. Accompanying this theory is an idea that work and family could actually enhance each other, rather than compete with each other (Grzywacz &

Marks, 2000). Marks (1977) refers to this as an "expansion approach" (p. 921), which postulates that "perhaps some roles may be performed without any net energy loss at all; they may even *create* energy for use in that role or in other role performances" (p. 926). Barnett and Hyde (2001) note that "study after study has demonstrated that women and men who engage in multiple roles report lower levels of stress-related mental and physical health problems and higher levels of subjective well-being than do their counterparts who engage in fewer roles" (p. 784). Barnett and Hyde (2001) propose eight processes by which this occurs: "buffering, added income, social support, increased opportunities for success, expanded frame of reference, increased self-complexity, increased similarity of experiences for women and men, and gender-role ideology" (p. 793). The authors do note, however, that an upper limit to the benefit of multiple roles may occur when there are too many roles, or the demands of one of the roles are extreme (p. 798-799). In this regard, both theories agree that the addition of multiple roles is at first beneficial, but will become negative when taken to the extreme. Goode (1960) describes this transition as occurring when role strain outweighs role reward (p. 487). Where the theories differ is likely at which point each believes this transition occurs.

Person-Environment Fit

The aim, then, is for the individual to create boundaries for each role that offer an appropriate "fit," reducing role strain and maximizing satisfaction with one's overall role system. Moen, Kelly, and Huang (2008) make the important point that "stress occurs when there is an absence of

perceived fit between demands and the resources with which to meet them"

(p. 414). They argue that "it is the subjective appraisal of degree of overall

fit that is especially key to family and individual health and functioning" (p.

415). Kreiner (2006) describes a person-environment fit theoretical lens,

where fit allows an individual to create their preferred boundaries between

work and home, resulting in reduced strain. This includes individual access

to resources that can create ideal conditions, be it clearly defined working

hours or a high degree of flexibility in when and where work gets done.

Kossek, Noe, and DeMarr (1999) define work-family role synthesis as "the

strategies an individual uses to manage the enactment of work and

caregiving roles. It involves decision-making choices governing boundary

management and role embracement of multiple roles" (p. 102).

Nippert-Eng (1996b) uses the term "boundary work" to describe the

strategies, principles, and practices that we each use to define the essence of

what is "home" and what is "work," and how they should relate. According

to Nippert-Eng, these conceptualizations can be maintained or changed as

individuals need or desire (p. 7). She describes two types of boundary work:

creating, or placing, boundaries, and transitioning between boundaries

(Nippert-Eng, 1996a). As noted earlier, there is not one universal type of

boundary or set of boundaries that is always optimal for all persons. Rather,

each individual creates and maintains boundaries specific to their particular

roles at particular times in their life.

Desrochers, Hilton, and Larwood (2005) describe a number of factors

that researchers have identified as having an influence on where on the

integration-segmentation continuum it is most beneficial for an individual to align him or herself, including:

> Employee characteristics such as time-management skills, social influence at home and work, and the meanings they attach to work and family; environmental factors such as the scheduling of work hours, the availability of a separate room in the home in which to work, and the presence of understanding and social support from supervisors, coworkers, and family; and the interaction or fit between the person and the environment (p. 445).

The goal is that boundaries lessen or eliminate negative spillover and/or excessive role strain. How exactly that happens, however, is still somewhat unclear. After reviewing a number of studies, Desrochers et al. (2005) conclude that "the relationship between integration and psychological well-being is complex and contingent on individual, environmental, and person-environmental fit factors" (p. 448).

Need for the Presented Research

Over the past few decades, much of the research and attention in the work-life field has focused on work-family conflict (Kreiner et al., 2009). Kreiner et al. (2009) point out that research focused on the clashes between work and home can only take the field so far in understanding how individuals can achieve balance. Barnett and Hyde (2001) point out that researchers have too often focused only on negative aspects of multiple roles. Rather, they call for research that includes "favorable outcomes such

as positive coping . . . perceived rewards from combining work and family, and positive spillover between work and family" (p. 793).

Kossek et al. (1999) feel that work-family conflict literature has overlooked the individual's influence of creating strategies to avoid or minimize conflict (p. 103). They believe that the "literature has ignored the fact that individuals to some degree have a choice as to how to manage work and family roles, taking into account the organizational and family contexts in which they operate" (p. 121). Or, as Kreiner et al. (2009) put it, individuals are not "mere automatons reacting helplessly to the pressures around them" (p. 705). Kossek, Lautsch, and Eaton (2006) note the need for more research on "coping strategies individuals can adopt to help set boundaries that fit with their preferences" (p. 364). Kreiner et al. (2009) point out that most research to date has focused on organizational level solutions (e.g., flextime, family-friendly policies) rather than individual level solutions, and call for research that results in "actionable knowledge or guidance" to help individuals or managers improve work-life balance (p. 705). My research contributes towards meeting that need by focusing on the strategies of individuals who have been identified as successful in boundary management.

Importance of Research for Leadership

The consequences of negative spillover or role strain are felt on an individual level, a relational level, a familial level, and an organizational level. Bulger et al. (2007) point to research showing that work-family conflict negatively impacts job and life satisfaction, depression, and work withdrawl

(p. 366). Being able to successfully create and manage boundaries is essential. Clark's (2000) research showed that disagreement between individuals regarding border issues "was a primary source of work/family conflict" (p. 761). Only through successful boundary management is one able to succeed in fulfilling all role expectations.

Bulger et al. (2007) suggest that "the ways in which individuals manage their boundaries have implications for their experiences of work/personal life balance" (p. 373). If an individual is experiencing great role strain, he or she will likely be unable to be effective in one or all of his or her roles. In addition, he or she would also be setting a poor example for children, other family members, co-workers, or employees that he or she supervises. Without success in boundary management, how can a leader nurture this skill in others? Clark (2000) notes that although "many aspects of work and home are difficult to alter, individuals can shape to some degree the nature of the work and home domains, and the borders and bridges between them, in order to create a desired balance" (p. 751).

White-Newman (2003) also points to the necessity of both effect and ethics in leaders: If a leader is highly effective but unethical, he or she will accomplish potentially harmful things; if a leader is highly ethical but ineffective, he or she will have impressive ideals but be unable to carry them out (p. 3-4). Unfortunately, leaders who encompass both of these qualities tend to "burn-out" (White-Newman, p. 4). In White-Newman's model, the third leg of the proposed leadership teepee is endurance. "A leader may heed the advice about taking care of self and still fail as leader by not

ensuring the endurance of the group, purpose or people to which he/she has

been committed" (p. 13). I would argue that without creating wellness for

oneself, it is nearly impossible for one to nurture it in others.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The aim of my research was to answer the following question: *What individual strategies successfully establish boundaries that create optimal fit and minimal role strain between work and non-work spheres, based on personal identification on the integration-segmentation continuum?* I also explored additional questions including: 1) What type of relationship, if any, exists between those identified as highly skilled at creating successful boundaries and their location on the continuum? 2) What types of themes, if any, will emerge among successful strategies? 3) How will individuals describe changes, if any, in where they identify on the continuum over the life course?

My research began with a review of the scholarly literature. This allowed me to become versed in the vocabulary of the interdisciplinary work-life field. I also gained a greater understanding of the ways that various degrees of integration or segmentation affect balance between work and non-work spheres. Lastly, it allowed me to more readily identify approximately where an individual falls on the integration-segmentation continuum.

To identify my sample, I began by asking a group of 58 people to suggest individuals who they feel are greatly successful at managing multiple roles. This group included personal friends, acquaintances, classmates, former colleagues, and professors. I sent an email which briefly reviewed the purpose of my research and requested a number of items, including the name and contact information of the nominee, a very brief description of why

the nominator feels that the nominee is skilled at managing multiple roles, and demographic information about the nominee including: gender, approximate age, employer or field of work, and work structure (part-time, full-time, work from home, have highly varied schedules, travel for work often, etc.) After receiving an insufficient response, I sent a reminder email which included a reply to a question I had received: How do you know if someone manages roles well? I concluded recruitment with a pool of 25 potential candidates. To prevent bias, I did not include any candidates with whom I had significant prior communication. I narrowed the group down to nine based on the strength of the recommender's comments and an attempt to have a varied sample. This included factors such as age, gender, field of work, workplace, and work structure. While I did not know in advance where the individuals identified on the integration-segmentation continuum, I expected that those with a more flexible schedule, especially those who work from home, would identify more strongly with integration due to the lack of a spatial segmentation between work and home spheres. While I hoped to interview participants who fell at varying points on the integration-segmentation continuum, I was also aware of the possibility that all persons identified as successful boundary managers would identify at the same point.

I constructed a 10-item questionnaire based on Nippert-Eng's work (1996a) to assess individuals' location on the integration-segmentation continuum (see Appendix A) based on tangible items referring to areas including calendar, email, clothes, talk, people, reading, and breaks (for example, integration is represented by one calendar for both home and work

tasks, segmentation is represented by two distinct calendars.) I piloted this questionnaire with several people, asking them to voice their thoughts as they read and completed the survey. I made adjustments to wording and document layout based on their feedback. I emailed interviewees to introduce myself and the project if necessary (many recommenders had already spoken about my research and/or forwarded my original email before recommending an individual). By explaining what I hoped to learn at the interview, my intent was that the interviewees would be able to give thoughtful consideration to how they create and manage boundaries. Since much of this boundary work is "automatic," I anticipated that giving interviewees time to reflect in advance would provide richer results. I scheduled interviews at a time and location directed by the interviewee. I also sent them the survey, asking for it to be completed and returned at least a few days before we met.

As I crafted my interview questions, I used an appreciative inquiry approach (Hammond, 1998) to find the most effective strategies used by each individual. This was a natural fit, with both the appreciative inquiry method and my research goals focused on what is going well for a person, rather than the areas that present challenges. It is also fitting with Barnett and Hyde's (2001) call for research focusing on positive aspects of multiple roles. In other words, appreciative inquiry posits that we can make improvements "by doing more of what works" (Hammond, 1998, p. 9). While I did need to ask questions about situations or people that presented conflict, I intentionally began with the positive aspects first, then followed up

with strategies that were used to rectify the negative situation and/or prevent similar situations from occurring in the future.

I consulted King and Horrocks (2010), McCracken (1988), and Pitt-Catsouphes, Kossek, and Sweet's (2006) "The Work and Family Handbook," more specifically, the third section on methodology, as I prepared my questions and interview protocols. While the vast majority of studies in the work-family field have used quantitative methods, recent research has called for qualitative and mixed methods approaches, such as the approach that my research takes (Kreiner et al., 2009).

Each interview was tape recorded. The semi-structured interviews ranged in length from 28 to 58 minutes of recorded material, averaging approximately 44 minutes. Eight of the nine were fully recorded; one interviewee voiced concern regarding personal anonymity in relation to his or her workplace, so I offered to both ask the most identifying questions off tape and to fully transcribe the interview myself. All those who assisted with transcription signed confidentiality agreements. I personally reviewed the transcripts against the original audio for every interview.

I entered the analysis phase of my work with the knowledge that it was possible that successful strategies would be consistent across the interviewees, regardless of where they fall along the continuum. It was also possible that specific strategies would emerge that were consistent with the location on the continuum. It was also, of course, possible that no discernable pattern would emerge, or that an entirely new pattern would emerge.

My analysis based on the integration-segmentation continuum questionnaire used simple calculations to determine average response totals for each question and for each interviewee. My analysis based on the interviews used coding to uncover possible themes. More specifically, I followed the model of "template analysis," which "does not systematically differentiate between 'descriptive' and 'interpretive' coding" (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 168). It is described as especially appropriate for research with sample sizes between 10 and 25 that include hour-long interviews, which is a near estimation of my methodology. In addition, it is "well suited to studies which have particular theoretical or applied concerns that need to be incorporated into the analysis" (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 168).

I read each transcription two times, noting sections that were relevant to my research. I then entered quotations and/or summaries of these sections onto a spreadsheet, recording in a separate column the theme(s) that emerged from each observation. I repeated this process for all 9 interviews, using my "template" of themes as a starting place for each interview. I concluded this portion of my work with 248 observations and a list of 59 themes. I narrowed my list of themes to 40 by combining and eliminating themes. Several themes which I initially observed as not being frequent were separated from the main themes onto a list of outlier themes. I reviewed all the observations against this final template of 40 themes, updating wherever necessary.

I then counted the frequency of each theme and the number of interviewees represented by that frequency. I moved items with only one interviewee represented onto the outlier theme list. The frequency category had totals ranging from 2 to 25. I highlighted two groups – those ranging from 10 to 17 and those ranging from 18 to 25. The number of interviewees category had totals ranging from 2 to 9. I highlighted two groups – those ranging from 5 to 6 and those ranging from 7 to 9.

There were 16 main themes that emerged with a highlighted cell in both the frequency and number of interviewees categories. Secondary themes included four that were highlighted on the number of interviewee side but not the frequency side and three that were highlighted on the frequency side but not the number of interviewee side. (See Appendix C for the full listing of identified themes).

Validity

I place tremendous personal value on balance and wellness. As such, I am very curious, passionate, and excited about my own research. It is important for me to identify the ways that my personal views and emotions influence the lens through which I collect and analyze data. For example, I tend to place a higher emphasis on family than on work. To further enhance the validity of my research, I employed a number of strategies suggested by Maxwell (2005):

- "Rich" Data: I conducted nine detailed interviews of approximately 45 minutes. Interviews were fully transcribed to reduce biased selection of key data.

- Respondent Validation: I used significant follow-up and clarifying questions throughout the interviews themselves to ensure that I did not misinterpret what the interviewees told me. I also secured permission from all interviewees to contact them during my research analysis if I required further clarification.

- Searching for Discrepant Evidence: Before I drew conclusions based on my research, I first intentionally sought data that challenged or did not fit those conclusions. I also relied on my advisor's feedback to ensure that I considered both supporting and discrepant data.

- Triangulation: I used a variety of sources and methods, including literature review, survey and interviews, to reduce the risk of systematic bias.

These strategies helped to increase the validity of my research.

Chapter 4: Presentation of Results and Discussion

This section gives an overview of the results of my questionnaire and interviews, linking relevant results back to the conceptual context where appropriate.

Interviewee Background and Detail

The nine interviewees who participated in my research came from a wide range of backgrounds. This included managers, directors, a consultant, a pastor, an artist/professor, a doula, and an athletic coach, among others, from a variety of nonprofit, for profit, and independent workplaces. The amount of time each interviewee had been in his or her current work position ranged from 1 to 17 years. Four individuals identified as belonging to the Baby Boomer generation, and five identified as belonging to Generation X. Eight worked full time (40-60 hours per week), with one working an average of 25-30 hours per week. Most interviewees had a fair amount of flexibility in terms of where and when their work gets done. All nine do at least some work from home. They live as near as 7 blocks and as far as 30 minutes from their workplaces. When asked to rate how much they like their current job, the average response was 8.7 on a scale of 1 to 10 (one interviewee declined to answer this question). Primary roles varied for each individual, but the three most common responses included partner, parent and professional/employee. When asked if the level of integration or segmentation reflected on the questionnaire was indicative of their preferences or their situation, responses included: six preferences, one situation, and two both.

Integration-Segmentation Questionnaire

The first step in my interview process, after selecting the nine interviewees, was to have each person complete the integration-segmentation continuum questionnaire. Questionnaires were completed and returned to me in advance of the interviews. On a scale of 1 - 5, where 1 is complete integration and 5 is complete segmentation, interviewees were asked to rate what most closely reflects their current situation for each of the categories. Average responses for each of the ten questionnaire items are presented below.

1. **Calendar**
   Integration: One calendar that includes work and home items (through email, pocket calendar, PDA, etc.)
   Segmentation: Two calendars: one at home, one at work, no overlap in contents
   Average Response: 1.33

2. **Email**
   Integration: Check and/or send personal email from work and work email from home
   Segmentation: Do not check or send work email from home or personal email from work
   Average Response: 1.33

3. **Clothes**
   Integration: One all-purpose wardrobe, changing in morning and evening insignificant
   Segmentation: Distinct "uniforms" for home and work, changing in morning and evening crucial
   Average Response: 3.11

4. **Talk**
   Integration: Talk about home and work in both realms
   Segmentation: No talk about work at home; no talk about home at work
   Average Response: 2.11

5. **Talk**
   Integration: Same style of talk used in both realms
   Segmentation: Realm-specific styles of talk

Average Response: 3.00

6. **People**
   Integration: Emails and phone numbers for all acquaintances kept in one place
   Segmentation: Emails and phone numbers for work and home acquaintances kept in separate lists, in separate places
   Average Response: 2.00

7. **People**
   Integration: Photos of co-workers at home, photos of family kept at workplace
   Segmentation: Photos of co-workers kept in workplace, photos of family kept at home
   Average Response: 2.67

8. **People**
   Integration: Co-workers come to home to socialize with family; family comes to workplace to socialize/work with co-workers
   Segmentation: Co-workers socialize together without families, in workplace during workday; family does not come to workplace
   Average Response: 2.33

9. **Reading**
   Integration: "Work" and "home" materials read anytime and kept anywhere
   Segmentation: "Work" material read during worktime and kept at workplace; "personal" material read during "personal" time, away from workspace
   Average Response: 2.11

10. **Breaks**
    Integration: No distinction between work time and personal time during the day or year
    Segmentation: Distinct pockets of personal time during workday when no wage labor is done; distinct annual vacations when no wage labor is done
    Average Response: 2.78

Overall, the interviewees' responses indicated that the average for all but two items was on the integration end of the continuum (below 2.8). There were no items that averaged on the segmentation end of the continuum (above 3.2). Two items ranked near the middle of the

continuum: number 5, referring to realm-specific styles of talk, which averaged 3.00 and number 3, referring to realm-specific styles of dress, which averaged 3.11.

Interestingly, the three items that ranked the lowest, or closest to the integration end of the continuum, had the most direct link to technology. Specifically, items number 1, 2, and 6 ranked at 1.33, 1.33 and 2.00, respectively. The increasing availability and prevalence of smart phones and personal device assistants (PDAs) has made it quite possible to completely integrate the calendar, email, and contact information referred to in number 1, 2, and 6. An area of further investigation, which is beyond the scope of this study, is to determine to what extent these devices are chosen (and paid for) by individuals themselves, and to what extent their workplace chooses (and provides) these devices, and correspondingly, if this has an effect on individuals' ability to leverage and/or limit technology to maintain their preferred boundaries between work and non-work spheres.

Individual responses also indicated that eight of the nine interviewees showed a strong identification with the integration end of the spectrum, with the ninth interviewee showing a moderate identification with the segmentation end of the continuum. The individual responses to the questionnaire items, and each individual's average response, are presented in the table below.

Table 1: Integration-Segmentation Questionnaire Results

	Ben	Bonnie	James	Jess	Lauren	Mary	Rebecca	Sarah	Sylvia
1.	2	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1
2.	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	1	1
3.	1	4	4	2	4	3	3	3	4
4.	1	3	2	1	5	2	1	2	2
5.	2	3	2	3	4	3	3	4	3
6.	1	1	1	1	3	3	3	1	4
7.	3	1	4	3	4	3	1	4	1
8.	2	1	1	2	5	2	3	3	2
9.	2	1	1	2	5	2	3	1	2
10.	2	2	4	3	3	4	3	2	2
Average	**1.7**	**1.8**	**2.1**	**2**	**3.8**	**2.5**	**2.2**	**2.2**	**2.2**

The fact that so many interviewees identified with the integration end of the continuum meant that a portion of my research question was no longer feasible. I had hoped to analyze successful strategies in boundary creation and maintenance based on personal identification on the integration-segmentation continuum. However, I was still able to address the key component of my question: *What individual strategies successfully establish boundaries that create optimal fit and minimal role strain between work and non-work spheres?* In addition, I can now definitively respond to my first sub-question: What type of relationship, if any, exists between those identified as highly skilled at creating successful boundaries and their location on the continuum? In my study, those identified as highly skilled clustered at the integration end of the continuum.

I have identified three possible explanations for the prevalence of integrators in my sample: 1) my secondary link to interviewees may mean that my personal network tends to integrate, 2) integration may be a more

visible form of successful boundary work, or 3) technological advances may mean that a larger preponderance of Americans identify with the integration end of the continuum. While the first option is possible, I do not believe that it is probable. I personally tend towards the segmentation end of the continuum. In addition, those who recommended the selected candidates include people who I have not spoken to for over six months and those who I have not known for more than six months.

As part of my recruiting email, I asked people "Can you recommend someone that you think does a great job at managing all of their different roles?" My original email did not expound on what exactly that meant. After being asked by one person for clarification, I included a brief description in my follow-up reminder email. However, this area was certainly open to a fair amount of interpretation. It is possible that integration more readily jumped to mind as a more visible form of successful boundary management. For example, the *absence* of stress or difficulty (as success may be demonstrated for a segmenter) may be less evident than the *presence* of positive spillover (as success may be demonstrated for an integrator). One who prefers to, and is successful at, segmentation may have friends who are not aware of their success at work, simply because they do not talk about work a great deal with their friends. On the other hand, a colleague of someone who prefers to, and is successful at, integration may be well aware of positive home to work spillover from the role of parent, such as photos of children at work, children's artwork displayed at the workplace, stories of weekend

adventures with children shared with colleagues, or fun visits of children to the workplace.

However, this phenomenon may extend in both directions. Bonnie, who ranked herself as a 1.8 on the integration-segmentation continuum questionnaire, reflected on the difference between what one experiences in terms of integration or segmentation compared to what others may view:

Bonnie: I mentioned to my daughter that we were going to have this conversation and she says, "Mom, you keep those [roles] really separate." And I thought, "Oh, isn't that interesting." Well, what she sees is I wear different things when I go off to see clients . . . and what she also sees is because of the confidentiality of my work I don't talk about work very much. So for her, and what she said is as we were growing up it was like, my work didn't impinge on the raising the kids and other things because I keep that pretty separate from my responsibilities with them. So I thought that was an interesting perspective.

Interviewer: So for you, you view it as integrated but from an external–

Bonnie: That's my internal dialogue because I know all the things I'm juggling . . . it was interesting, my daughter's perspective, her perspective, she thought they were very separate because I don't verbalize the work-related stuff that's going on for me.

In this instance, a recommender could have seen Bonnie as someone who is likely to segment, when in fact from her "internal dialogue" she identifies as someone who integrates.

The third option that was proposed to explain the large number of integrators in my survey, the increased use of technology, is consistent with prior research. As noted in my conceptual context, Chesley (2005) said that "the question of 'blurred boundaries' may become an irrelevant one for the next generation of workers, spouses, and parents because they cannot imagine life any other way" (p. 1246). Obviously, the people who I interviewed are not the "next generation" to which she refers. Yet, the advances of technology even since 2005 are startling. For example, the BlackBerry was released in 2002 and the iPhone was not introduced until 2007, several years after Chesley's observation. Chesley and Johnson's prediction in 2010 that as technology use "continues to rise in American workplaces, it is highly probable that work extension and blurring of work-family domains will become more prevalent" is consistent with the results of my questionnaire ("ICT and Non-Traditional Work Arrangements," para. 2).

Interview Data

As noted in the methodology section, my data analysis revealed 16 main themes resulting from the interviews. Those themes can be sub-divided into two main categories: specific strategies and general observations.

Top Strategies

Specific strategies include:

Table 2: Top Strategies

Theme	Frequency	# of People
clear communication	12	5
clear communication re: expectations	21	6
compensates for excessive spillover by taking extra time in other sphere	13	5
firm boundaries around certain aspects of home/work	17	6
flexibility (secondary, control over that flexibility)	15	6
gentle with oneself	15	5
intentional workplace selection	13	6
not doing everything	25	8
prioritizing	19	6
supportive partner	12	6
values	16	6

While the strategies noted above are discrete, they are also woven together. For example, the idea of *not doing everything* is also closely tied with *prioritizing* based on *values* and being *gentle with oneself.* The most dominant strategy described above is *not doing everything*, showing up 25 times in eight interviewee's responses*.* In some cases, this reflects a deliberate effort to not take on more than one can reasonably – or successfully – accomplish. Sylvia very succinctly states, "If I'm not sure if I can do it, I don't say I'll do it." Ben is also careful about agreeing to take on "extra" things: "I try to make sure that what I'm doing, I'm doing it the best that I can. And so, I don't always tackle something extra that I could, do a partially decent job of it." When she feels like she is drifting away from a preferred boundary, Sarah says it is important to "learn that word no again."

Inherent in these decisions is the ability to *prioritize* appropriately to determine what one can, in fact, say no to. Mary has the option of being at work in meetings until 9 p.m. most nights. For her, it is an issue of discerning where she can most efficiently use her time. "It's sort of figuring out, what is the most important and relevant information to MY work." Several interviewees also addressed the need to be strategic and thoughtful about determining which pieces are released. Sarah reflected, "I think too much we try to say, 'No, everything has to happen today.' Well, so the whole prioritization to not allow the tyranny of the urgent to rule." Bonnie terms this kind of strategic thinking as "discipline." She goes on, "When I have something big like on the work front I tend to leave dishes in the sink, I tend to leave clothes unwashed. I just focus on that big rock." The discipline lies in the fact that this may require focusing on things that are more difficult but have to get done from a strategic standpoint, and not just going after an easily accomplishable task like loading the dishwasher.

Several interviewees emphasized that *not doing everything* is not beneficial if one is not also *gentle with oneself.* Jess still struggles with this. At the time of our interview she was on sabbatical from her position as an art professor. However, she was still being asked to participate on committees. She reflects:

> But I'm just going to say no. You have to be comfortable with, and I do struggle with this, like, my [partner] just says, like, "You know what? You have a sense of obligation." I have a sense of obligation that I fight.

She has found that focusing on what is important helps, as well as having support. "So my research assistant - her main job was to tell me to say 'no' to people. . . . Just saying 'no' to people is really important, I think, and not feeling badly about it."

As a full-time employee, mother to young children, and law student, Mary has a very full plate. During a certain time each year, a work event "just takes over" her life for a period of time. "I have to pick and choose about what is going to fall through the cracks." Recently, she had a big project due in her class, and as she described:

> I really had to consciously choose, "Am I going to devote as much time as this project needs?" or, "Am I okay with getting a lesser grade?" And I just had to choose that the lesser grade had to be fine. And be fine with it. Like, I got a B minus. I did not get the best feedback, like, it was a conscious choice, right? It, like, I don't feel bad about that grade. It's like okay, that's what I had to choose to do, and I did it.

The idea of being *gentle with oneself* also spills into the secondary theme of *self care.* From a psychological perspective, being okay with not doing everything is an important skill. Mary experiences "a lot of guilt" about not being around her children as much as she'd like. A classmate and friend of Mary's who serves as an informal parental mentor told her that there were many right ways to raise a child. This has helped Mary, along with telling herself "this is the best I can do today." She thinks about how what she's

doing now is "going to set me up for a different situation in the future where my kids WILL have more time with me."

Sylvia, who is a doula, spoke of working with some teenage moms who become overly needy. "I make referrals as much as I can and then there's a point at which I say, 'I can't do it anymore now. I have to move on.'" She goes on, "to offer more than I can actually give would not help. So I give what I can. We have to be satisfied with that, there's a certain amount of humility in that. . . . I'm not the answer to their prayers." The secondary theme of *perspective* that Sylvia displayed also emerged when Jess spoke of *not doing everything.* As a result of her being on sabbatical, she has not been as available as she normally would be to students whom she is mentoring. "It's easy to put too much importance on yourself, too, in that way," Jess reflects. "Like, you're just like, 'well [the students] totally need me.' And they talk like they totally need you, but then you're like, 'You know what? It's a semester. . . . It'll be fine.' And they always are."

The idea of *values* came up frequently with the interviewees, many speaking of their reliance on *values* when deciding how to *prioritize*. Jess described this as "thinking about what really matters. . . . Maintaining your own value system" amidst demands from others. In other words, just because something mattered to the person making the demands didn't mean that it mattered most to Jess. There was one important piece of discrepant data when it came to values-based prioritization and decision making. Lauren felt that imposing the idea of values onto what are often pragmatic decisions is inappropriate:

People interject the word values and I really think in some ways that's not playing fair. . . . So if I don't go to my daughter's soccer game, is that, are you saying I don't value my daughter? I mean, I think a lot of the decisions that people have to make are just flat-out pragmatic. . . . My daughter will forgive me for not showing up at the soccer game. I may or may not get that same level of forgiveness at work. Doesn't mean that I'm saying work's more important or I value work more than that. I don't think it's been fair to women how many times people talk about values and making value-based decisions.

Values were also linked to self care and fulfillment in the workplace. Sylvia mentioned numerous times the importance of having integrated values. In other words, the values that one holds in one sphere should echo the values held in the other sphere. She felt that how one selected the "place of work in your life should be based on a value system that's working in both places. Wherever you are there's ways you have to treat people, there's ethics, there's no kind of work that has no ethics." She continued, "You should have the same ethics at work that you have at home, in my opinion. And that's part of what an integrated life is. It's not just about time, it's about values." Many interviewees felt that these parallel values were a cornerstone of the benefits of living an integrated life. Ben described that his "preference would be to integrate because that would mean that, that would mean that my [partner], family, love what I do, they love the people that I work for, like I do."

Rebecca's prior unhealthy work situation provided a stark contrast. "I was wiped out. Values-wise I was wiped out. Exhausted-wise and so I know from that I know what my limits are and what I am willing to do and not willing to do for other people." Being "wiped out" regarding values, as Rebecca describes, likely made it more difficult for her to weather challenges at work. Sylvia describes the benefits she experience by living her values through her work: "I'm living what I believe. So, when it's hard, it's hard because it's worthwhile." Bonnie explains this as a "holistic view" of home and work roles, as "part of my philosophy, which is that, we're not separate people . . . what we have to bring is ourselves. Whether it's at home or at work." This resonates with Kanter's (1977) idea of the myth of separate worlds – that you can never truly be two separate people in home and work spheres.

Rebecca's prior experience is a strong example of poor person-environment fit (Kreiner, 2006; Moen, Kelly & Huang, 2008). The level of negative work to home spillover and the intense permeability of her work to home boundary left her with resources that were so depleted she was unable to fulfill multiple roles as she desired. "I was able to play a work role but that was it and I wasn't able to do any of the other [roles in her life] even remotely well." These observations reaffirm the literature which shows that having multiple roles is beneficial (e.g., Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Hecht & Allen, 2009). The benefit of multiple roles was also echoed by Lauren, who described the roles as spokes on a wheel. "If you've only got one spoke in the wheel of life, and you hit a bump, you're not as resilient as if you've got

multiple spokes in the wheel of life." She felt that "being multi-faceted . . .
leaves you more resilient. Leaves you probably stronger in each role."

Jess brought up many times the importance of nurturing her role as an
artist in order to be a better professor. She doesn't necessarily view being
an educator as a literal idea of being in the classroom and being on
committees. Rather, "you have to start with yourself and be deeply
committed to your work. You know, that passion is to me really valuable."
Jess purposefully sought a position at an institution that placed great value
on her role as an artist – a place where this role "would be valued as part of
myself as a teacher . . . they recognize that you being excited about your
work just naturally transfers to your students being excited about their
work." The way that Jess described this idea throughout her interview
echoed Marks's (1977) "expansionist approach" (p. 921). In her case, her
role as an artist actually creates energy for use in her roles of teacher and
mentor.

Values were also reflected in the ways that interviewees described
having a *supportive partner.* Jess described the importance of "having a
partner that totally understands [integration], that doesn't expect me home
for dinner every night, and, um, you know, like, totally respects and supports
my creative life and my ambition." As an athletic coach, Ben's schedule
means that he is gone many nights. After describing how his work time is
structured, he half-joked "so you basically have to have like a really, really
understanding [partner]." His partner also enjoys the work that he does,
and it has proven to be a positive experience for his entire family to be

involved in his work. In this way, the idea of person-environment fit applies not only to seeking a workplace that provides the resources necessary for optimal fit, but also ensuring that one's home environment provides the necessary resources. If Ben's family was resistant to a flexible boundary between themselves and his workplace, it is possible that he would experience a certain level of role strain.

One of the ways that Ben is able to manage his roles as coach and parent is by *compensating for excessive spillover by taking extra time in the other sphere.* He described how although it was difficult to miss his children's activities, there were many times "where I'm really flexible and can do whatever. . . . I mean, there's some give and take, I may miss something here but it's usually made up with the fact that I'm like, really flexible here." This was especially true in the summers: "It's like, 'okay, what do you guys want to do today?'" This theme was reflected strongly in many interviews. Mary has a set period of time that is available for this compensation – she calls Sundays her "wildcard" days. If she spends extra time with her children during the week she knows that she'll have to study extra on Sunday, or vice versa. Rebecca also voiced this theme. "I don't have any issues with [work] crossing over like that 'cause like I said if I need to leave to go and pick my son up 'cause he's sick I can do that." She feels that the flexibility goes both ways. "I really feel like there's times that . . . my personal life invades my work life and vice versa and it, to me it just kind of balances out." Bonnie echoed this theme as well, describing periods "like last week when particularly the work responsibilities are very heavy and I can do less on the

home front and then I have to kind of catch up with my, usually my [partner] and I catch up together."

A crucial component of being able to *compensate for excessive spillover by taking extra time in the other sphere* is *flexibility.* More specifically, having *control over that flexibility* in order to be able to have some discretion in when and where work and non-work roles are fulfilled. My sample all had a type of work that allowed for a certain extent of flexibility. Recall the earlier definition of boundary flexibility as "the extent to which the physical time and location markers, such as working hours and workplace, may be changed" (Hall & Richter, 1988, p. 215). Other professions, such as factory workers or air traffic controllers, may not allow for such flexibility. It is also important to note that not all workplaces described by the interviewees encouraged what we typically think of as flexibility; for one interviewee, flexibility was simply needing to do some work from home at times. Thus, the secondary theme of *control over the flexibility* is vital in fully conveying the meaning behind the theme.

Bonnie explained how this flexibility is really required in both realms if one works for someone else. "It's realizing that there are going to be times that the work is going to demand more. There are going to be times that the home demands more, and that both parties are really open and flexible with that." An additional component to this flexibility is the idea of trust – that a supervisor or workplace trusts the employee to exercise discretion in their flexibility. Rebecca experiences this: "I kind of get to structure my time how I need to." She has "the total freedom to work at home if I need to on a

project or anything else so. For me it's an ideal scenario." Ben also notes

how important it is that his boss trusts him. "Everything is flexible and

everything is kind of on your own." Much of this has to do with the

relationship that he has with his supervisor. "Basically my [boss] is trusting

that I . . . am putting in this time to get the job done and stuff like that so

the hours are extremely flexible." Jess had a unique means of achieving this

flexibility and control. For her, it had to do with finances. "I've never had a

credit card; I still don't have a credit card. To me that's sort of been key, is

never getting into that, never live beyond my means."

When Bonnie described a recent day, it was obvious that she exercises

both physical and psychological *flexibility* almost nonstop. She began with a

coaching conversation via phone, then talked with her daughter regarding

taxes, went to an appointment on-site at a corporation, was supposed to

have a conference call but they were late, so she began folding clothes in a

basket. She "listened to music and folded clothes while they were getting

their act together. When they got on the line I put that aside and then when

I got off the line I finished it up, I brought it upstairs." She then tended to

her sick partner and prepared for work the next day. Bonnie also raised the

idea of being "emotionally flexible," or as Lauren termed it, "psychologically

nimble." When Bonnie adjusted to the late conference call by acting in a

non-work role, then smoothly changed back to a work role, she displayed

this quality. In her own words, it is important to "be emotionally flexible to

make a change because things have changed. Like a child is sick or water's

leaking in the ceiling (laughs) or things like that then it makes it very difficult to keep those boundaries."

While *flexibility* emerged as a key theme, the idea of having *firm boundaries around certain aspects of home/work* also came through loud and clear. Some interviewees described selected segmentation, particularly around their families. Mary said "when I'm with my kids, I am WITH my kids. I normally don't answer my phone, um, I don't look at my emails." Sarah also creates firm boundaries around family time. "There are a few areas that we work to NOT have integration. . . . There are times like at dinner where we say, 'You know what? We're not talking about anything work tonight.'" She continues, "It's like, 'Wait a minute, we're on the fun part. We're on the non-work part. Let's leave that at work.'" Ben in particular provided a strong contrast to this idea, as his integration is centered on the flexible and permeable boundaries between his roles as partner and parent and his role as coach.

James, because he is a pastor, has a hard time being on vacation when he stays in town, since there always seems to be something that comes up. He has learned that "really the way to get a break is to take a full break and get out, you know, get out of town." He and his partner have tried to do that, particularly by having "shorter, more frequent vacations rather than just one big one in the summer." Physically removing himself from the same city as his work helps him maintain firmer boundaries around vacation time.

Jess uses the technique of having *firm boundaries around certain aspects of home/work* in many ways. As an artist and art professor, she tries to create days that are just for studio time, trying not to "let other stuff creep into it." She calls this "guarding creative time," which is very important to her. Jess also uses this concept with her students: she will set aside a certain portion of a certain day for students, and tell them that if they want to meet with her, they will have to do so during that time. She is displaying *clear communication regarding expectations* of when she will be available for students. Because of the nature of her work – more specifically, being an artist – it can be difficult to NOT have boundaries in place.

> The hard thing is, with being an artist – and I watch a lot of people struggle with this – like, if people are visiting you, you know, and you had a job, you would have to go to that job and you would be like "alright, fend for yourself today; going to work." And when you're an artist, you can just kind of say "Well, I don't have to go to the studio today, whatever." So I think you do have to make that somehow artificially in your head that you're going to work. . . . It's just keeping that in your life and not letting other things just seep over it, 'cause they will, you know?

Being able to maintain *firm boundaries around certain aspects of home/work* is crucial for Jess.

As mentioned above, having *clear communication* and more specifically, *clear communication regarding expectations* was a common

theme throughout the interviews. Several interviewees addressed how crucial this was in setting the right tone with a new employer as part of an *intentional workplace selection*. When conducting a job search, Rebecca said that every time she spoke to a "potential employer that I was really interested in was a very open conversation about 'I work a four-day week right now and I don't have any plans to go back to working a five-day week right now.'" This was a primary factor in her job search. "The only environments that I would've considered moving into were very receptive to that option." One of the jobs that she was interested in did not offer any flexibility in terms of working from home on Fridays. "So that kind of segmentation, boom, right off the bat, told me that that was probably not the best environment for me." Although she was very interested in the work that she would have been doing, she did not pursue that job any further. Rebecca continued to be clear about her role by creating an email signature which notes that she is not in the office on Fridays. "I don't create expectations that I'll get back to people on Friday." In Mary's interview for her current position, she told her future boss "'I'm going to law school. I'm starting. This is a priority in my life. I'm going to make time for it and space for it, how do you feel about that?" She maintains this open communication every semester when her school schedule, and the extent to which she has to adjust her boundaries, shifts.

The idea of *clear communication regarding expectations* is also connected with the ability to be, as Rebecca termed it, "an advocate for myself." Ben holds a second coaching job with high school aged athletes

which takes place, for the most part, on the off-season of his college sport. Somewhat recently, his second coaching job was getting too demanding. He clearly told the head of the program "'okay, this is the way it's going to be and you can take it or leave it' kind of thing." He had to be very straightforward and "have a talk about it because well, because it was just like, you're infringing way too much time on something that's a volunteer situation." Being able to be clear about how much he was willing to offer allowed him and the head of the program to come to a clear understanding, which has "been going great" since then. In this instance, Ben is exhibiting "differential permeability" (Kreiner et al., 2009, p. 719). While he is very encouraging of his home roles spilling over into his work, here Ben needed to decrease the permeability of his secondary coaching role into other realms of his life.

The pastor who held James' position before he did was entirely integrated in work and home roles. He worked 70 hour weeks and basically didn't take any vacations. He did everything at the church, from shoveling the walk to painting the walls. When the interim pastor came to the church before James arrived, he had to work with the congregation to mitigate expectations about the replacement pastor. "So that's important that there's just that general understanding [from the congregation] of the need for, for boundaries as a pastor." In other words, the need to understand that James would not likely be found on his day off shoveling the walk at church. He reflected further:

There's no right or wrong answers and that some things need to
be integrated, some things need to be segmented. And to know
which is which I think is important. Because I think maybe
seminary simplifies it a little too much. They say, "you have to
have a good work-life balance." I don't think that's enough. I
think that's not realistic to say you have to have these things
segmented because I think there's advantage of having some
integration. There's definitely disadvantage of having too much
integration. . . . Be intentional in figuring out which areas should
be integrated and which should be segmented. And then
communicate those things too, so it's not just in your own mind.
. . . I think that has to continually be articulated.

The idea of *clear communication regarding expectations* applies not
only to expectations regarding one's role in the work sphere, but also one's
role in the non-work sphere, particularly the areas where the two intersect.
Rebecca, who is trained as a counselor, feels that her background has
"allowed me to create some healthy boundaries, I think too, with people that
really matter to me 'cause I can kind of just say, 'Okay, which role do you
want me to be?" She will ask that of her partner, her friends, and her mom.
"Do you want me to be a totally non-objective friend and you need me to
just, like, be with you and agree with you on whatever you're going to say?"
Or, "do you need me to play kind of the objective professional that's going to
ask you good questions and maybe ask you some hard questions?" Rebecca
is countering a challenge that Ashforth et. al (2000) described: "highly

flexible and permeable boundaries, coupled with overlapping role identities and associated role sets and contexts, may foster confusion and anxiety about which role identity is or should be most salient" (pp. 480-481). Rebecca's up-front communication around this issue allows her to maintain clarity about which role is primary at a given time.

Mary has found that *clear communication regarding expectations* is important to help her family get through law school finals time. Mary ended up speaking frankly with her partner, saying "'here's what this time is going to be like, and, um, so you can either go to Iowa and be with your mom and have all that support . . . or you can be here and it's just you.'" She told her partner, "'Either way, it's up to you what you want to do but just understand, I'm not going to be here.'" They did choose to go to Iowa and were there for two and a half weeks, which worked out well for the whole family. In this case, it was Mary's family with whom she had to be clear regarding their expectations of her role as partner and parent.

Kreiner et al. (2009) found four broad types of tactics that their interviewees used to create and maintain preferred boundaries: behavioral, temporal, physical, and communicative. Behavioral tactics included "using other people, leveraging technology, invoking triage, and allowing differential permeability" (p. 715). The first of these, using other people, did not emerge in my research to the same extent that it did in the research noted above. This may be due to the nature of the respective samples: my sample noted a strong preference for integration; the other sample included all Episcopal parish priests, who provided an extreme case of work-home

demands. The authors noted that their sample "tended towards desiring more segmentation" (p. 726). All examples provided by Kreiner et al. (2009) displayed using other people as a way to further segment, such as a wife answering the phone on the priest's day off. My data showed a stronger identification with the interviewees being their own "gatekeeper" by clearly communicating their preferences and expectations to others.

The remaining three categories all emerged prominently from my data. Leveraging technology could be seen, for example, by Mary including her partner on meeting requests via her work Outlook email account if a work event was going to spill over to home time. Several interviewees mentioned smart phones and laptops allowing greater levels of integration, such as combining electronic calendars with their partners. Sarah leveraged the "off" option of technology: when she attended Twins baseball games with her partner she would say "okay, Blackberrys off, focusing on the next two-and-a-half, three hours, whatever the game is, on just relaxing, unplugging, baseball and friends." *Leverage technology* emerged as a secondary theme in my data, and *limits technology* came through as a less dominant theme as well.

Kreiner et al. (2009) discuss invoking triage to explain how to manage multiple simultaneous demands. While they touch on the idea of having a "basic priority set established before the crisis," the idea of *being gentle with oneself* was not discussed, nor was the explicit term *values.* The connection between *not doing everything, prioritizing, values* and *being gentle with*

oneself were strongly linked in my data, which offers an expanded base of knowledge regarding this identified tactic.

Lastly, what Kreiner et al. (2009) term "differential permeability" was mentioned in the section above on *clear communications regarding expectations,* where Ben exhibits this characteristic. The authors describe their documentation that "individuals can *both* segment and integrate their work and home domains" as "an important step, because previous research has primarily examined very general tendencies towards integrating or segmenting" (p. 719). The dominance of *nuanced boundaries* in my data (more on this below) strongly supports their finding.

Identified themes were also consistent with temporal tactics described by Kreiner et al. (2009), including controlling work time (*compensates for excessive spillover by taking extra time in other sphere*), and finding respite (the secondary theme of *self care)*. Physical tactics including adapting physical boundaries (such as Sylvia's home office which had two walls dedicated to her work role and two walls dedicated to her grandmother role), manipulating physical space (such as James choosing to live seven blocks from his church so he could go to and from work during the day), and managing physical artifacts (such as Sylvia preferring to answer work related emails in clothing rather than her pajamas) also came through in the data, although less prominently. Communicative tactics described by Kreiner et al. (2009) emerged in my data as well: setting expectations (*clear communications regarding expectations*) was a dominant theme, and *confronting violators* (as Ben did in the example above, or as Sylvia does

with clients who need more than she can give), while not an identified theme, did come through in the data.

Top Observations

In addition to specific strategies used to increase fit and reduce role strain, a number of general observations emerged from the data.

Table 3: Top Observations

Theme	Frequency	# of People
nuanced boundaries	21	7
positive home-work spillover	13	5
positive integration	15	6
role enhancement	19	9
strategies change over the life course	12	8

Many of the general observations most frequently noted in the interviews were also reflected in the strategies described above. Nuanced boundaries, for this group of predominantly integrators, often manifested in *firm boundaries around certain aspects of home/work.* Other times, it was displayed through interesting combinations including aspects of both integration and segmentation. This again echoes "allowing differential permeability" that Kreiner et al. (2009) discussed. This finding is significant, as Kreiner et al. (2009) noted that prior research looked at broad tendencies towards integration or segmentation rather than "the nuances bound to exist within individuals" (p. 719).

Rebecca, for example, receives both work and personal email on her phone and can check both at will, yet maintains separate email accounts. Sylvia, who does a fair amount of work out of her home office, observed that

"interestingly I will feel most comfortable being dressed when I answer [work email from home]. Not dressed up, but in, not in my pajamas." Bonnie, when waiting for me to arrive for our interview, created a to-do list. She told me that she wrote it out as she typically does – one page of paper with two lists, one for the work sphere and the other for the non-work sphere. James, as a pastor, "can be social and be, and have friendships but, really the pastor role has to take precedence whenever I'm with church members." When Mary is having a bad time at work, she will limit the amount of work to home spillover. In other words, boundaries were not black-and-white. They were not straight lines; rather, they were dotted lines with dashes and squiggles.

All nine interviewees alluded to at least one way in which they experience role enhancement. Perhaps not a coincidence, the majority also noted positive aspects of integration, and positive home-to-work spillover (positive work-to-home spillover was also noted, with a slightly lower frequency). Mary doesn't feel that the time she spends with classmates detracts from her other roles. Integrating her classmates into her home life "makes it easier to, like, have those two worlds live with each other." For Rebecca, the role of self-care, specifically exercising, enhances her other roles. She describes that as "a huge balancing factor for me. It makes me sleep better, it keeps me healthier, it gives me more energy. . . . Everyone around me is happier too." Sylvia described all of her roles as "mutually enhancing. My marriage being good is a wonderful thing, the quality of my marriage and my relationships with my children is a lot of what I bring to my work with young people who are starting families." She feels enhancement

in the other direction as well. "The reverse is true, too. I learn constantly from young women especially that I work with but also young men, too. . . . There's a lot of enrichment that comes both directions in this way." Sarah draws from her faith, which she feels enhances her other primary roles, what she calls "the faith element. I feel it's really, if I don't have a strong relationship with God, that flows down to everything else." Yet, if that relationship is strong, "then that flows to my marriage and . . . that's given us our strength with the family and the children all along, and then with the work as well. . . . That's why I say 'love God, love people, love life.'"

Ben described his home and work integration in such a manner it was difficult at times to discern if it was home spilling over to work or work spilling over to home, due to the level of positive integration. He describes how his daughters "like being a part of [his work], like they feel a part of this, I think." His partner "totally grasps and understands and . . . really likes being a part of this, she likes having to, be able to have the kids come over here and be around a bunch of incredibly good positive role models for . . . our daughters." Ben also talked about how his home to work spillover enhances his work role by humanizing him a bit more. "I think that [the athletes] like [his partner], it humanizes me more, when they see her, you know, and she's really good at being, like, you know, 'He likes you guys a lot.'" He goes on to describe that the spillover is mutually beneficial, as it is good for the athletes "to be positive role models and see themselves in that light. . . . Having [kids] around is an affirmation, so it's good for [the athletes] as well, so, and then obviously I think it's good for my kids." In

general, the responses of interviewees reflect Chesley's (2005) observation that the minimal research on positive spillover shows that it is "positively correlated with several indicators of life quality" (p. 1239).

Bonnie and James both talked about ways that their work can enhance their role as parents. Bonnie said that "the fact that I've worked all these years has made me a better mother 'cause I think the level of intellectual challenge that I really need to feel good and to feel stimulated and to feel creative" has only been possible because she did work outside the home. James feels that things going on in his own life, such as becoming a new parent, make him "more sensitive and empathetic to what other people are going through." The enhancement goes both ways. "Vice-versa, again, I would want my child to be here because I think this place provides a great community of support and nurture for children and would be for my child then too."

Another theme that emerged from observations is the idea that *strategies change over the life course.* More specifically, almost every person who mentioned this idea did so in relation to children. James, Jess, Mary, and Rebecca (all Generation X) mentioned how they have had to modify strategies because of their young (or soon arriving) children. Mary talked about how her parental mentor, who is also a law student, uses strategies that differ from her own. The mentor's children are older than Mary's – elementary age – so are able to, for example, go to a friend's house for a sleepover to allow for more study time. As Mary puts it, "there's different strategies for her to be able to cope."

Jess and Rebecca also talked about how, as their small children age, the strategies that they use change accordingly. Rebecca reflects "now that my son's getting older, before I didn't really want to travel [for work] a whole lot, be away on nights and weekends. Now that he's getting a little bit older I'm much more open to that." Jess described the difficulties of trying to integrate her roles as artist and parent by sitting down to draw with her young daughter. At her age, "we start drawing and she's in my lap and she's on my arm, and you know, and she's trying to draw on the couch, and, you know?" Her friends who are artists have told her that "it'll change, right, when she's . . . she's super-fun right now, but . . . you have to give her your full attention. There's no way to do a lot of other stuff."

James has always had Fridays as his day off, although he admitted that he ended up doing small amounts of work on Fridays – emails, sermon preparation, etc. He recognizes that when his family of two expands to a family of three in the near future, "I'm going to have to have Fridays off because, at least with a four-month-old, I'm not going to be able to be working on a sermon while watching a baby." This is going to require an even greater level of communication with his partner. "I think we'll have to plan more than we're doing now, planning our schedule so that we know when everyone's home."

Sarah, Sylvia and Bonnie, who are part of the Baby Boomer generation, all spoke about how the level of planning required to manage multiple roles has decreased somewhat since their children have grown. Several interviewees also mentioned naturalness or ease that developed

between themselves and their partner when it came to juggling multiple roles over the years. When Sylvia reflected back to when she managed multiple roles with small children, she said, "there was a lot of advance planning in that. Much more than there is now. Now I've just talked about this, sort of, really, letting it happen and having lots of backup." Sarah said, "I'm at the empty nester stage of life where, we joke because my [partner] and I both work too much (laughs). . . . We can give and flow easier than I know people can when they've got children." Bonnie said, "when the kids were young we'd talk a lot because it, you know, who would pick the kids up from daycare and I mean, what about dinner? I mean, it had to be a long conversation." It is less involved now, "partly because we've been married so long and we just kind of have patterns that when it comes to the extra stuff, like ice dams. . . . We kind of figure this out."

Sarah very intentionally adjusted her workplace responsibilities to reflect the life stage of her children. After her second child was born she decided to leave a high-demand work environment to stay at home with her children. Then, when they began school she worked part-time, and went full-time after they were in high school. When reflecting back on the changes, Sarah said:

> I think to me of any probably one learning is it's not going to be
> static. You know, it's not going to say, "Oh, my boundary is
> going to be this way for this month or year or forever. I'm
> never going to work." Well, you know, the reality of life might
> be that you might have to work part-time and that might be the

healthiest thing for your kids. So I don't think that there's any one right answer for each, for every family and then I don't think there's one right answer that's constant. . . . How has the environment changed at home, at work, for you personally?. . . . You know, you've got what works well for your family now but you know if things change, versus fighting the change, if it's a reality of life and you can't change it, then you have to find out what's the balance and the normal that you can cope with.

While interviewees strongly voiced the idea that strategies for boundary management change over the life course, they differed somewhat in how they described the extent to which their own general preferences changed or stayed the same over the life course. Mary described how she was more segmented as a child, but after having children of her own the way other people fit into her life "totally changed" and became much more integrated. Sylvia also feels that she is more integrated now, but she "always chose the integrated range, I always somehow made all the parts of my life interconnect." Ben's preferences have changed due to the nature of the jobs that he has had. In the past, he held typical 9 to 5 jobs where it "wasn't something where I would be bringing my family to my work or vice-versa," yet "for my coaching [which was part-time] I would have, had I had kids at the time, or a wife. I mean, if I had a girlfriend they knew about my team that I coached." When coaching became his primary work role, he increased the extent to which he integrated.

For James, strong integration has always been a way of life. "Looking back I guess I never really had a job that was segmented." Even in high school, he started a lawn-mowing business with his friends "that was very much integration because we were friends first, working together. We were often working for people we knew or our parents knew and, you know, so, we would go out for coffee at night . . . talking about work." He continues, "so yeah, so I think there is something I like about that integration of work and life."

Drawing from the data, it is difficult to make a conclusive statement about the extent to which one's preferences on the continuum change over time. A number of factors appear to influence this, including changes in family dynamics and the extent to which one identifies with and/or enjoys one's job. It is interesting to note that when asked to rate how much they like their current job on a scale of 1 to 10, respondents averaged an 8.7 (one interviewee declined to answer, feeling that it was an oversimplified question). It is possible that boundaries become more permeable to allow for greater spillover if that spillover is positive, leading to increased integration.

Chapter 5: Summary, Recommendations, and Conclusion

Summary

In 1977, Kanter described a myth of separate worlds. Arguing against this myth, Kanter suggested that "work and family are connected in many subtle and unsubtle, social, economic, and psychological ways" (1977, p. 89). Since that time, the separateness of home and work spheres has eroded even further. With technological advances, the temporal and spatial boundaries that once existed around these spheres have become increasingly blurred. Chesley and Johnson (2010) predict that as the use of technology continues to rise, this blurring will become increasingly prevalent. It is no longer a question of *if* this change is taking place; rather, it has become a question of what this means for the individuals who comprise our society, the organizations within which they work, and the larger society as a whole.

There are two views regarding the possible effects of multiple roles. The first, role strain (Goode, 1960), proposes that an individual has a set amount of energy to distribute amongst all existing roles. Goode states, "the individual's problem is how to make his whole role system manageable, that is, how to allocate his energies and skills so as to reduce role strain to some bearable proportions" (p. 485). A contrasting view is offered by Marks (1977) through an "expansion approach" (p. 921), wherein a given role may actually increase an individuals' energy for use in other roles. Marks explains that "perhaps some roles may be performed without any net energy loss at all; they may even *create* energy for use in that role or in other role performances" (p. 926).

Nippert-Eng (1996a) proposed that individuals could engage in boundary work to both create and manage boundaries that would lessen any potential role strain and/or increase success in multiple roles. More specifically, Nippert-Eng (1996a) offered the idea that people tend to either segment their roles (with firm boundaries strongly demarking the borders between roles and little crossover between roles) or integrate their roles (with permeable, flexible boundaries that allow for individuals to transition frequently between roles). The goal of this boundary work is to create boundaries that allow for optimum "person-environment fit" (Kreiner, 2006; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999) for an individual at a given point in time.

Much of the research to date has focused on conflict that results from multiple roles. However, many recent researchers have called for work focusing on individual-level solutions that emphasize positive aspects of multiple roles. The aim of my research was to both help individuals gain important awareness and insight into their own boundary work, and provide successful models and tangible examples of strategies that could be employed by others. My research question was: *What individual strategies successfully establish boundaries that create optimal fit and minimal role strain between work and non-work spheres, based on personal identification on the integration-segmentation continuum?* I also explored additional questions including: 1) What type of relationship, if any, exists between those identified as highly skilled at creating successful boundaries and their location on the continuum? 2) What types of themes, if any, will emerge

among successful strategies? 3) How will individuals describe changes, if any, in where they identify on the continuum over the life course?

My research results showed that there was a very strong correlation between the interviewees, who had all been identified as successful at managing multiple roles, and their preference for integration. Eight of the nine interviewees identified more strongly on the integration end of the continuum. When asked if their location on the integration-segmentation continuum reflected their preferences or their situation, all eight integrators responded by saying either yes or both.

A number of themes strongly emerged from the interviews, including eleven top strategies for boundary management and five top observations regarding boundary management. Strategies included: clear communication; clear communication re: expectations; compensates for excessive spillover by taking extra time in other sphere; firm boundaries around certain aspects of home/work; flexibility (secondary, control over that flexibility); gentle with oneself; intentional workplace selection; not doing everything; prioritizing; supportive partner; and values. Observations included: nuanced boundaries, positive home-work spillover, positive integration, role enhancement, and strategies change over the life course.

As indicated above, the fact that strategies do change over the life course was reflected in the data, as evidenced by its inclusion as a top boundary management observation. However, I was not able to draw conclusions based on the data that I gathered concerning preferences on the continuum changing over the life course. This appears to be a complicated,

nuanced topic, with changes in family dynamics, differing levels of happiness, and values consistency or incongruence all playing a role.

Since my sample included 89% integrators, I was not able to examine strategies based on identification on the integration-segmentation continuum. However, consistent strategies did still emerge across the interviewees to create optimal fit and minimize role strain. Interestingly, while the individual who tended more closely towards segmentation did reflect themes not seen in other candidates (such as firm segmenting as an adaptation, the necessity at times of pragmatic decision-making rather than values-based decision-making), there were also a number of themes that were consistent with the larger group (*not doing everything, being gentle with oneself, prioritizing*).

In addition, it became clear that there was no "one size fits all" recommendation. While all nine interviewees did address some aspect of role enhancement in their interview, there was no specific strategy that the entire group offered. In fact, only one strategy –*not doing everything* – was mentioned by eight or more people. This does, however, reaffirm one of the top observations, that *strategies change over the life course*. Depending on a particular situation at a particular life stage, the strategy will likely vary.

While the identified themes were discrete, there was significant overlap between them. For example, *not doing everything* is a strategy in its own right, but will be less effective if one does so under the duress of obligation. Thus, being *gentle with oneself* is a necessary complement to this strategy. In fact, the top strategy of *not doing everything* exhibited perhaps

the largest cluster of themes around it: the abovementioned being *gentle with oneself, clear communication regarding expectations, prioritizing, supportive partner* and *values* were all linked to some extent with the top strategy, as were the secondary strategies of *advocating for self* and *perspective.* This is consistent with Kreiner et al. (2009), who found that the broad categories of boundary work tactics that they identified were "often complementary," and that they "reinforce each other, creating a multipronged approach to negotiating the work-home boundary" (p. 724).

Recommendations

This leads to the first of several suggestions for future research. A large number of the 248 noted observations had more than one theme attached to them. While my research analyzed the overarching themes and the interrelatedness between them, there is also the opportunity to take this analysis to the next level by examining the relationship between multiple themes attached to individual observations at a finer degree. Are several themes almost always found together? Are any themes almost always found by themselves? From this, we could learn if any of the top strategies do, in fact, need to be "packaged" with another strategy in order to be effective.

Another area that portends interesting and useful results is the level of happiness with both home and work spheres in relation to boundary work. More specifically, comparing those levels to the respective levels of spillover from home to work and from work to home; in particular, if any noted spillover is positive or negative. The theme of *values* could also play into this. As *values* also emerged as a top theme, it is possible that having

consistent values in both home and work spheres allows for increased positive integration. One may transition between roles in different spheres with greater ease if those spheres hold consistent values. Changes in family dynamics, levels of happiness, and values consistency or incongruence may all affect the extent to which preferences on the integration-segmentation continuum change over the life course.

In addition, there is an opportunity to go beyond the focus of what the individuals have done to reduce role strain and increase optimal fit, and to look more deeply into how we might know that the strategies have been successful. As mentioned previously, my subject recruitment method left a fair amount of discretion in identifying successful boundary managers. Further research could examine how we can truly identify a successful boundary manager. From there, one could analyze the extent to which the strategies of these boundary managers are truly successful: How would one identify a failed strategy? A merely sufficient strategy? A truly successful strategy? And, finally, how could we determine the extent to which an individual is satisfied with the strategies that he or she employs?

There are also myriad factors that could be analyzed regarding the makeup of the sample, which were simply beyond the scope of my research. While I achieved a diverse sample from the pool of potential candidates, there were many ways in which they were still similar: all lived in the Twin Cities metropolitan area of Minnesota, all held professional work positions, all were partnered, and all had children (or a child on the way). Research that achieved a purposefully diverse sample in regards to one of the areas

mentioned above, or others – ethnicity, culture, family of origin work/life norms – could be analyzed through their respective lenses.

Lastly, while my original research question could not be answered per se, due to the prevalence of integrators in my sample, I do still feel that this would be a fruitful study to pursue. A possible route to a more purposeful sample could involve administration of the integration-segmentation questionnaire to a significantly larger group of recommended successful boundary managers, then selecting a final group for further study based on either a) a preponderance of segmenters for comparison to this study, or b) a more evenly split mix between integrators and segmenters.

Conclusion

Our society's once-distinct realms of work and home are now inextricably intertwined. The purpose of my research was to gain insight into how individuals can best mitigate the challenges and maximize the benefits that result from this new normal. While much research has been done regarding conflict between work and home realms, my research sought to uncover positive, effective strategies that individuals could implement. This builds specifically on the work of Kreiner et. al (2009) and Nippert-Eng (2006). The strategies noted in my research may be more applicable to those who tend to integrate home and work spheres; however, it is also very likely that a number of the strategies would be beneficial across the board.

Boundaries that create optimal fit on an individual level have impact felt far beyond that individual. If an individual is experiencing great role strain, he or she will likely be unable to be effective in one or all of his or her

roles. This spreads to partners, families, colleagues, and workplaces.

Without successful boundary management, it is near impossible for an

individual to be a successful leader. Greater knowledge, consciousness, and

intentionality around boundary work will only become increasingly necessary

as our society continues to evolve.

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Appendix A: Integration-Segmentation Questionnaire

Home and Work Realms: The Integration - Segmentation Continuum

On a scale of 1 - 5, where 1 is complete integration and 5 is complete segmentation, please rate what most closely reflects your current situation for each of the following categories. Try to think about what is *generally* true, or what *best* describes where you identify. There is no right or wrong answer.

	Integration - 1	Segmentation – 5	Your Rating
Calendar	One calendar that includes work and home items (through email, pocket calendar, PDA, etc.)	Two calendars: one at home, one at work, no overlap in contents	
Email	Check and/or send personal email from work and work email from home	Do not check or send work email from home or personal email from work	
Clothes	One all-purpose wardrobe, changing in morning and evening insignificant	Distinct "uniforms" for home and work, changing in morning and evening crucial	
Talk	Talk about home *and* work in both realms	No talk about work at home; no talk about home at work	
Talk	Same style of talk used in both realms	Realm-specific styles of talk	
People	Emails and phone numbers for all acquaintances kept in one place	Emails and phone numbers for work and home acquaintances kept in separate lists, in separate places	
People	Photos of co-workers at home, photos of family kept at workplace	Photos of co-workers kept in workplace, photos of family kept at home	
People	Co-workers come to home to socialize with family; family comes to workplace to socialize/work with co-workers	Co-workers socialize together without families, in workplace during workday; family does not come to workplace	
Reading	"Work" and "home" materials read anytime and kept anywhere	"Work" material read during worktime and kept at workplace; "personal" material read during "personal" time, away from workspace	
Breaks	No distinction between work time and personal time during the day or year	Distinct pockets of personal time during workday when no wage labor is done; distinct annual vacations when no wage labor is done	

Adapted from Nippert-Eng, C. (1996a). Calendars and keys: The classification of "home" and "work". Sociological Forum, 11(3, Special Issue: Lumping and Splitting), pp. 563-582.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

The following questions were used as a guide for my semi-structured interviews. Items that are highlighted in gray were offered only as necessary for clarification. Items in bold were customized, depending on the interviewee's earlier responses.

I'll start off by asking a few biographical questions:

1. What is your title and your workplace?

2. How long have you been in your current position?

3. Which of the following age groups captures your generation?
   a. Traditionalist - born before 1946
   b. Baby Boomers - born 1946 to 1964
   c. Generation X - born 1965 to 1981
   d. Millennials - born 1982 to 2000

4. Could you tell me how your work is structured?

   a. Is it part-time or full-time?

   b. Do you work from home or on-site?

5. How far do you live from your workplace?

6. If you feel comfortable doing so, could you rate how much you like your current job on a scale from 1 to 10?

7. Could you tell me about the different roles that you occupy both inside and outside the workplace? Examples would be spouse, friend, employee, pet-owner, or volunteer.

   a. Which roles do you consider primary in your life? Why?

8. According to the questionnaire you filled out, it appears that you tend to identify more with the **integration/segmentation** end of the spectrum. Do you think this is an accurate description of your current situation?

   a. Would you say that this reflects your preferences, or just the situation you're in? Explain.

> i. **If it reflects preferences:** Was there a deliberate effort to seek or create an environment that would fit your personal preferences?
>
> ii. **If it reflects situation:** What appeals to you about the other end of the continuum? What do you think keeps you from getting there?
>
> iii. Earlier you told me that your level of happiness with your current job is **[high/low]**, do you think that this affects the type of boundaries that you created?

b. Are the boundaries that you create between work and home different? For example, you may be fine with bringing work home on the weekends (which would be a weak work-to-home boundary), but get frustrated when your spouse or child calls during the work day (which would be a strong home-to-work boundary).

c. What strategies, tactics, or coping mechanisms have you employed that help you keep your roles **integrated/segmented**?

d. OR What strategies have you used to help keep you from being pushed too far into **integration/segmentation**?

e. OR For example, a strategy to increase segmentation between work and home for a pastor who lives next door to church might be to build a fence so he doesn't see his workplace out his bedroom window, or a strategy to increase integration could be using the same address for all work and home mail.

9. Do you feel that any of your roles enhance other roles? If so, how? Could you give an example? Such as your role as volunteer strengthening your role as parent, for example.

a. Has having **fluid/firm** boundaries in place encouraged this enhancement? If so, how?

10. Are there times when these roles have been in conflict, you have felt difficulty in fulfilling the roles as you would like, or there was a violation of your preferred boundary? Could you give an example of this?

a. What specific strategies have you used to try to reduce or eliminate this conflict?

11. Are there any situations, people, or things that you find can act as "boundary violators" per se by not respecting your preferences? How do you handle this? For example, someone who prefers to segment may find that their mother who calls frequently during the workday is a boundary violator.

12. Thinking about the strategies that you described earlier, such as **xxxxx** and **xxxxx**, that increase role enhancement and reduce role strain,

   a. How did you come to discover these strategies? Was it a conscious decision?

   b. Who or what is vital to enable you to enact these strategies?

   c. In the past or in prior jobs, were your preferred boundaries different than they are now?

   d. Have these strategies changed over the course of your life? If so, how?

13. What would you recommend to someone who is struggling to manage their roles? Or, more specifically, is struggling to **integrate/segment**?

14. Are there any strategies that you think would be very beneficial to you, but you haven't been able to put them into practice yet? What are they? What is holding you back?

15. Are there any other things that you'd like for me to know before we finish?

Appendix C: Full Listing of Identified Themes

General theme	Frequency	# of People
advocate for self	8	6
be fully present when in a given role	5	3
clear communication	12	5
clear communication re: expectations	21	6
compensates for excessive spillover by taking extra time in other sphere	13	5
control	2	2
embrace existence of role conflicts	5	4
exercising	4	4
faith	5	2
firm boundaries around certain aspects of home/work	17	6
flexibility (secondary, control over that flexibility)	15	6
gentle with oneself	15	5
humanization because of home to work spillover	2	2
intentional strategies	5	3
intentional workplace selection	13	6
leverage technology	9	5
life course, preferences on continuum	9	5
life course, strategies change	12	8
limits technology	4	4
multiple roles enhance resilience	2	2
nature of current work necessitates segmentation	2	2
nature of work in society used to be more segmented	2	2
not doing everything	25	8
nuanced boundaries	21	7
partner, supportive	12	6
perspective	13	4
planful schedule	10	4
positive home to work spillover	13	5
positive integration	15	6
positive work to home spillover	10	4
pragmatic decision-making	2	2
prioritizing	19	6
psychologically nimble	4	2
role enhancement	19	9
seeks appropriate support	8	2
seeks support	5	3
self-care	9	5
values	16	6