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A South African Perspective on Work-Life Balance: A Look at Women in Academia

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I declare that this research report is my own, unaided work. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at this or any other university.

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Abstract

Work-life balance has been a topic of researched for over two decades. The primary aim of the current research project was to explore the challenges and issues that female academics (in the context of a South African University) face in balancing their work roles and their non-work roles and responsibilities. The study explored female academics' perceptions of the relevance and effectiveness of policy aimed to promote work-life balance. The research utilised a qualitative approach to explore the topic of work-life balance – the research instrument being a semi-structured interview. Boundary Theory was incorporated into the study as the overarching theory in comprehending the construct of work-life balance and as the basis for the Thematic Content Analysis. The data revealed that as an occupation, academia provides a large degree of flexibility and participants reported this as both helpful in the achievement work-life balance *and* complicit in the creation of conflict between the work and non-work domains. Overall there was a trend for the participants to have more role integration as a result of highly flexible and permeable boundaries. The relevance of role identity in the negotiation and maintenance of boundaries was a particularly prominent aspect of the data that assisted in understanding the participants' experiences of work-life balance. According to several participants' reports, the role of the institution's policies is integral in the achievement of work-life balance. However there was a great deal of variation in the reports of the role of the institution's policies – some positive and others negative. In general the participants were not clear on the role that the South African Government plays in the achievement of work-life balance.

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Introduction

Many changes have occurred in the workplace and in South African homes over the past few decades. South Africa has seen changes in workforce demographics, family roles, as well as the interaction between work and non-work domains (Aarde & Mostert, 2008). In recent years, as a result of social transformations such as dual-career couples and single-parented families, the concept of work-life balance has become a focus for researchers; especially with the growing number of women in the workplace (Aarde & Mostert, 2008). Policies, such as the South Africa's National Framework for Women Empowerment and Gender Equality (The Office on the Status of Women, 2000), show that South Africa has made great efforts to provide women in the workplace with an environment and culture of equality as well as creating an increased awareness of gender issues in every sphere of life. However, regardless of current policies, gender inequality in South African homes and workplace is still a relevant issue in the broader South African society, and the situation is made more complex because of the legacy that South Africa's apartheid history has left behind (Hofmeyr & Mzobe, 2012).

One way of enquiring into the difficulties or conflicts experienced by South African women within and between their various spheres of life has been through the research domain of work-life balance. Sirgy and Wu (2009) define balance as "a state reflecting satisfaction or fulfilment in several important domains with little or no negative affect in other domains" (p. 185). There is debate within research on the basic assumptions of the notion of 'balance' and the inconsistencies of what balance means to different individuals. The current research explored the participants' understanding of work-life balance and the extent to which the concept was applicable to them.

The choices made by an individual to balance life and work, and the degree to which organisations assist in these endeavours, affect that individual's career, mental health, stress levels, as well as life satisfaction (Crooker, Smith & Tabak, 2002). The current research examined these choices and experiences as well as the institution's role in assisting in the achievement of employees' work-life balance within the specific context of a South African University. The context of higher education provides a unique inroad into some of the above mentioned concerns. The unique challenges for people working in academics (who for the most part have flexible work schedules) in terms of balancing a successful career and

parenthood further encourages research within this particular sector, especially with regards to women who frequently report higher demands in relation to family obligations and child care (O'Laughlin & Bischoff, 2005). Whilst these unique challenges will be explored in the current research, previous research suggests such challenges stem from organisational structure and flexible schedules of academia as well as the high demand associated with academic work (Beninger, 2010).

Much of the research of work-life balance (and similar topics) is focused of women (and men) with families (e.g. Patel, Govender, Paruk and Ramgoon, 2006, Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw, 2003) and there are gaps in the literature with regards to the experience of single women or women without children. The current research explores the experiences of *both* working mothers and women without children.

O'Laughlin and Bischoff (2005) note that even though there are a wide variety of models that examine work-family conflict; there is limited research specifically examining work-life balance in academic careers. The information below brings to light the challenges that employees, and specifically female employees in the higher education sector, may face in the workplace today. In conjunction with this, Boundary Theory is presented as a guiding framework in the exploration of the literature and analysis below.

Literature Review

Work-life balance is topic of discussion in research that has been conceptualised and contextualised in various ways in the last twenty years or so but the literature review below will focus on various *perceptions* of work-life balance, including perceptions within the context of South Africa. The review begins with a general overview of the concept of work-life balance under the section "Work-Life Balance" – here the concept is defined. The theory underpinning the current research and the analysis of the data is *Boundary Theory* – this is outlined in the section headed "Theoretical Foundations". The section headed "Exploring and Researching Work-Life Balance" provides a brief review of some of the recent research done in the area of work-life and work-family balance as well as previous literature focused on academics and females is explored. Relevant South African Legislation and Policies are considered and outlined in one section of the Literature Review below. The final section of

the literature review, "South Africa, Female Academics, and Work-Life Balance", brings together the argument of the current research by outlining work-life balance in the context of academia.[1]

Work-Life Balance

Historical Context

The terminology of 'work-life balance' was adopted during the last twenty years however the issue itself is much older. For example, the way working women attempt to balance their roles (as wife and worker) has been an issue from about the time of the Second World War when women began to participate in the labour market at a historically unprecedented rate (Roberts, 2007). Another example of research in this domain comes from workers on shifts "or unsocial hours as these schedules came to be described" (Roberts, 2007, p. 335) that has been acknowledged and investigated since the 1950s. In modern society, evidence has been shown to suggest that large sectors of the population claim that the pace of life has increased substantially and work is generally cited as the root of these developments and problems (Roberts, 2007).

While men increasingly communicate concerns and interest in a more balanced commitment to their work role, it is women who seem to experience higher levels of conflict between work and non-work domains – particularly in light of societal pressures on women to take up family responsibilities coupled with the expectations for the women to perform the majority of household tasks (Burk, 2001, cited in Whitehead & Kotze, 2003). Moreover, the percentage of women participating in the paid labour market in South Africa in 1995 was around 49% and this figure increased to around 64% in 2001 (Casale, 2004). It would, however be naïve to suggest that this increased participation in the labour market has 'released' women from the traditional expectations placed upon them (Brink & De la Rey, 2001). It is important to note that South Africa is a tradition-based society with specific social and cultural values and expectations which play a role in defining the identities and moreover the gender roles for people on the whole (Mathur-Helm, 2011). In a South African study that examined the relationship between work-family conflict and job performance (as well as other factors), Patel et al. (2006) discussed that there is a need to recognise the increase in

[1] It should be noted that the research is loosely based on a research title *Women in Academia: A Cross-Cultural Perspective on Work/Life Balance* (Beninger, 2010). The proposed research therefore adopts some of the theoretical and methodological approach of Beninger's (2010) research.

women who work not just as a hobby or temporary distraction from their roles at home. Their involvement in the workplace possibly means that their work role serves to enhance their identities (Patel et al., 2006).

The Importance of Work-Life Balance

As women around the world are gaining access to better educational and workplace opportunities, the role of women in the workplace is being altered radically (Bosch, 2011). Although statistics show that there has been an increase in gender diversity within South African workplaces, it is also evident that women still occupy lower paid and lower skilled joins in the economy (Bosch, 2011). The trend of women entering and staying in the workplace has meant that research must focus on a richer understanding and a better grasp of how to strengthen and empower women in their role the workplace (Bosch, 2011). A central theme that stems from work-family balance research is that stress and conflict may occur between employee's work role and family role (possibly as a result of work schedules, marriage, children, work orientation, and spouse employment patterns) but women also have the added strain of social expectations (Brink & De la Rey, 2001), including the tendency for women to bear the responsibility of household duties (Bosch, 2011).

When women are confronted with competing demands at home and at work, it has in the past been said that employers expect less commitment to the job for women than for men (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985 cited in Brink & De la Rey, 2001). Brink and De la Ray (2001) explain that "non-compliance with the expectation that women are less committed to their jobs, may cause sanctions from others, as well as sanction from the woman herself, manifesting as guilt" (p. 55). However, despite the strain that may result from societal expectations and the challenge of managing daily logistics, there are an increasing number of women that choose to combine work and family responsibilities (Brink & De la Rey, 2001). Therefore, it is recognised that women have the exceptional challenge of finding a balance between various tasks that are associated with their work roles and homemaker roles; that is to say the fulfilment of responsibilities of being an employee, a spouse, a mother, and a caregiver simultaneously (Whitehead & Kotze, 2003).

Understanding Work-Life Balance

The understanding of tension or conflict between work and family is one that has been represented and defined in a variety of ways; including work-family balance, work-family conflict, spillover, work-life balance and others. The research focused on *work-life balance* because it encompasses a wider range of activities beyond merely the spheres of work and family. The literature review however, takes into account research and theory that is based on spillover, work-family balance or conflict as it contributes as a theoretical underpinning to the research and is also contained in the sphere of work-life balance.

Guest (2002) established that work-life balance can be perceived as a form of a metaphor. One example of a metaphor is that of a set of scales where balance happens when each side has an equal distribution of a load. However, the kind of work-life balance that is sought after by different individuals may not imply equal loads on both sides (Guest, 2002). Another metaphor is balance as having a psychological and physical meaning of "stability of body and mind" (Guest, 2002, p. 261). Guest (2002) finds the latter metaphor more applicable as it implies the possibility of both human agency and external verification. There is a need to be aware that balance may have both a subjective and an objective meaning (and measurement), and that it will differ according to context and across individuals (Guest, 2002). Subjective perceptions and understandings of balance are key to any analysis of work-life balance. This is because for some individuals, their preference is to spend many hours at work (maybe as a result of career stage or because of limited life outside of the workplace) while for other individuals, the opposite can apply – balance is achieved where some work takes place but it is secondary to the demands of the home-life (Guest, 2002).

Crooker et al. (2002) define work-life balance as the "stability characterised by the balancing of an individual's life complexity and dynamism with environmental and personal resources such as family, community, employer, profession, geography, information, economics, personality, or values" (p. 389). At the individual level, 'life complexity' is a function of various difficulties or challenges within a person's environment and the interdependencies among such challenges. 'Dynamism' is a function of the predictability, frequency, and degree of change across each of these challenges (Crooker et al., 2002). Crooker et al. (2002) explain that, at the level of the organisation, 'environment' is the factors outside of its boundaries, and 'complexity' is the number of variables in the environment that an organisation must monitor and manage, whilst also noting their interdependence in order to succeed. 'Dynamism' refers to the occurrence of change, the extent of change, and predictability of

each variable similar to the way dynamism affects individuals (Crooker et al., 2002). Combined, the variables represent environmental uncertainty within an organisation as experienced by the individual (Crooker et al., 2002).

Another definition of work-life balance is provided by Greenblatt (2002) as "the absence of unacceptable levels of conflict between work and nonwork demands" (p. 179). By this Greenblatt (2002) suggests that achieving work-life balance is dependent on attaining and managing adequate resources. This means meeting an individual's real and perceived personal and work obligations, and therefore satisfying the main needs of the individual as well as the people that that individual is committed to support (Greenblatt, 2002). Four kinds of resources are often discussed in work/life balance literature and research; *temporal resources* (which provide the time to do everything that the individual wants or needs to do), *financial resources* (which provide the money to purchase goods and services that improve life satisfaction or create opportunities to make time to do so), *control* (which provides the ability to select how and when to create integral outcomes), and *personal resources*. Greenblatt (2002) explains that it is often difficult to increase an individual's money, time, and control because it requires a negotiation between organisation and individual; where time is allocated by the organisation, money is earned by the individual, and control is established through social interactions between the individual and those within the organisation.

Greenblatt (2002) further highlights other resources crucial to work-life balance – these are *personal resources* that include *physical*, *psychological*, *emotional*, and *social resources*. Based on research, it appears that increases in employee personal resources are associated with various work benefits such as an increase in retention, lower turnover rates, and reduced burnout (Greenblatt, 2002). *Physical resources* include physical and psychophysical capabilities, such as strength, the restfulness to remain alert in staff meeting. P*sychological resources* include all kinds of affective and psychological responses and abilities – those needed for self-esteem, empathy, patience, competitiveness, commitment, and leadership. C*ognitive resources* include learned and natural intellectual capacities and the ability to access them – including the energy essential to use these abilities. And *social resources* include an individual's interpersonal associations as well as the abilities required to access them for personal benefit. For instance, adequate social resources may give the skill, access, and energy required to call in a favour from an old acquaintance (Greenblatt, 2002).

The above definitions have in common their understanding of the importance of balance, stability, and lack of conflict between work and non-work domains or roles. They do vary in some of the underlying interpretations but they nonetheless supply a good foundation in order to appreciate the variety of research in different areas and guide this review into the theory that will be used in exploring the perceptions of work-life balance, its antecedent conditions and associated outcomes among female academics.

Theoretical foundations

The theory that was used in this research has been previously applied in understanding work-life balance, namely, *Boundary Theory*. The theory focuses on the transition process and it proposes psychological movement between daily roles (Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000). The framework presented by Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate (2000) describes the role transitions of individuals as *boundary-crossing activities* where the individuals enter and exit their roles by transcending boundaries (Van Maanen, 1982, cited in Ashforth et al., 2000). The theoretical model looks at three major domains of everyday role transitions; the first being work-home transitions (for example home-based work or commuting), the second domain being work-work or at-work transitions (this relates to transitions between individual's roles of peer, subordinate, superordinate, and organisational representative; also between having multiple jobs), and the last domain transition is that of work-'third place' (this includes transitions between work and other social domains – religious centres, hobbies or clubs, and community activities) (Ashforth et al., 2000).

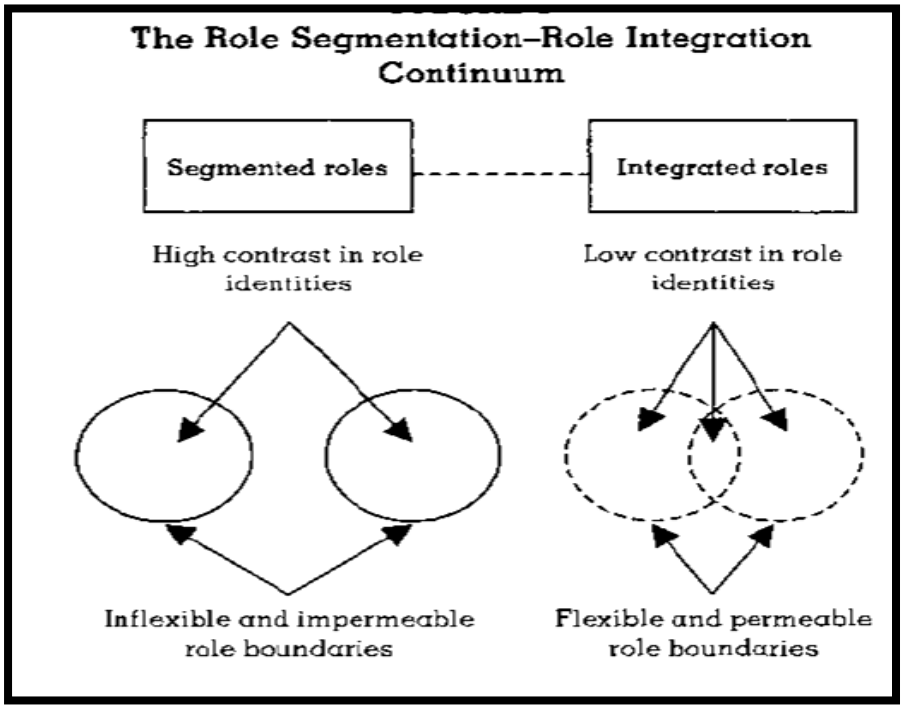
Boundaries characterise the point of contact between domains and have been conceptualised to differ in the amount to which they permit flow between domains (Matthews, Barnes-Farrell & Bulger, 2010). Boundaries refer to the temporal, physical, and /or cognitive perimeters or limits that identify entities as distinct from one another and that identify components within entities (Sundaramurthy & Kreiner, 2008). Ashforth et al. (2000) emphasise *roles* to a large extent; they explain that roles seem to be associated with certain individuals who are labelled accordingly (for instance parent or employee) and therefore a "*role boundary* refers to whatever delimits the perimeter – and thereby the scope – of a role" (Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 474).

Boundary Theory includes the definition of *role identity*, which is described as "socially constructed definitions of self-in-role (this is who a role occupant is), consisting of core or

central features and peripheral features" (Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 475). Peripheral features can include aspects of a person such as charisma and intelligence. However central features are important, typical, or necessary characteristics of identity. For instance, the identity of the typical managerial role highlights some central features of aggressiveness, emotional stability, objectivity, and self-reliance (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, cited in Ashforth et al., 2000). This is pertinent and is relevant to work-life balance as this theory demonstrates that the greater the contrast between role identities (for example between the roles of manager and family member), the greater the extent of the transition from one role to another, and therefore the increased possibility of difficulty being experienced during that transition (Ashforth et al., 2000).

Boundary Theory has also been utilised as an organising framework in organisational responses to employees' non-work lives (Lee & Steele, 2009). From the perspective of organisations, "effective responses to employees' non-work lives could bring valuable gains in the form of key outcomes" (Kirchmeyer, 1995, cited in Lee & Steele, 2009). Organisations, therefore, can benefit from understanding and reacting to the effects of a healthy or unhealthy work-life balance.

One interesting aspect of the theory is the role segmentation-role integration continuum.



The above figure (from the Ashforth et al.'s (2000) article) demonstrates the way the concepts of permeability, flexibility, and contrast together define a certain pair of roles as

integrated and segmented (Ashforth et al., 2000). The on-going tension between segmentation and integration makes it necessary for individuals to constantly work on constructing boundaries and making transitions (Ashforth et al., 2000). Extreme cases of segmentation and integration are a rarity because the majority of role sets are found somewhere along the middle of the continuum (Ashforth et al., 2000).

The above figure shows that roles that are highly differentiated or have high contrast, permit few cross-role interruptions (impermeable), are fixed to particular times and setting (inflexible) and are highly segmented (Ashforth et al., 2000). Segmented roles suggest a number of consequences for people's values, beliefs, norms, goals and interaction styles that make up each role identity; there is also the minimal likelihood that there will be overlap in physical location or membership of the role sets (Ashforth et al., 2000). The main benefit of segmented roles is that it tends to reduce the *blurring* between roles, thereby clarifying the nature of a transition (Ashforth et al., 2000). Work-family blurring or work-family boundary ambiguity may be defined as the difficulty in distinguishing a person's work role from that person's family role in a certain setting where these roles are perceived as highly integrated (Desrochers & Sargent, 2004). The negative side of segmented roles, however, is that the high contrast increases the extent of the transition and the accompanying challenge in highly segmented roles, is in *crossing the role boundary*; to psychologically (and at times physically) exit a role and enter another (Ashforth et al., 2000). Transition rituals, for example packing a briefcase or putting on 'work' clothes, are patterned behaviours that signify to the individual (and to others) that they are in the process on exiting one roles and preparing to enter another role (Desrochers & Sargent, 2004).

The Figure above also shows the opposite side of the continuum - role integration - which is denoted by roles that are weakly differentiated or have low contrast, allow cross-role interruptions (high permeability), and are not tied to particular times and places (high flexibility) (Ashforth et al., 2000). Highly integrated roles are that the roles may have similar identities, overlap in physical location and the membership of role sets, and be embedded in similar contexts (Ashforth et al., 2000). Transitions between the roles of work and non-work may be frequent and at times unpredictable because of the nature of the highly flexible and permeable boundaries and, thus, complete integration implies that there are practically no differences between the roles (Ashforth et al., 2000). High permeability and flexibility make roles very accessible and, as such, either role can be interrupted without prior notice.

"Interruptions, as role boundary violations, disrupt the enactment of a role identity and may force an unwanted shift to another role identity" (Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 481). In effect, high integration makes it hard for an individual to psychologically disentangle the roles – fully disconnecting from one role in favour of the other. On the other hand, role integration has the tendency to diminish the affective influence of interruptions (Ashforth et al., 2000).

The main benefit of the integrated roles is that there is a low extent of change between roles and this simplifies the process of crossing role boundaries (Ashforth et al., 2000). On the other hand, the cost of integrated roles is that there is much more role *blurring* as compared to more segmented roles. This, in turn, can cultivate interruptions, anxiety and confusion such that the transition challenge lies in *creating and maintaining boundaries* between the roles (Ashforth et al., 2000). Nippert-Eng provides a definition for *boundary work* as "the strategies, principles, and practices that we use to create, maintain and modify cultural categories (1996, p. 7, cited in Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 482). Ashforth et al. (2000) further explain that boundary work is utilised to cultivate either greater role integration or segmentation; to create or adjust the spatial, temporal, and other boundaries that distinguish one's roles and in doing this, to construct less or more distinctive spheres of the self. There is thus, a constant tension between integration and segmentation that makes constant boundary and transition work necessary.

Boundary Theory also brings to light three important individual and contextual factors; role identification, situation strength, and culture. In terms of role identification, Ashforth et al. (2000) expect that "the more valued the role and its identity, the more likely they will be internalised as an extension and expression of oneself" (p. 483). Role identification can be seen to occur when an individual defines themselves (at least to an extent) in terms of the role and its identity – in essence the individual 'becomes' the role. Role identification can decrease the difficulty of the transition process as it seems probable that the more one identifies with the role, the more willing one might be to enter the role and the more swiftly one may become immersed in the role (Ashforth et al., 2000). Role identification can increase the difficulty of the transition process as it can obstruct role exit – one may be reluctant to exit that role (Ashforth et al., 2000). One example of the influence of role identity is seen in the term 'working mothers' as it blends the distinct concepts of worker and mother – each of which has unique and sometimes opposing societal expectations (Garey, 1995 cited in Patel,

et al., 2006). Women in the workplace are thus faced with the negotiation and reconciliation of these often incompatible roles which can result in inter-role conflict (Patel et al., 2006).

With regard to situational strength, it is essential to note that role identities and role boundaries (and thus role transitions) are embedded in social spheres and contexts that are full of history, structure, and culture (Ashforth et al., 2000). In the case of the current research, the context is within a South African University. It is said that the social domains or contexts can strongly impact the maintenance, creation, and crossing of role boundaries as well as the nature of the role identities (Ashforth et al., 2000). Ashforth et al. (2000) explain situational strength using Mischel's (1977, cited in Ashforth et al., 2000) understanding that a strong context or situation exists when everyone in that context has consensus and construes it in much the same way – everyone has a similar or the same comprehension of what behaviours are appropriate, everyone is able to perform those behaviours, and the behaviours are reinforced by all.

For Ashforth et al. (2000), cultural backgrounds are a pertinent source of self-concept and have been demonstrated to influence work behaviour (Erez & Earley, 1990, cited in Ashforth et al., 2000). Ashforth et al. (2000) adopt Hofstede's approach to culture and his four dimensions of cultures; collectivism versus individualism, femininity versus masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and power distance. These dimensions are important with regards to discussions about institutional and national regulations and the culture of promoting work-life balance in the academic world. These will be discussed further in the sections below.

Another theoretical concept that is often used in understanding work-life balance is that of spillover. Spillover is a concept that has often been used in research about the effects of work on home and home on work. The permeable boundaries of family and work frequently result in *spillover*; which is the experience of work affecting life outside of work or vice-versa (Stevens, Minnotte, Mannon & Kiger, 2007). "Spillover manifests itself in many ways, including feelings, attitudes, and behaviours that develop in one sphere and are then carried over into another sphere" (Googins, 1991, cited in Stevens et al., 2007, p. 244). These effects can be either negative or positive. For instance, positive spillover can happen through instrumental, affective, and value-based routes (Greenhaus & Powell, cited in Lourel, Ford, Gamassou, Guéguen & Hartmann, 2008). Instrumental spillover is apparent when behaviours and skills from one domain help in accomplishing a goal in another domain, affective spillover is apparent when positive affective states in a certain domain carry over to change

perceptions and problems in another domain, and value-based spillover happens when the values obtained and applied in a certain domain assist a person to perform in another domain (Lourel et al., 2008). Negative spillover, also referred to as 'conflict', can occur in terms of home-to-work interferences or conflicts and through work-to-home interferences or conflicts (Lourel et al., 2008; Stevens et al., 2007).

Desrochers and Sargent (2004) highlight some of the different ways that boundary and spillover theories can be applied to work-family topics; these include when individuals work at home, work with family, have flexible scheduling, use mobile telecommunications and on-call work arrangements, and when workplace culture includes family friendly policies. Individuals who complete some or all of their work at home may at the same time experience both work domain cues and family (or non-work) domain cues; even though these may involve different kinds of behaviour, the fact that these behaviours happen in the same place and frequently at the same time can make the salience of work and non-work roles seem equivalent (Nippert-Eng, Desrochers et al., 2002, cited in Desrochers & Sargent, 2004). Working at home, however, means that people can spend more time with their family, as does working with family; where people can give family members more awareness of the worker's job, but this can potentially blur work-family borders as work behaviours and family behaviours are very intertwined (Desrochers & Sargent, 2004).

Perhaps more relevant to the current study is the effects of flexible scheduling, which is a relatively common aspect for academic jobs (Beninger, 2010). The use of mobile telecommunications technology, such as laptop computers and cell phones, can assist in coordinating schedules and time saving. On the negative side however, they can keep work concerns almost persistently accessible thereby causing more stress (Desrochers & Sargent, 2004). Lastly, Desrochers and Sargent (2004) highlight workplace culture as one of the topics that border and boundary theories have helped develop. Many organisations around the world implement family friendly policies (for example flexitime) because these policies help recruit more talent and can increase productivity and reduce absenteeism (Desrochers & Sargent, 2004). Organisational culture and human resource management practices, therefore, can hinder or facilitate boundary management (Desrochers & Sargent, 2004).

Exploring and Researching Work-Life Balance

Previous research on work-life balance covers a multitude of contexts, variables, and demonstrates a mix of results that help in furthering organisation's and individuals' pursuits in understanding the benefits and challenges of achieving balance in an employee's life. The literature bellow is representative of some of the existing arguments and research that are relevant to the current study.

Potgieter and Barnard (2010) have noted that one of the driving factors behind the increased interest in work-life balance has been the decreased differentiation between work roles and home roles, particularly with regards to space and time boundaries. In part, this is a consequence of an increased usage of information technology and home offices, flexible working hours, entrepreneurial activities, as well as other changes in the way people work.

In collecting previous research on the topic, it is evident that there has been a major focus in research on *depletion* theories, where theory is directed towards the negative consequences of imbalances including theories on resource conflict and drain (Lee & Steele, 2009). For example, Roberts (2007) identifies seven likely reasons for the spread of dissatisfaction with working time as well as time pressure and work-life balance becoming widespread issues. These include higher rates of labour market participation by women, the intensification of work, more prevalent feelings of job insecurity, people working at strange hours, the introduction of new technology, the culture of long hours, and free time increasing more slowly than individual's income and spending desires. Literature on work-life balance has illustrated the negative outcomes for organisations and individuals in the cases of work-life (im)balance; these organisational outcomes can include variations in employee satisfaction levels, employee commitment, turnover intentions, and absenteeism rates (Crooker, Smith & Tabak, 2002).

On the other hand, there has been a recent shift towards *enrichment* or *facilitation* theories, which focus on positive consequences and interactions between roles. This can occur in the expansion of resources, or the buffering of negative outcomes in one role by others (Greenhaus & Powel, 2006, cited in Lee & Steele, 2009). Research has supported the benefits of work-life balance for organisations and employees' awareness of the potential benefits of work-life balance is growing (Downes & Koekemoer, 2011). A few of the benefits that have been researched are increased productivity, customer satisfaction, employee satisfaction and

well-being, successful recruitment and selection, and decreased absenteeism and turnover (Mayberry, 2006; Morgan, 2009; White, Hill, McGovern, Mills & Smeaton, 2003, cited in Downes & Koekemoer, 2011).

In an effort to launch a *Work-Life Balance Campaign,* the United Kingdom Government launched a major investigation into the state of Work-Life Balance in Britain (Hogarth, Hasluck, Pierre, Winterbotham & Vivian, 2001). Their understanding of work-life balance was that it is the balance that employers and employees achieve between work and life outside of work (Hogarth et al., 2001). A point that Hogarth et al. (2001) make evident is that few people are likely to attain perfect work-life balance but it is evident that certain groups face considerable difficulty attaining a desirable and sustainable balance (Hogarth et al., 2001). Their examples of such people are single-parents and individuals with substantial caring responsibilities as well as groups of individuals who, whilst having a higher position in the labour market, have achieved a great amount of imbalance in their lives (Hogarth et al., 2001).

Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw (2003), in a primarily quantitative study, sought to provide a comprehensive definition of work-family balance, develop a measure to examine work-family balance and finally examine relations between work-family balance and quality of life. Their definition of work-family balance included three kinds of balance; time, involvement, and satisfaction – where work-family balance is defined as "the extent to which an individual is equally engaged in – and equally satisfied with – his or her work role and family role" (Greenhaus et al., 2003, p. 513). Similar to the Boundary Theory, Greenhaus et al. (2003) focus on 'roles'. Among other results, their research found that work-family balance is associated with quality of life but only under particular conditions (Greenhaus et al., 2003). There was an association between work-family balance and quality of life when there was substantial involvement, time, or satisfaction across work roles and family roles (Greenhaus et al., 2003).

In a qualitative study, De Villiers and Kotze (2003) explored how South African employees within the petroleum industry define and experience work-life balance. The researchers found that work-life balance is a subjective notion because it had a different meaning for various individuals. They also found that work-life balance is a dilemma is not easily rectified; it is a unique concept that changes depending on the situation and it is heavily impacted by complicated workplace issues (for instance, organisational values, supervisory skills,

managing change, and leadership) (De Villiers & Kotze, 2003). Although the experience of work-life balance is subjective, most participants in the study described work-life balance with regards to having enough time to fulfil difference roles. The inability to "switch off from work" (De Villiers & Kotze, 2003, p. 21), health problems, and exhaustion found to be indications of psychological impact of work-life conflict. The study also suggests that "the most substantial work-life conflict experienced (both time- and strain-based) arises from the workplace" (De Villiers & Kotze, 2003, p. 21).

In a study that combined the results of various researches on work-life balance and its correlates, results included the finding that weekly hours of work was an integral determinant of individual's work-life balance, as well as their age, occupation, caring responsibilities, and gender (Dex & Bond, 2005). More specifically, Dex and Bond (2005) found that "working for more than 48 hours per week had the largest single effect promoting work-life balance; caring responsibilities and being aged 36 to 45 were approximately equal in size and contributed to work-life imbalance approximately half as much effect as working more than 48 hours per week" (p. 634-635). They thus concluded that in order to affect employees' work-life balance, there needs to be a change in the weekly hours.

Research in this field has evolved from only being concerned with work and family to a wider set of concerns that consider all aspects of the balance between work and life (Hogarth et al., 2001). This is also apparent in the Boundary Theory discussed above. The examples of research above provide a wide set of results of previous investigations of the topic. However this literature review has provided a fraction of the available literature on the topic. But the examples highlight important variables and components of work-life balance. In the section headed "South Africa, Female Academics and Work-Life Balance", more research specific to female academics and the South African context is outlined.

South Africa, Female Academics, and Work-Life Balance

Beninger (2010) chose to use academia as the profession in which to explore work-life balance because she believed academia offers a unique test site in which to consider the dynamics of work-life balance. This is as a result of the great amount of flexibility that the job offers; academics are not generally confined to their office from 9am to 5pm as traditional jobs dictate (Beninger, 2010). In contrast, "[a]lthough academic positions generally have the advantage of a flexible work schedule, one outcome of this flexibility is

that work is often accomplished at home in the evening or on weekends" (O'Laughlin & Bischoff, 2005). This can cause a balance of energy and focus towards fulfilling work expectations that may result in conflict with demands for attention from partners, spouses and/or children.

Coetzee and Rothmann (2005) outline some of the challenges and demands that academics face, that they may not have faced a few decades ago, including; value for money, greater accountability, as well as an increase in autocratic and remote management styles. A study in the UK explained that most significant stressors among staff at higher education institutes were issues such as a plethora of administrative paperwork, inadequate resources, ineffective organisational communication, uncaring organisation, increased workload due to escalated student numbers, and various other challenges (Coetzee & Rothmann, 2005). Another study conducted in the UK found that women who are academics have had to make hard decisions about balancing their family lives and work and despite the advances that women have made over the last two decades, the women in the study still had to take greater responsibility for domestic responsibilities (even if it hinders or halts their careers) (Forster, 2001).

Specific to the South African context and female academics, Prozesky (2008) describes how women who started their academic careers during the apartheid era where society held onto strong patriarchal and apartheid ideologies, started their careers under circumstances that are characterised by strong gender-role stereotypes; "including traditional values that demand of women to accord a very high priority to their homes, families and husbands – and the apartheid system that reinforced male dominance at [South African Higher Education Institutions]" (p. 48). The qualitative data that Prozesky (2008) uncovered indicated that husbands can initiate or strengthen their wives' research activity and publication productivity, especially if spouses take part or collaborate in their research endeavours; this is in contrast to the assumption that marriage plays an impeding role in women's careers. The study further shows that the incompatibility between being a mother and a productive academic is "an empirically untenable stereotype" (p. 60) even among South African female academics whose early careers were shaped when patriarchal and apartheid ideologies were predominant (Prozesky, 2008).

Whilst there has been an increase in the number of women professors over the last two decades, the somewhat poor enactment of provisions designed to eliminate gender-based discrimination, as well as the increased size of the higher education sector, suggests that the

progress made can be considered as far from overwhelming (Knights & Kerfoot, 2008). If one looks at the statistics of women working in academics, the national Higher Education Information Management System (HEMIS) database for 2006 recorded a little over 15 000 academic staff working in public universities in South Africa – of these 42% were women (UCT Blogs, 2008). 55% of Junior Lecturers were female and 51% of Lecturers were female, however, only 19% of full professors were women where men occupy 69% of Associate Professor positions and 59% of Senior Lecturer positions (UCT Blogs, 2008).

Research and literature around and within the South African context is more limited than from other parts of the world. Whitehead and Cotze (2003) explain that this is due to the slower emergence of women in the developing socio-economic environment in South Africa as compared to countries such as Britain and the United States. Higher education in South Africa has changed since 1994 where now the emphasis is on redressing the effects of the apartheid era and progressing to a democratic society (Coetzee & Rothmann, 2005). Whitehead and Cotze's (2003) study aimed to gain in-depth understandings of the meaning of work-life balance for South African professional women as well as the factors which influence and support their experiences. Their qualitative research found that professional women, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, experience similar pressures and challenges (Whitehead & Kotze, 2003).

Some intriguing results that Whitehead and Kotze (2003) found was that throughout the analysis of data, it was evident "that one constant dynamic influencing the experience of role conflict amongst participants was when a disproportionate amount of time was spent on a role as compared to the identity gained from that role" (p. 79 & 80). The example they gave of this dynamic was when participants, that expressed that work and career were a substantial part of 'who they are' but they were not dedicating enough time on this role (due to family or other role responsibilities), experienced high levels of role conflict (Whitehead & Kotze, 2003). The respondents expressed that the experience of work-life balance seems to be elusive and constantly changing and it was clear to the researchers that the things that represent work-life balance to one individual are not necessarily applicable to another individual (Whitehead & Kotze, 2003).

Therefore the current research explores the unique and complex experiences of female academics and investigates the challenges of women in the field of academics. Moreover the research explores the idea that the field of academia presents a distinctive test site for

understanding and investigate the challenges of women with flexible and permeable boundaries between work and life outside of work. Yet, despite the distinctiveness of female academics as a sample, the findings and analysis of the participants' reports may give light to the experiences of women who work in jobs with similar boundary characteristics. Thus the study also delves into how female academics in a South African context construct, negotiate, and understand work-life balance.

South African Legislation and Policies

As mentioned above, the policies within a workplace has been reported to have an effect on work-life balance; however it can be assumed that governmental legislation also has an effect on the kind of policies organisations have to put in place with reference to women and work-life balance. This section covers some of the current legislation and bodies that are active in South Africa that promotes women in the workplace and their emphasis on assisting work-life balance for employees. The emphasis on government policies is in part because of the importance that Beninger (2010) places in her research with regards to her sample orientation from countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (from the United Kingdom, Australia, Sweden and the United States). South Africa is however not an OECD country and thus has not adopted the strategies to address problems of gender inequality and work-life balance common to these countries. This provides a platform for comparison which was explored in the Findings and Analysis below.

According to the Labour Market Review (Maja, 2005), the South African government acknowledge that historically women have been subject to different types of discriminatory behaviour, policies, and attitudes which in turn have hindered their full integration into the labour market. There have been various programmes and policies that have been implemented in South Africa to ensure fair and equal access to the labour market (Maja, 2005), however, the issue here is not whether women are present in the workplace but rather if the unique role women have in society (as both worker and wife, partner or mother) is recognised in the promotion or work-life balance.

Beninger (2010) mentions the integral part that societal norms plays in fostering progressive institutional and governmental policies that give support to women's work-life balance. This is especially evident when she explained the norm in Sweden where social norms help work-life balance because women and men generally share the domestic labour as compared to

other countries. “With the support of formal policies and social norms, having children is not seen as an impediment to a woman’s career, a reality Americans can only dream about” (Beninger, 2010, p. 35). Moreover, Beninger (2010) explains that Swedish culture even encourages people to have a life outside of the work environment and therefore fosters more progressive governmental and institutional policies that give support to work-life balance achievement in a mutually strengthening cycle.

In terms of South African legislation, the Employment Equity Act (Act55 of 1998) explicates that

> “Employers should endeavour to provide an accessible, supportive and flexible environment for employees with family responsibilities. This includes considering flexible working hours and granting sufficient family responsibility leave for both parents” (p. 21)

The Employment Equity Act (2005) also recognises that harassment in the workplace (direct or indirect) is a form of unfair discrimination and is prohibited on the grounds of (one or the combination) of gender, sex, family responsibility, marital status, and culture amongst others. Harassment, according to the Act (2005), is a serious form of misconduct which can be subjected to disciplinary action – and can result in dismissal.

South Africa’s National Policy Framework for Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality tries to ensure that the process of achieving Gender equality is a key part of South Africa’s transformation process within all procedures, structures, practices, institutions, policies, and programmes of government (its agencies and parastatals), civil society and the private sector (The Office on the Status of Women, 2000). South African labour legislation has been supportive of bringing women into the workplace by introducing equity laws and paid maternity leave but according to Patel et al. (2004), there is still tension with working mothers. Working mothers continue to gather the societal message that they should rein in their work involvement in order to reduce the influence of their job on the non-work lives (Butler & Skattebo, 2004 cited in Patel et al., 2004).

The Department of Social Development (2011) released a Green Paper on families titled ‘Promoting Family Life and Strengthening Families in South Africa’ that explains that the government acknowledges that many of the social ills that South Africa faces are a

consequence of either weak family systems or non-existent families. The Department (2011) promotes the launch of a family policy in South Africa in order to empower families to fulfil their essential roles and responsibilities in society and in the end make them catalysts of progress and national development. The Department (2011) highlighted that the government has instituted legislation and policies to transform the South African society; the 'family' is not explicitly addressed in many of the country's policies (but is often inferred). Among a wide variety of sectors of society that would help implement the family policy, the Department (2011) add the "Role of Business" (p. 69) to the list. Employers are responsible for developing programmes that "create a healthy balance between work, and the family" (Department of Social Development, 2011, p. 69 & 70) and in trying to achieve a better work-life balance, business should take into account the fact that individuals are part of a family and (more importantly) are possible breadwinners for that family. The Policy insists that business has a crucial role in ensuring that the work environment is family-friendly through benefits that influence the quality of life of family members (Department of Social Development, 2011).

In a speech to the high-level roundtable discussion on 'Gender Mainstreaming in Public Service', Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi (2007) (Minister for Public Service and Administration) voiced her concerns about gender inequality in South Africa and maintained that government has to ensure that family friendly policies are developed in order to attend to workers' needs in relation to child care and work-life balance. At a conference co-sponsored by Higher Education South Africa and the Department of Education that focused on central issues regarding gender and women in South African higher education, a theme that persisted was the disparity between (on the one hand) policies and (on the other) their implementation as practices (UCT Blogs, 2008). This is an issue that the current research takes into account when exploring the research questions (see below) – the idea that there are provisions in place to promote greater work-life balance but their implication within South African organisations is at times somewhat limited. A further concern is the predominant focus on family and the lack of legislation on *all* South Africans creating balance for themselves, including females who do not have children.

Conclusion

The above literature has given a broad description of the relevant information that relates to the current research. The definitions provided for work-life balance offer a wide basis for

understanding the potential challenges that people face in today's pressurising workplaces. The theories presented give an indication of some of the themes that may emerge through the chosen method (discussed below). Previous research has highlighted the negative and positive outcomes of employees' achieving a desired balance between their work roles and non-work roles (including those of family and spouse responsibilities). It has highlighted the continual challenge for women in academia to find any balance in a job that offers great flexibility. The governmental legislation and policies are the basis of some of the norms found in the chosen context and are important because one aspect that the research explores is the role that organisations and governmental policy play in assisting in the achievement of work-life balance. Generally the literature offers an overview of the importance of work-life balance for employees today but there is still space to explore the perceptions of individuals in order to better organisation's understanding of the importance of balance for their employees.

Research Questions

1. How do women in academia construct, negotiate, maintain, and cross boundaries between their work domain and non-work domain?
    a. What are women in academia's perspectives on the challenges they face in achieving desirable work-life balance?
    b. In what ways do institutional and governmental policies play a role in achieving work-life balance?
    c. What do women in academia perceive as the implications of achieving work-life balance?

Methodology

The Methodology section contains information that pertains to the way the current research was conducted. This includes the paradigmatic position and the overall research design that was chosen to suitably explore the research questions outlined above. Also included in this section is a description and critique of the research instrument that was used. The sampling method is summarised below including some descriptive details of the sample itself. An important aspect of this research was the actual research procedure that was used by the researcher and this is outlined below. The next part of the research was the analytical approach that was utilised to take the raw data and interpret it into an analysis within the theoretical framework of Boundary Theory. The whole research process required the researcher to be reflexive throughout the research procedure and this reflexivity is detailed in the section. Finally, ethical considerations are summarised to conclude the Methodology section.

Paradigmatic Position

The current research was positioned in the interpretive paradigm. Interpretive science focuses on meaning and meaning-making in particular contexts and on processes of sense-making on a broader scope; it is interested in understanding the lifeworld of the participant in the situation being examined (Hatch & Yanow, 2003) - in the current study the participants were women working in the field of academia in a South African context. Interpretive science engages in the function of language and other items in communicating and constructing meaning and social relationships (Hatch & Yanow, 2003). The knowledge of the social world that people claim to have comes from *interpreting* their sense perceptions. The sense-making that happens through perception requires interpretation, which people do in the context of an experience or event and is informed by previous knowledge (Hatch & Yanow, 2003). In this way, both the researcher and participants of research are situated entities; their meaning and meaning-making is contextualised by previous knowledge and by other events or experiences (surrounding elements) (Hatch & Yanow, 2003).

"Interpretive approaches to science are found in many social sciences, including organisational studies" (Hatch & Yanow, 2003, p. 63). Interpretive research methods for

accessing and analysing can data include observation, semiotics, content analysis, ethnomethodology, and interviews – the current study proposed that in-depth interviews were the best method within the interpretive paradigm to explore the perceptions of the challenges that female academics face in achieving work-life balance as well as the strategies female academics utilise in order to achieve desired work-life balance.

Research Design

The research used a qualitative, interpretivist approach in its methodology. Qualitative research is focused on analysing concrete examples and cases in their local and temporal distinctiveness (Flick, 2009). The method chosen best allowed the research to investigate and explore the types of understandings, meanings, desires, motives and experiences with which the interpretive paradigm is concerned.

Research Instruments

The current research used one main instrument in exploring the research questions; in-depth interviews. The qualitative data was from semi-structured in-depth interviews (See Appendix 1). Interviews allow for great detail on the perceptions, desires and motives of female academics in their specific context. They also allow for concrete suggestions from those participants on how to achieve work-life balance.

The interview questions are based on Beninger's (2010) interview topic guide. The interview schedule was separated into 5 sections that were grounded in the theory and literature discussed above and there were 16 open-ended questions in the current schedule. The first section focused on contextual questions and section two applied to the challenges that female academics face and the strategies implemented to achieve work-life balance. Section three explored the application of the Boundary Theory to female academics in the given context. Section four looked at the external influences affecting work-life balance including the university and department, and governmental factors. The last section was comprised of question regarding the future considerations and any advice for the achievement of work-life balance that female academics would give to women entering the field of academics as well as an open question for further comments on the topic.

As mentioned above, interviews are a method that is used within the interpretive paradigm and interviews are the tools that helps understand individual perspectives, generating rich, descriptive data (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Some of the disadvantages of interviewing include finding participants who are willing to participate and give up time in order to spent a substantial amount of time discussing the relevant issues (Rossman & Rallis, 2012) (especially when considering that the research question centres around work-life balance and if women are able to balance their time and energy in different domains of their life). Interviews can be very time consuming.

A good interviewer is a good listener and is deeply interested in other people and what they can contribute to knowledge; they are skilled in question framing, interpersonal interaction, and gentle probing of participants for elaboration of information given (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). So as to capture relevant information, the current research made use of recording devices with the addition of minimal note-taking. The interview schedule was piloted on three academics at the University of the Witwatersrand. Appropriate changes were made to the interview schedule based on the pilot. These academics were not asked to participate in the data collection process.

Sampling Method

The required sample for the current research was female academics from a University based in Johannesburg, South Africa. These academics had permanent employment positions at a University; they came from a broad scope of academic fields and were at the level of senior lecturer or higher. This restriction on the level was implemented in order to explore the idea that these women were more likely to have first-hand experience in the difficulties of balancing demands between work and life outside of work. Female academics in the Organisational Psychology department at the University were not included in the study because they may have insight into the study that may influence the data. As discussed above, women have a unique role in society as employees, daughters and/or mothers and/or wives (or partners) and are therefore the sample that best suites the aims of this study. Academics also have a distinctive job (as described in the literature review) that may provide different strategies for achieving work-life balance.

Ten interviews took place in Johannesburg in the offices of the participants. The current research used non-probability and purposive sampling as this allowed for the sample to be

applicable to the aims of the research – this being to explore female academics experiences and difficulties of achieving a balance between work and non-work life. Purposive sampling stresses that researchers think critically about the constraints of the population of interest and choose the sample sensibly on this foundation (Silverman, 2000). As stated above, the sample was chosen to meet specific criteria that would allow for the research question to be addressed but nonetheless the appropriateness of the sample is discussed at a later stage in this report. Below is a descriptive table of the sample. The table includes the faculty in which the participant works, however in order to ensure confidentiality, the specific School within the Faculty is not mentioned.

Participant	Faculty	Position	Marital Status	Children	Years in Academia
Interviewee 1	Commerce, Law and Management	Senior Lecturer	Single	none	10
Interviewee 2	Commerce, Law and Management	Associate Professor	Married	2 children	<10
Interviewee 3	Engineering & the Built Environment	Senior Lecturer	Has a partner	none	>10
Interviewee 4	Humanities	Senior Lecturer	Has a partner	1 child	>10
Interviewee 5	Engineering & the Built Environment	Professor	Married	2 children	<10
Interviewee 6	Science	Associate Professor	Married	2 children	<10
Interviewee 7	Science	Professor	Single	None	<10
Interviewee 8	Humanities	Professor	Married	3 children and grandchildren	<10
Interviewee 9	Humanities	Senior Lecturer	Single	none	>10

Interviewee 10	Humanities	Associate Professor	Has a partner	none	<10

The age of the participants ranged from 35 to 65. There was a large range in the years worked in academia, from 7 years to 40 years.

Research Procedure

The initial stage was seeking permission from the Human Research Ethics Committee and the Higher Degrees Committee at the University of the Witwatersrand. Once permission was granted, the researcher contacted the University in order to obtain permission to approach the female academics at that university. Female academics were identified from the University's website and through word-of-mouth. Participants that meet the criteria were emailed and asked to participate in the study. There were certain responses from those who were emailed that also indicated that they were too busy for a particular period of time and could only help me after that time, one woman responded to say she was on sabbatical and did not want partake in the study, and there were some women who did not respond at all. However, there was some interest in the topic and the females who responded seemed to see the relevance of the topic.

A convenient time and place was organised via email. When the researcher arrived at the interview, the participants were asked to sign a consent form for the researcher to interview them as well as for the use of a recording device (See Appendix 2). Participants were asked for specific demographics such as age and occupational position. The interviews took approximately 30 to 50 minutes to complete. One reason for the short length is because the researcher had to schedule the interviews in the academics' consultation time which is often restricted to maximum an hour. Also, the sample included females who are not married and/or do not have children and these interviews were shorter than females with children. Perhaps this is because the interview questions were based on the Boundary Theory and this theory may not have been as relevant for women without children. For instance, questions regarding how the people outside work influence the work boundary were not as applicable to women without families as compared to those who did have families. At the end of the

interview the participants were then thanked for their time. The interviews were transcribed. The qualitative data was then analysed in order to address the research questions.

Analytic Approach

In line with the qualitative approach, the analytical approach was thematic analysis. "Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 6). Boyatzis (1998) also explains that thematic analysis is a "way of seeing" (p. 1). A theme envelops something important about the data in relation to the research questions and represents a certain level of patterned meaning or response within the data set (Braun & Clark, 2006). For Boyatzis (1998), a theme is a pattern that is found in the data that at minimum organises and describes the observation and at maximum interprets parts of the phenomenon. Boyatzis (1998) describes four stages in the ability to utilise thematic analysis; sensing themes (recognising codable moments), doing it reliably (encoding consistently), developing codes, and interpreting information and themes in the context of a theory.

Thematic Analysis is known to be a flexible method thus requiring that the researcher be clear and explicit about what the objectives and methods of the research are and what the analysis says, and ideally there should be congruence between these components (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore the theory and method was applied rigorously and the analytic claims were supported by data, including important excerpts from the data in the research report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis at times used a 'theoretical' thematic analysis because the data was analysed with reference to Boundary Theory (discussed above). This however did not exclude the possibility of emergent themes that were not predicted by the theories.

The coding process began with the transcribing of the data where notes were made on the initial ideas of the possible themes. A few themes were identified at the outset (such as those relating to the theory) and other themes emerged while coding took place. The transcripts were read through as a body of data and this was coded for preliminary codes. The coding involved highlighting noteworthy features and examples of where the Boundary Theory was applicable (in terms of where it was suitable and where it lacked nuance). Examples of extracts from the participant's interview were selected to represent themes and this was tabulated. This table was reviewed and some changes were made in terms of where the

extracts were applicable. Consultation was provided by the supervisor of the researcher at certain intervals of the processes outlined above.

Specific measures were taken to ensure that credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Scientific rigor has to be maintained throughout the research procedure and strategies have to be developed to ensure this (Brockopp & Hastings-Tolsma, 2003). Credibility is the extent that the results are believable from the standpoint of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 cited in Klenke, 2008). For credibility, the researcher coded the data and this coding was checked with the research supervisor to ensure that the analysis was true to the data. Transferability is similar to the concept of external validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 cited in Klenke, 2008). The research used purposive sampling to explore the topic which meant that only female academics were interviewed. This can be a problem for transferability; however the results that the data presents can be transferred to females in work environments similar to the research participants. Dependendability is the extent to which similar results can be obtained by different researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 cited in Klenke, 2008). The researcher kept a diary where notes were made after each interview and initial analyses and reflexive observations were made. The methodology was described in details and therefore if another researcher wishes to examine the research, there should be dependability and a comparable analysis should be evident (Brockopp & Hastings-Tolsma, 2003). Confirmability is the degree to which the results of the research can be confirmed by others (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 cited in Klenke, 2008). The researcher made efforts to reduce any bias from the analysis and address confirmability by being reflexive (see below).

Reflexivity

Bearing in mind the fact that as the researcher, I am a female student at the University of Witwatersrand, I recognise that I had to be reflexive in my research and this meant that I had to be self-aware throughout the research process. The term reflexivity in research is often used for inescapable reciprocal influence of the researcher and the research participants on each other (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983 cited in Maxwell, 1998). Braun and Clark (2006) explain that thematic analysis involves a variety of choices that need to be explicitly discussed and considered. They therefore make it evident that the researcher needs to have on-going reflexive dialogue throughout the analytic process.

A bias that may have featured could be the difference between my understanding of balance and the participants' views of what constitutes work-life balance. My personal belief is that society dictates that women are still constrained by cultural norms and no matter how successful they are in their jobs, they will not be successful in life if they are not good wives or good mothers – even if this is not something they value. I refrained from allowing any personal perceptions, attitudes or biases to influence the research and these potential difficulties of reflexivity were dealt with using certain techniques, for instance keeping a research journal where reflections were written on the experiences that I had when interacting with the participants and analysing the data. It was important for me to keep research organised and manage the data effectively. This helped to ensure that the analysis is strongly based in the empirical details of the data and did not deter from what the data indicated. By the end of the data collection, my views of the role of work-life balance were altered to a certain degree; it became more apparent that some people do not see their work and life outside of work as separate and that does not decrease their quality of life.

Ethical Considerations

Appropriate ethical clearance was obtained from the Human Ethics Committee at the University of the Witwatersrand. Ethical considerations for the current research included obtaining informed consent, voluntary participation and ensuring confidentiality (Klenke, 2008). The chosen University was contacted to supply consent for their employees to be interviewed and the female academics approached were asked to give their consent to participate in the research. The topic of the research was discussed briefly with the participants and they were assured that no harm will be inflicted through their participation. Participation in the study was totally voluntary and it was made clear that there were no disadvantages or advantages for taking part or not taking part in the study. There were no incentives for partaking in the study.

The participants were briefed on the study both verbally and given the cover letter. At the start of the interview, the participants were able to read a cover letter (See Appendix 2) and they signed a consent form thereafter. The consent form asked for permission for partaking in the interview and also granted permission to be tape recorded during the interview. Considering the fact that this research explored personal experiences and challenges of work-life balance, in order to protect the participant's identity, the participants were assured of confidentiality. All data was analysed using pseudonyms with no identifying information

being included in the final report so as to protect for confidentiality. Anonymity could not be guaranteed in the current as interviews were conducted face-to-face. This necessitated that strict measures were in place to ensure confidentiality.

The researcher was the primary research instrument and this established distinctive interactional dynamics between the researcher and participants (Klenke, 2008). There was no deception used in the current research and the researcher avoided any form of plagiarism. The sample were all participants over the age of 18. It was important that the researcher engages in ongoing reflections and responses to ethical issues throughout the research project (Klenke, 2008). At the start of the interview, the participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study and they had the right to not answer questions that they felt were not appropriate.

The researcher's contact details were made available to the participants so that the participant, if she wishes, could contact the researcher. If participants require feedback, they can contact the researcher six months after the interview has taken place and a summarised version of the study will be emailed to her. The data collected was stored on one password-protected computer that was only be accessed by the researcher and the researcher's supervisor. The data will be kept over time to facilitate the presentation and publication of findings.

Findings and Analysis

In the Findings and Analysis section there is an exploration and expansion of the thematic analysis (see Appendix 3). The analysis uncovered 6 main themes and several subthemes that underline and expand on the main themes. These global themes are *Balancing, Spillover, Conflict, Institutional Influence, Governmental Influence,* and *Personal Aspects*. Each theme has within it various subthemes that together provide an analysis of the experiences of female academics in balancing their work life and their life outside work. The data suggests that female academics have a great deal of 'within work' role conflict that makes it difficult to maintain the boundary between work and life outside work. The job of an academic allows for a lot of flexibility in terms of where work can be completed and in what hours the job incumbent can work. The data suggested that this flexibility is helpful in achieving a desirable work-life balance but can have negative consequences too. The Boundary Theory discussed above was mostly applicable to the data and this will be analysed below. The role of the institution and the South African Government is also explored in the analysis.

Balancing

The subthemes for Balancing are promoters of balance, distracters from balance, strategies, negotiation, and lack of balance. These subthemes are presented below along with quotes from the participants that allow for the rigours of thematic content analysis to be maintained.

Promoters of Balance

The data revealed that female academics have certain promoters of work-life balance that help to maintain boundaries and the permeability of these boundaries. These promoters relate the Greenblatt's (2002) *resources* discussed in the literature review above, in that the promoters often link to a specific resource; such as temporal, financial, control, or personal resources. One such promoter is the additional **assistance** they receive from domestic workers in the home, au pairs that fetch their children, or administrators that help in organising schedules. These promoters create *temporal* resources that allow the participants to free up time to dedicate to other roles. For instance, Interviewee 2 reported that an au pair fetches her children and this allows her to stay at work for longer to finish her tasks. Such assistance can also be seen as a promoter in the sense that it may allow the participant the

time to focus on focal tasks in each domain; for instance Interviewee 7 explains that, *"I had a great administrator who was a personal secretary to me and she was fabulous. And I used to make her throw me out the office for tennis and yoga, I used to make her".* In this way, Interviewee 7 would balance a long day's work with **exercise**. Thus the boundaries between work and non-work activities were constructed and maintained with the assistance of a secretary or an au pair.

This also introduces the resource of *control* because the participants are given more ability to select when and how they create important outcomes. Some participants pointed out that one of the unique aspects of living in South Africa is the availability of domestic workers; Interviewee 6 expressed that

> *I think here in South Africa we're quite lucky that maids are such common place. They are actually wonderful with children on a whole. Um, that we don't have that problem of cleaning and washing which a lot of my colleagues overseas have.*

This "common place" norm then allows women the choice of having assistance in the home that seems to help with balancing and negotiating their role within the home. It is important to note these strategies are by no means available to everyone and it may take several years of negotiating a work-life imbalance for an individual to reach a stage where such strategies are viable. A further point on the participants' reports is the way that domestic workers are specifically a strategy to assist them (and not necessarily the entire family). This hints to the notion of the expected roles of women in the household – that of a caretaker and domestic – and that this role needs to be somewhat 'outsourced' in order to assist in the achievement of work-life balance. This supports the literature above that women's role in South Africa is still to an extent tied to traditional expectations (Brink & De la Rey, 2001).

The reported influence of non-work and third place activities also promoted a balanced life, whether it was exercising, caring for their pets, going on holidays with the family, or seeing grandchildren. These activities often maintained or created *personal* resources such as *physical* and/or *psychological* resources. The physical activities helped participants remain strong and fit – an example is of Interviewee 5 going to regular Bio Kinetics appointments. Interviewee 4 illustrated the benefits of a third place activities, such as taking part in a community project or committee, as the participant reports that it allows one to use one's intellect in a public forum. The data however indicated that non-work activities were more

frequent and effective in creating work-life balance for females with children compared to females without children. This will be discussed further below.

Interviewee 4 discussed the importance of how her **positive perspective** on her work role as a researcher assisted in her achievement of work-life balance. She reported that

> *Research is something I love… and it takes a long time I think to come to a place in yourself where you see your research as having a conversation with yourself and the people in the field rather than having a scary outside figure judging it.*

Her role as a researcher reportedly became something she did for herself as well as being a requirement from the University because it is a time where she is on her own and she thinks of it "*not as an activity for someone else but an activity for myself"*. The role of researcher thus enhanced the permeability of her work and non-work boundaries. In part, the *meaning* or *love* component is crucial in this report. Presumably, conflict is more probable when the 'spillover' impacts upon an aspect of one's life that is important to them. Therefore whilst the individual's border may be permeable, the fact that cross-border activities are the activities from which meaning is gained may mitigate any negative feelings or consequences. This can therefore be interpreted as a way to create a *psychological* resource and *cognitive* resource where a person has the energy or ability to access their intellectual abilities.

A major focus of Balancing is the presence of **flexibility** in academia. This flexibility appears to be synonymous with working in academia (as discussed in the literature above) and several participants expressed that flexibility was one of the reasons they stayed in academia, Interviewee 6 explained

> *So that was part of my balance was to say 'ok, I'm not going to earn as much as I think I should be earning but I want to be flexible' but that's what annoys me every time they try to get rid of the flexibility within the system because it's, and it's a benefit for me to be able to bring my children onto campus and here there are no problems.*

This report indicated a negotiation between having *control* compared to having *financial* resources. For Interviewee 6, she explains her choice to have the flexibility in her job as an academic as opposed to choosing a job where she made more money. Although it was evident

that flexibility is one of the promoters of work-life balance, it was most effective to women with families as compared to women without children. One participant, who did not have children, expands on this by discussing that she takes time off to do her shopping and other activities but will work in the evening and "*I would like it if it was **expected** that you didn't work 8 hours or 9 hours a day"*. It was apparent in the data that every participant would take work home and work in the evenings – that is one of the consequences of flexible work hours in academia but the problem that can occur is that the balance of work and non-work activities does not equal out and hence some participants felt that they have limited or no work-life balance.

Distracters from Balance

Flexibility also involves the use of modern technology which Interviewee 10 reported made life both easy and difficult. The data thus indicated that **technology** can act as a distracter of work-life balance as Interviewee explained

> *I think the proliferation of internet technology has actually made life quite **difficult.** On the one hand quite easy but on the other hand quite difficult for everybody. So I never feel, there's no sort of fine line so I could actually carry on working till 12 AM. I don't because I need 8 hours sleep. Ok, but I think getting a balance between, because one actually **can work,** it's not a finite issue of how much work you do.*

The participant is thus suggesting that technology appears to make the maintenance of boundaries more challenging.

Another challenge that was reported to distract from work-life balance is the **competitiveness** of the field of academics that the participants work in. For example Interviewee 7 expressed

> *I don't know, it's a very competitive field because people get grants and people who do this, do this because they are passionate about it otherwise they would give up and go and get a job and earn 3 times more which I could but I don't. So, anyway, I guess it's kind of something that you learn to deal with and it's fine and I don't mind it. But I do need some more balance in my life.*

The participant is explaining that one needs *psychological* resources that allow one to be competitive in order to access the *financial* resources that enhance one's career. There was

little discussion about competitiveness in the data besides the participants who worked in the fields of Science and Engineering; this speaks to the variation in the data between the departments and the impact of different departments on work-life balance. The institution and departments will be discussed further in the theme dedicated to their impact below.

Another factor that was reported to restrict the balance of time spent in non-work domains was time spent **commuting** to work. Whereas there were some participants who reported living near to the University, one participant expressed that traffic dictates that she has to leave home early and at times come home late, thus leaving very little time in her non-work domain

> *…traffic in Johannesburg so it means that I have to leave home early to beat traffic and it also means that I have to leave work early to beat traffic or stay here until late. So I can't find a balance I get home very late, I'm the last person to get home and the first person to leave the house because of the traffic.*

This distractor impacts the amount of *temporal* resources one has in one's life outside work. This is a factor that is harder to control but commuting is a consideration when understanding challenges to achieving work-life balance.

Strategies

The strategies that the participants discussed in the interviews were quite varied in their practice but there were a few general strategies that overlapped; these included time-management, discipline, childbirth, exercises and classes, organising holidays, and seeking professional help. Time-management strategies that were reported included diarising, making lists and deadlines, and being organised in both work and non-work roles. This strategy can be helpful in the achievement of a work-life balance but being organised does not guarantee balance because as Interviewee 6 describes "*I've tried to make lists and set myself deadlines; often things get in the way".* An example where time-management was not implemented very efficiently was when Interviewee 10 explained that she lacked time-management skills and this affected her effectiveness. She suggested that the University think about offering training in time-management to help academics achieve a work-life balance.

The data indicates that an element that might enhance time-management is **discipline**. In both domains, participants reported the need to be disciplined on how they structure their time. For example, Interviewee 9 discussed the constant presence of deadlines in academia, *"So you **have** to be disciplined in relation to due dates and you **can't** leave work until late when you're working with this kind of thing. So working early on is good for you".* From the reported experience, being disciplined means that Interviewee 9 can focus of work roles and give sufficient time to each role and avoid panic when everything is due. This may then maintain the balance between the work domain and non-work domain in that there is not a large amount of time spent in the work domain as compared to the non-work domain. Discipline was also reported to include making oneself stop working, for instance Interviewee 10 explicated

> *So one can work very very very hard and use up all one's hours so I actually discipline myself, for example I never work on Friday night and I never work on Saturday night, I **try** not to work on the weekends but inevitably I do have to.*

In the report above, the participant has expressed an example of a negotiation of the boundary construction between work and life outside work. There is the reported potential to spend a great deal of time on one's work because several participants described the workload as substantial or that the work itself can consume a large amount of one's time. This can leave an individual with limited temporal resources and thus making it harder to achieve a desired work-life balance. Discipline can therefore be understood to underline or be a part of the process of constructing, negotiating and maintaining boundaries.

There were reports from participants that regular **exercise** and **art** classes were a key strategy that they practice as it is time they spend on and for themselves. These would primarily take place in **third places.** However there can be an integration of different domains with regard to these activities. For instance Interviewee 3 gave the example that *"...I also do some recreation at [the University], I use the swimming pool so sometimes I come in over the weekend just to use the swimming pool".* This integration further blurs the boundary between work and non-work domains for Interviewee 3. The maintenance of distinct domains can wear away when leisurely activities take place in work environments and this makes the achievement of work-life balance more complex.

Holidays were also reported as a strategy to achieve work-life balance, both for women with children and those without children. This would appear to be a distinct separation from work for some participants yet for others holidays also involve work, for instance Interviewee 4 reports that "*when I go away I tend to go away to work"*.

The following strategies are life choices that participants explained helped them or could possibly have helped them. Two participants mentioned that a strategy for achieving work-life balance is **seeking professional help**. Interviewee 6 discussed the positive benefits that coaching can bring,

> *I never thought that coaching would have worked. I mean I've been to a few workshops on it and I can see that it would have really helped me define where I want to go, how I can achieve it, instead of muddling along… And I think that's ya, you've got to move and realise there are professionals out there that can really help.*

Interviewee 4 recounted a time when she "*slipped into a major depression"* and sought out professional help in the form of Psychoanalytic Therapy and has continued this therapy ever since.

> *…I think the only way I've managed to hold them all together honestly, without having a psychic breakdown, is through therapy – is through psychic intervention. Honestly, it's been the thing that's allowed me to at least kind of see the whole picture and see where I'm um, you know acting out of something weird in myself rather than something clear in myself. I've been able to manage the kind of authority around how I work.*

This strategy also allowed participants to gain *personal* resources, specifically *psychological* resources that help in the maintenance of work-life balance.

Interviewee 8 reported that she chose to wait an extended period of time between **having children** as a strategy to carry on working and create a work-life balance,

> *The other strategy and this is quite a drastic one is that I spread my children apart. I had them 5 years apart because if I'd had 3 small children born close to each other, I would never have been able to carry on working. And I **did** want to carry on working so that was a very definite strategy – which worked; fortunately it worked in my case.*

In general the strategies that were reported by participants indicated that balancing work and non-work domains is something that they all have taken some kind of action in ensuring, although perhaps not with the understanding or underlying reasoning of creating a work-life balance. At times in the interviews, it appeared (from the interviewer's perspective) that several participants were experiencing revelations that they had not thought about previously and some of the participants tried to work through those revelations within the interview. This process of self-reflection also revealed that the topic of 'work-life balance' is not widely or commonly discussed within academia or at least not within the academic context that the research took place. This general lack of discussion and debate may then be interpreted as a reason for women in academia not focusing on work-life balance or that there is a lack of institutional and societal emphasis of employees' work-life balance. This will be discussed further in the themes below.

Negotiation

The subtheme of negotiation is focused on some of the decisions that the participants reported in their experiences of facing the challenges of work-life balance. These negotiations differed especially between women in the early stages of their career as compared to women in the later stages of their career. One of the reported negotiations is the decision that the participants' work is 'good enough' and does not need more attention. For example, Interviewee 3 explained,

> *I also think that I have become much smarter about using time more effectively. I am able to cut to the chase more quickly. I'm a bit better at deciding when something is good enough, even if it's not perfect.*

This report indicates that over time the skill of knowing when one's work is good enough is an important one to learn as it saves time which is an important resource. Interviewee 3 expressed that this is partly about having the *"confidence"* to say it is good enough. Having confidence relates to having *psychological* resources in one's ability to perform.

With regard to the differences seen between earlier career and later career, the recurring suggestion that females in their later academic career gave was to say *"no"*. Interviewee 2 reports the advice she gives to women at the early stages of their career,

I always say to them, 'don't take on too much'. Particularly if they're good and they kind of are efficient and willing, I sit them down and I say 'you're going to be asked to do a lot things because you're good, efficient and willing and you're a woman so say no before you say yes and never say yes before you've given it 24 hours'.

This is in contrast to the reports given by females in the earlier stages of their career. Interviewee 3 expresses that

My biggest challenges… I suppose taking on too much, taking on more than I should, taking on more than I suppose is good from some objective measure. I can't say that's such a terrible thing though because it's a choice. I mean I had taken on, I could say no to it, and it's also stimulating and interesting and exciting and that kind of thing. But it's also worthwhile to do that kind of stuff.

And to further illustrate the negotiation, Interviewee 4 reported that she implements educational programmes that are not completely necessary but she implements them in order to make the learning environment better for students,

And that kind of thing, about how we make this work better, how do we create a better environment for our students, up the ante on their education. So I guess I'm quite motivated and driven by a sense of urgency…

The contrast seen may indicate that the negotiation of boundaries is something that is harder to do in earlier stages of one's academic career, especially while one is trying to make one's way up in the academic hierarchy and especially during promotion allocations when one is being judged on the quantity of publications and one's input relative to one's colleagues.

There are ways that female academics can start to negotiate their work-life balance earlier in their careers; for example participants made suggestions on how young females entering into academia can achieve a work-life balance – one such example is to find an appropriate mentor in the University. Interviewee 3 expressed that a possible strategy is to ask for help

So if there are expectations around probation or publication or promotion or any of those kinds of things, then I think being clear about what support is offered to help with all of that would be very useful. I think it's something I would never do – to think about asking what support is there – I'd assume I would have to get on with it on my

own. But I don't necessarily think that my approach is the right approach. It's probably better to say 'ok, great there are these targets and expectations of me, but now what support is there, what help is there, how can I access it?'

Thus the skills and strategies suggested by others may help in the achievement of work-life balance. (See Implications for Research section below for more suggestions and advice)

Lack of Balance

The analysis of the reported work-life balance negotiation process also revealed that some of the participants expressed that they were either unsuccessful at striking a balance or lacked balance between work and non-work domains. No participant reported spending too much time in their non-work domain. There was a major emphasis on the work domain for Interviewee 10 and she reported, *"I don't think I'm very successful at striking a balance. I think I probably do work too much. I do work too much so I don't think I've been successful."*

Interviewee 7 reported that she thinks that she has no balance in that she works a great deal compared to the time she spend on non-work activities, *"I have no balance. I'm a good example for your study of not what to be."*

Interviewee 9 explained that she has not been successful at achieving a balance but this has resulted in her performance at work being effective

I think I'm not successful at balancing but what it has meant is that I am successful in ***my*** *career because I think that I take a lot of time that I think should be pleasure time, that should be family time, that should be time for me to do my gardening and cleaning my house you know. So I took a lot of that time and put it in my work and I don't think I am succeeding at doing that but I'm… I need to find more balance…*

Although these participants reported a lack of balance between work and non-work domains, they all expressed that they saw a need for balance in their lives and that it was something they would try implement.

The theme of Balancing has incorporated those aspects of the data that explain the ways that work-life balance has been promoted and also possibly hindered. An important aspect of the analysis has been the understanding of work-life balance provided by Greenblatt (2002).

This perspective explains work-life balance as being dependent on attaining and managing adequate resources. There was a range of degrees to which the participants reported attaining and maintaining the mentioned resources. It should be noted that the social resource that Greenblatt (2002) mentions as part of personal resource, did not present itself in the reports of the participants. This may be because of the focus on a specific type of work environment of academia.

The construction of boundaries through strategies and actions includes aspects such as time-management and seeking professional help. The maintenance of these boundaries is often difficult in a workplace that offers flexibility and where work permeates the non-work domain and non-work aspects are often allowed to permeate work boundaries. Participants revealed that the negotiation of work-life balance is something that changes over time and as people become more experienced, the strategy of knowing when one's work is good enough and when it is appropriate to say 'no' to requests made by one's department, colleagues or even the University itself. The following theme focuses more on the theory of work-life balance and way the data converged or differed from the theory provided in the Literature Review.

Spillover

During the interviews, the participants were asked to describe their day-to-day activities. Their responses varied in some of the daily activities but they all described that the primary responsibilities of their job are teaching, supervising, researching, and completing a certain amount of administrative work. This commonality may be a result to the basic requirements of job and because the sample was all at the level or above the academic level of Senior Lecturer. Added to those basic requirements, the participants reported having to be available for students, attend meetings, partake in University committees, and for those in the Science field – prepare and run experiments in the laboratory.

The data revealed that there was both positive and negative spillover between work and non-work domains. The positive spillover from non-work to work domain was coded as **instrumental positive spillover** – this occurs when positive behaviours, skills as well as values are transferred from work to the non-work domain and these benefit the family (Hansen et al., 2006, cited in Chen, Powel & Greenhaus, 2009). An example was provided by

interviewee 8 when she explains how her work has allowed her to have quality time her family,

> *My family life, I feel I have been a very good mother – I think my children would say that because whenever I got home from work I've given them my full attention, I never got impatient with them or bored of them because I see them for such short spaces of time. So and I think I've enriched their lives because I've brought into the home a whole world from outside so I think they've benefited. And I think my husband has benefited in that way too.*

Whilst there were few reported instances of positive spillover, multiple reports of negative spillover; including interferences from work to home and interferences from home to work were reported. In terms of **work-to-home interferences**, Interviewee 2 reported,

> *…therefore I go into a meal or time with the children or spending time with the children when I'm bringing baggage from the office or I'm bringing tiredness from the office. Or the balance. So I think that that's the most invasive.*

And furthermore, Interviewee 8 expressed that to an extent her husband had "*suffered*",

> *But I **think** that [my husband] has probably suffered the most and I know, he's verbalised it, he has felt sometimes that I devote too much time to my work and too little to him. In my own heart, I don't feel that I've sort of made a choice in favour of my work but I've made a choice in favour of what is **urgent** and has to be done for tomorrow or if I have to get up early tomorrow then I won't want to go out tonight. And he loves going out every night so he has suffered, I think he has suffered.*

These reports are examples of when work creeps into the home domain, possibly making it difficult for the participants to maintain the boundaries between work and non-work domains.

On the other side of the spectrum are examples of how **home interfered with work**. It can be understood that part of the reason that non-work domain can interfere in work is because of the flexibility allowed in the job. One example of this is provided by Interviewee 6,

> *I mean it's something you'll find if you… I mean, often working mothers' offices look like a dump because you drop things to go and fetch – you're in the middle of*

something and you can't finish it. You have to leave it behind or pick it up and I find that a bit disruptive – that every time I sit down to write a paper, I'm not very efficient at it and when I get into it, somehow I have to stop and do some other task.

The report is an instance where female academics are permitted to cross boundaries between work and non-work domains during a time that is traditionally allocated to work and thus the tasks designated to the work domain suffer. Interviewee 1 reiterates this idea and reports,

Although I will say that sometimes, when there is a crisis with family, friends, there are boyfriends that have come and gone as well – it can mean that you can't give 110% here. And what really is affected, when you have a crisis, is your research because you can't get the focus.

The examples thus exhibit the permeability of the boundary between work, non-work and (in some instances) the third space. The multiple examples of negative spillover are indicative of the argument in the literature review above; that interferences from work to home and home to work can manifest in individuals' feelings, attitudes, and behaviours.

Boundary Theory

The Boundary Theory described in the Literature Review above helps to explain some of the ways that the participants construct, negotiate, maintain and cross boundaries. In general, the theory pointed to the understanding that the field of academia is one that lends itself to **role integration**; this is because the work role of academics are not always tied to particular places and spaces (suggesting a flexible boundary) and there are instances of cross-role interruptions (suggesting a permeable boundary) (Ashforth et al., 2000). In terms of the flexibility, Interviewee 5 described how she would work at McDonalds so that she could work while her children played,

But I sort of fit it in, I mean when the kids were younger we would go to McDonald's and the junglegym so I would sit at McDonald's at the table and you plug a laptop in and work at McDonald's. So I try and make it that you can balance everything I suppose in that sort of context. If I have to work, can't we go to a place the kids can do something and I can work? So if you can balance things like that at least you can

do a bit of a win-win. So a lot of my work when the children were younger was done at McDonald's.

This is an instance where a participant took on the role of academic in a 'non-academic' environment. The report is also important in understanding role identity because the participant is able to easily embrace her role as an academic in an environment that is not normally a working environment. The participant's work role identity can thus be recognised as a strong identity because the transition into work role is reported as easy and can happen in non-work environments.

Interviewee 8 reported an instance where she would leave work to breastfeed her child during working hours and this was because of the flexibility of boundaries,

I mean I remember when my son was born, first born, I remember that I used to rush back home to do the 4 hour feed and then come back here you know and do that. Fortunately I've always lived very close to [the University] otherwise I wouldn't have been able to do that. So you know I used to obviously… and then when they were at school or growing up they sometimes had afternoon activities and I would have to dash sometimes if I had to (if I wasn't in a lift scheme or didn't have some other lift available) I would have to dash home and do that.

This intertwines with the permeability of role boundary which was evident in some of the participant's reports. The simple act of answering emails at odd hours and on the weekend was reported by several participants. All the participants reported that they work from home and this is what is expected from them, especially when deadlines such as "*marking*" are looming. As Interviewee 7 explained,

And so I try but you know I certainly cannot cope without working most nights. I work most nights during the week and during the weekend obviously I do take a bit of a break but I do work every weekend.

This indicates that it is often difficult to create the contrast or boundary between work and no-work domains, Interviewee 2 explained this difficulty,

It's very difficult to draw the line. It's very difficult to say 'I'm at work now'; I mean it's easy enough between half past 8 and late afternoon but because your work day is

> *a bit truncated you know, you have to find ways of catching up… in other parts in the evening or the week. Although your work never really goes away from you actually and lets you say 'today's the day I'm actually not going to work'.*

This relatively extreme permeability of boundary that was revealed in the data uncovers one of the reasons for the extent to which spillover between work and non-work domains can occur. It also highlights one of the costs of role integration according to Ashforth et al. (2000) – **boundary blurring**. Examples of boundary burring were provided by participants but one of the more extreme cases was from Interviewee 3 (whose partner also works at the University),

> *I live close to [the University] so I don't spend a lot of time commuting and I am able to pop home quite easily and quite quickly should a need to. So there is quite a strong physical relationship, spatial relationship… I think the boundaries aren't very clear at all. I mean we probably live in quite an artificially small world, mentally and physically. Because of being so University-oriented, it probably would have been different if one of us wasn't a [University] person... One would probably have a bit more perspective on the extent to which everything is so muddled up.*

Part of the reason for this blurring is due to spatial proximity and Beninger (2000, p. 28) also explores the idea of spatial boundaries and explains that "the lack of spatial and temporal boundaries allows the work to spill over into every aspect of their lives, making a desirable work/life balance much more difficult to achieve". Interviewee 8's report above also gave an insight to the role of spatial proximity when she would go home to breastfeed her child. On the other hand, Interviewee 9 reported that she has to travel quite far to go home for "*either it's a funeral or it's a wedding, or it's some ritual"* and this distance means that she truly has to exit her role as an academic and she reports that for *"those of us that are outside Gauteng actually it's not easy to work"* as a result of family responsibilities.

Boundary blurring can also lead to "confusion and anxiety about which role identity is or should be most salient" (Ashforth et al., p. 481). This is quite clear in the report provided by Interviewee 3. She was unsure of any negotiation of boundaries and explained that "*everything is so muddled up"*. This would mean that the transition between domains need not be elaborate and role exit and role entry is not definite.

The data also drew attention to the reported strong sense of career centrality in the participants' identity and their **role identification**. The theory suggests that the "more valued the role and its identity, the more likely they will be internalised as an extension and expression of oneself" (Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 483). Role identification was seen in most of the participants, for instance Interviewee 3 reported, *"Because you know if you are really interested in your work, your work is partly your pleasure as well and it's hard to integrate the two out and think about it separately."*

Interviewee 9 expressed that she loves her career and she values success in her career and it has led to her working hard to achieve in her career,

> *I think my love of career is that one that influences my work-life balance. I think maybe I value success that I was not aware of before today. Maybe I value success to the extent that it's actually pushing me to spend a lot more of my time on my work than looking after myself because I want to succeed at work.*

Ashforth et al. (2000) explain that the stronger one's role identification, the more likely one is to try to integrate the role with other roles, Interviewee 7 reports how she loves her work and thus is prepared to work hard. She therefore reported lacking a work-life balance,

> *Not that I would stop doing what I'm doing. I'll do my research and teaching, I love it! And I love my students… I suppose it was in my early 30's maybe that I realised that I really do love my job and I am prepared to do this.*

There were various reported examples from the participants that supported Boundary Theory in terms of the role of flexibility, permeability, boundary blurring, and role identification. There was the distinct impression that most participants had high **role integration** – some more than others. There was a difference in the integration of those females with partners and children compared to females who were either single or lived with a partner. The females with partners and children reported more role segmentation because of examples of 'switching off', 'shifting gears', or making a conscious effort to leave work and spend time with their family – they tended to have more rituals in entering the role of academic (for instance checking emails in the morning) and there were more reports of having to exit the role of an academic more frequently compared to single females or females who lived with a partner. It was evident that single females or females who lived with a partner did not

negotiate or cross boundaries between work and non-work **as much** but there was an equivalent amount of negotiation with the roles within the work domain. This negotiation will be further explored in the theme of *conflict* below.

Conflict

The next theme identified in the data was that of *conflict*. The subtheme of role conflict was evident through the analysis above and will be expanded on in this theme with examples of conflict between work and non-work boundaries, as well as within work role conflict. There were few examples that gave the impression of a lack of conflict between boundaries and this will be explored further. One aspect of conflict that impacts work-life balance of the participants was the guilt experienced from both work and non-work domains. The conflict that the participants reported experiencing helped to further understand the negotiation of work-life balance.

Role conflict

The data showed that **role conflict** was found between work and non-work boundaries as well as within work roles. Interviewee 8 described conflict in terms of taking off religious holidays,

> *I take off 2 or 3 religious holidays per year and that is all… You know I feel with the kind of job that I've got; it's very difficult because then you'd have to make up lectures and whenever you have a make-up lecture half the class doesn't come. It's really problematic so I just take off 2 or 3 really important ones.*

The conflict is that if she takes days off for religious holidays she will have to make up that time and create more conflict within her work domain and with her role as an academic – thus she sacrifices spending time with her family on religious holidays so as to not interfere with work. Interviewee 5 expressed that having children creates conflict, *"I think fitting kids in is a hugely difficult thing."* This report substantiates some of the results from Whitehead and Kotze's (2003) study. They found that a constant dynamic in their qualitative reports was that participants experienced role conflict, especially with regards to their role within their families as compared to their work role.

The role as a mother is conflicting with one's work role because of the responsibilities one faces when one has children. Interviewee 7 reported wanting to have time to exercise and have some free time to spend on herself in her non-work domain but she explained that the pressure of her work role stops her from doing so,

> *So I'm thinking I just want to be able to have some free time to do the things that I like, for example to go to yoga, to go swim more often, to go to an odd concert (not that I don't ever go – I do sometimes)… and sometimes if I don't feel like working on the weekend, I don't have to. But every single weekend I have this pressure; should I accept this social arrangement? What is my work? So it comes that way instead of the other way around.*

One can interpret this example in the way that her work role dominates her decisions within her non-work roles and creates conflict between the boundaries. There is an indication that her work role identification is strong in the way that she can choose to accept a social invitation *only if* she does not have too much work. This again ties up with Whitehead and Kotze's (2003) results as their participants expressed that their career and their work were a big part of who they are.

In contrast, Interviewee 8 reported that she has very little conflict between boundaries,

> *So actually all I need is just to be home on time but when I get home I still do some work, do this reading or mark or the other things that I wanted to do. But for colleagues who have children, I think it would be really difficult for them.*

As highlighted in the theme above, this was a distinction that could be seen between females with families and those who do not have the responsibility of a family.

Perhaps as a result of the interviews taking place in the participants' offices within their work domain, there was major emphasis on the **conflict within work roles** (as compared to the conflict between boundaries). The environment where the interviews took place was not neutral and therefore the conflict at the forefront of the participants' minds could have been predominantly work related. Nevertheless, this conflict is applicable to discuss when exploring the work-life balance of academics because their job is divided into various roles

and tasks (as discussed above). There was the clear conflict between the role of teacher and the role of researcher, as Interviewee 6 explained,

> *So now everyone who is employed must be interested in doing a PhD. And then when you go that track – there's a conflict with teaching.*

And part of the argument that Interviewee 10 reported is that research is rewarded more compared to teaching and other academic roles,

> *I suppose mostly what I would like is just to do research but of course there are these conflicting demands with the University of course only* ***really rewards*** *research… But it feels like research is a luxury on the one level – you can only do it when nothing else is demanding your time – at the same time that is what counts for advancement.*

This idea of research as a "*luxury"* was an undercurrent in other participant's reports because as an academic, one has to find time for research and it is not necessarily scheduled into one's timetable in the year, even though there is the expectation that every academic should publish 2 articles a year. This inter-role conflict is one that affected all the participants.

Other inter-role work conflicts also involved completing administrative work, as Interviewee 1 reported,

> *…on the one side there have been increases in student numbers and the other side the University, and I think rightly so, is pushing for more research…to become more of a research institute and that does mean you've got to spend more time on your research and it's difficult to balance that when you're dealing with these pressures um, with increased student numbers and increased administrative load.*

These reports of conflict within work roles are in line De Villiers and Kotze's (2003) results as they found that many of their participants experienced work role overload. Their participants seemed to experience overload in the work role (as compared to non-work roles) and as a result they always worked overtime to complete their work (De Villiers & Kotze, 2003).

Interviewee 4 explained that the role of colleague within the department is an additional responsibility and it can cause conflict when one is perceived as being a bad colleague,

…but when you're off you have to be doing research if you want to be a good academic, you have to spend that time reading, writing, doing…and then my colleagues in the Department were a little bit pissed off with me because some of our colleagues are on sabbatical and so they felt that 'why was I leaving the department?' because it meant that they had to deal with all the burden of enquiries from students. So there's a lot of work in University life that happens in free time like dealing with students, dealing with student queries, everyone wants letters of recommendation or um, their parents want to discuss their careers…

The report above emphasises the role of colleague and the role of teacher or mentor for one's students (to a certain extent) being in conflict with other work domain roles. The abundance of work role responsibilities and conflict between these roles may give an insight as to why some of the participants reported that they lacked a work-life balance – the task also involves finding a balance between roles within the work domain which was reported as being difficult.

Guilt

The word 'guilt' appeared in the interviews of several of the participants. The guilt that the participants reported was often an expression of some kind of conflict that they had experienced. There were two main types of guilt identified in the data; the first is guilt about work spilling over into non-work domain and the second is guilt about no completing one's work role. Interviewee 5 reported both kinds of guilt outlined; she reported that she feels guilty about not always being involved in her children's lives,

And it is fitting them in, you know, trying to… make sure you don't feel too guilty. You know, some mothers are horribly involved and you have got to think that maybe it's too much or I can't.

Interviewee 5 went on to say that she sometimes ignore the guilty feeling that she is not doing her work,

I think there is always a bit of guilt, there is always something you take home. Sometimes at taking just one paper home that I have to read because otherwise there

is always this pile that you can see [indicating pile in front of her] *so there's always this guilt that you should be doing something and you've got to ignore it.*

Interviewee 5 described the guilt as a "*woman thing"*,

Because one's always guilty – I think it's a 'woman thing'. You're always guilty you're not giving enough here or you're not giving enough to the kids or the husband or whatever the house is untidy, there's cobwebs in the light fitting or you ran out of toilet paper or whatever it might be – there is always guilt. And to kind of say well ok, that's fine, everyone will survive and make sure you have time for yourself.

This report certainly shows the possible conflict that the participant goes through to achieve a desirable work-life balance – including time spent on oneself. It is also a reference to the literature above where Brink and De la Rey (2001) explain that not only do women experience conflict between work role and family role, but moreover there is an additional strain of social expectation which may manifest itself as guilt. Interviewee 9 reported a strategy that she uses in order to not feel guilty,

…for me to not feel guilty and have fun at the baby shower – I should first do something in the morning that is work-related and then when I'm done 1 thing or 2 then I can go out – it's a ***reward****, going out is a reward for work done.*

This is a tension or conflict that she reports having where work-related tasks must be completed before attending a non-work event – in a way she balances and negotiates her time spent in non-work domains by completing a certain amount of work before going out.

The theme of 'conflict' gives light to the negotiation process that is involved in individual's work-life balance. The data indicates that conflict is experienced between work and non-work boundaries and often conflict occurs between work roles (especially in the case of academics) and at times this can result in feelings of guilt.

Institutional Influence

The participants were asked what their experiences were of the University's role (and/or their department's role) in the promotion of work-life balance. This was to explore the idea that workplace culture can help or hinder the achievement of work-life balance (Desrochers &

Sargent, 2003). Variation was seen in the participants' reported experiences, including experiences of positive and supportive institutional influence and on the other hand quite unsupportive and negative influence. The practices that were reported were coded in terms of those that promoted work-life balance and those that distracted from the achievement of work-life balance.

Promoters

Two participants discussed a particularly supportive programme that was implemented at the University in the past, Interviewee 8 reported

> *Perhaps the **only** time that I've heard that is perhaps in a project that I joined in 2002... And I was very fortunate to be taken on to that project so occasionally over the years, once every 3 or 4 years, we've had a retreat and when we go on the retreat we discuss – we haven't ever discussed this directly – but um there is an absolutely clear ethos there that women in the workplace should not only promote themselves but promote their own values and kind of reach their own satisfactory life within themselves and in that way they are more **productive**. That's the only kind of thing in my very long working life at [the University] that I've ever heard anyone promoting a work-life balance.*

This was reported to be a positive programme for the two women who reported it but was not experienced by all the participants and does not appear to still be in existence. These reports of a supportive programme reinforce that emphasis of context and situational strength that Boundary Theory outlines. The context of the University allowed, at the time of the programme, for discussion and promotion of individual values which equipped the participants to be more productive in their work in a way that promoted satisfaction.

The basic practice that participants reported as promoting work-life balance was that of a **flexible work schedule**, as Interviewee 9 expressed,

> *Flexible means you determine your own pace. All they tell you is that these are the outputs and you know you decide the time you spend in order to meet your outputs. But I think that the flexibility then allows for you to create that work-life balance.*

Flexibility is an aspect of academia that was highlighted in the current study (as explained in the literature above). Boundary Theory's interest in situational strength (Ashforth et al., 2000) is stressed here because in this context, flexibility in the work schedule is given consensus and therefore the behaviours (such as working on weekends and in non-work contexts among others) are accepted and reinforced by the academics at the University.

Desrochers and Sargent (2004) explain that flexibility in a work schedule where an individual can complete all or some of their work at home means that they can spend more time with their family even at the expense of blurring boundaries between work and non-work domains. Various participants who were mothers reported spending time with their families in a non-work environment and still being able to complete their work. The participants' reports of flexibility promoting work-life balance therefore substantiate that when an institution allows employees to not be confined to the office from nine to five, it can enhance employees' ability to balance, negotiate and maintain boundaries. However there can be a negative side to this flexibility which will be explored in the next sub-heading.

The general reported lack of institutional promoters of work-life balance indicates a lack of understanding and/or reaction to the effects of achieving work-life balance as discussed in the Literature Review above (Lee & Steele, 2009). The positive outcomes of work-life balance (such as employee satisfaction and well-being) that have been researched (Downes & Koekemoer, 2011) are therefore not being fully realised.

Distractors

Participants provided examples of where the lack of support from the institution made it difficult to negotiate and maintain boundaries between work and non-work domains as a result of an increasing workload. The data revealed that there were more practices that distract from achieving work-life balance for the participants compared to those that promote balance. Interviewee 7 expressed that she perceives the upper management of the University as piling on the work without consideration of how it affects the workers on the ground,

> *No, I don't think [the University] have a clue what we do on the ground… the kind of Old-Guard that I feel they kind of pile us with more and more and more because they know we'll do it and they know we'll do it well.*

The additional workload and pressure of publication was definitely a practice that was reported to distract from work-life balance, as Interviewee 1 reported,

> *And for [the University] to become more of a research institute and that does mean you've got to spend more time on your research and it's difficult to balance that when you're dealing with these pressures, with increased student numbers and increased administrative load.*

The increase in workload as a distractor from the achievement of work-life balance supports previous studies – for example De Villiers and Kotze's (2003) research that explored how time- and strain-based conflict occurred the most in the workplace and thereby negatively impacting work-life balance. This example of a distractor can be explained in terms of Crooker et al.'s (2002) definition of work-life balance. From the reports, it seems that Academia at an organisational level presents an environment of high complexity where there are many variables to manage which creates challenges of life complexity for individual academics. All the factors and pressures the participants reported facing make the workplace environment quite uncertain and thereby do not assist to a huge extent to individual's work-life balance.

Interviewee 4 described the conflict that she had with the University when she adopted her child,

> *I think, I mean one of the battles that I had with the University was to fight for adoption leave to be made the same as maternity leave. So adoption leave was 3 months and through various actions by myself and a couple of colleagues, we got it to be 4 months which is the same as biological maternity leave. Um, that I had to fight for, right.*

She explained that she finally managed to receive the same amount of maternity leave as biological mothers but the essence of this issue, as the participant discussed, is that an institution that would want their employees to achieve a work-life balance in any instance would allow every kind of mother the same amount of maternity time. This report underlines the experienced organisational culture that does not support females who are adopting.

One aspect that Interviewee 6 reported as important for the University to assist with is support and assistance,

> *But it's also the backup, you know there really is very little backup if anything goes wrong. For example if something happens to a child and I have to rush off, there's no backup for someone to take my lectures. There's no backup to phone and say please cancel this lecture and there's no backup for us, I mean a lot of the women get more administrative jobs and there's no backup there. It's all been eroded.*

From this perspective, the degree of flexibility found in the workplace is hampered by a lack of backup for females to then fully utilise the flexibility – where in previous years there may have been a system that helped with this sort of issue, Interviewee 6 reported that there is very little support in this respect.

Interviewee 7 reported that she received limited support for the construction of her project support,

> *…we don't get enough support that we should and I don't get enough technical support. I have to do everything myself. Even my greenhouse – if something breaks, if something's this, the water doesn't work, the equipment doesn't work – you know all that I* ***have to do all of that myself****.*

Interviewee 6 explained that part of the reason for the limited support is because there are not "*enough post-grad students"* in her particular department. The various aspects discussed in this subtheme are some that Roberts (2007) identified as likely reasons for the spread of dissatisfaction at work. These distractors *can* lead to negative outcomes as a result of employees' work-life (im)balances, including absenteeism and a lack of well-being (Crooker, Smith & Tabak, 2002). Therefore the role of the institution and department is important in female academics' achievement of work-life balance and this role is reported as being more negative than positive in this particular context.

Gendered Roles

The unique role that women have in South Africa has been discussed in the literature above but it seems from of the some participant's reports that within the University, they have experiences where their gender is a factor in distribution of workload. Interviewee 4 reported

on what she describes as "*invisibilised labour*" in her department, particularly pertaining to gender roles,

> *I mean it is difficult for the University and the State to recognise forms of deep-routed sexism that accompany things like invisibilised labour in departments – how do you get at that? The best you can hope for is that you have colleagues that won't take advantage of that or who will step up…. I'm not prepared to clean up this disgusting kitchen that these guys leave because they leave filth, like rotting things in the sink for weeks… And I've noticed now that my female colleague is now back from sabbatical, there's a new sponge in the kitchen, there's a new towel, things are cleaner, dishes are washed and I'm wondering if she doesn't do it or if she organises for it to be done by one of the cleaning staff but* ***clearly*** *that's the kind of labour that women should be very careful not to get stuck into.*

Interviewee 4 also included part of the "*invisibilised labour*" is seeing to the student's questions and demands as well as making sure that they are heard. This is reported as generally performed by the females in the department. Interviewee 4 warned that women should not get stuck in this type of labour if it is expected for the women to perform such tasks. Interviewee 5 also reported times when being a female meant that she had more work domain responsibility,

> *I mean I found for example, being a woman and professor and whatever all else, you know that they get you on the selection committee and kind of tick off two boxes at once and I have just said no.*

These participants' perspective is that women are used or expected to perform tasks solely because they are women and this distracts from the achievement of one's own work-life balance. It is something that perhaps the institution and each individual department should be aware of if they want to promote work-life balance.

Childbirth was a topic that a few participants brought up as it was reported to be a possible cause of one's academic career 'slowing down' compared to the men or women without children in the field. Interviewee 1 reflected on her career and those around her

> *…if I compare myself with those that are around me. I've seen where a woman was single and had no children sort of on track with me, and then along the way they got married and had children um, it slowed them down considerably that I was able to climb faster because I don't have other responsibilities. So it does make a difference.*

Interviewee 7 discussed that she has a great deal of respect for female professors who have families and that if she had had a family and children, she might not be where she is today in terms of academic position. Other participants emphasised the notion that if one takes maternity leave, in a situation where promotions are given, the female applicant may be disadvantaged because of fewer publications compared to male colleagues. Interviewee 9 explained that this is easily rectified if the promotions counsel take into account maternity leave.

This subtheme highlights the difficulties that women face at work. South Africa's history as a patriarchal and segregated society has left its mark in the workplace as women still have the exceptional challenge of balancing various tasks that are associated with their work roles and homemaker roles; being the fulfilment of responsibilities of an employee, a spouse, a mother, and a caregiver simultaneously (Whitehead & Kotze, 2003), within an unequal society. The added strain of social expectations (Brink & De la Rey, 2001) was apparent from several of the participants' reported experiences.

Governmental Influence

The participants were guided in the interviews to discuss their knowledge of the South African government's role in promoting work-life balance – this was to grasp a cross-cultural perspective in relation to Beninger's (2010) results. There were large differences between the countries of the participant's in Beninger's (2010) study, in terms of formal policies and social norms and the data in the current research suggests that there are few similarities in terms of perceived governmental influence on work-life balance.

Policies

There was a general lack of knowledge on the government's role in the promotion of work-life balance. Interviewee 1 reported *"I'm not sure… I don't really feel that I'm supported much there".* The limited knowledge that the participants reported indicates that there is not

much **discussion** or **action** taken around the issue of work-life balance in South Africa. However, some participants were able to identify certain policies that promote work-life balance. For instance, Interviewee 9 reported,

> *Not specifically for academics but I know their policies are very good in relation to women like the maternity is quite good, it's up to us to comply with that. So they've got really good policies.*

Interviewee 3 pointed out that the government offers grants,

> *I don't know, the government offers grants, child grants and those types of things. Um… only in very indirect ways would I see their support in training in Universities for people that can assist.*

Interviewee 2 reported that the framework provided by the government is relatively positive, "*…other than a kind of regulatory framework which I think is reasonably positive, um, I think there's nothing else."*

The social norms in Sweden that Beninger (2010) mentioned (as presented in the literature above) were not apparent in the current research data. As discussed above, having children is definitely seen as an impediment to a female academic's career and only two participants reported having a home where both partners have equal responsibilities. However, several participants who are mothers discussed that as mothers, they often do more in the family domain, Interviewee 6 reported,*"…as a mother you just do more. Unless you have a full-time house-husband which there are, but I don't know!"* thus reinforcing the literature regarding the specific issues working mothers face. Swedish norms encourage a life outside of work, however the data did not indicate this kind of progressive environment within the South African workplace and it appears from the participants' reports that the institution just about does the opposite of encouraging a life outside of work because of the reported expectation to work more than a regular nine-to-five job. Thereby affecting the ability of female academics to balance and negotiate the boundaries between work and non-work domains.

The data suggests that there is still a fair amount of work to be done if the South African Government wants to be perceived as a major promoter or contributor to South African citizen's work-life balance. Some of the ways that they can improve is with regards to public

transport and child care, among others. Even though the South African government acknowledges the history of discrimination towards women in South Africa (Maja, 2005), the participants did not report this acknowledgement as something that promotes or even affects their experiences of work-life balance. The reports did not outline any programmes or facilities that government provide to help women create a balance between work and life outside of work. Moreover part of government's role in South Africa is to ensure that businesses and institutions develop programmes that create balance between work and family (Department of Social Development, 2011), yet from the analysis above, the University has a more negative influence on the achievement of work-life balance compared the reported institutional promoters of balance. This indicates that even with laws and legislation promoting equity, the practical application of supporting women (especially those with children) still needs to be addressed. Thus reinforcing the discussion in the literature above about the disparity between South African policies and their implementation (as practices) (UCT Blogs, 2008).

Personal Aspects

The participants gave an array of reports on the challenges they face in achieving work-life balance as well as their perspectives on what work-life balance actually means to them. The theme of *Personal Aspects* will explore the common as well as the unique understandings of work-life balance. This theme contains the subthemes of values, partner support, and personality – the data indicated that these were all contributors to the participants' negotiation of balance. It was evident was that the participants' individual culture did not play much of a role in the achievement of work-life balance. This substantiates the results of Whitehead and Kotze's (2003) research that found that professional women, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, experience similar pressures and challenges.

Perspectives on Work-Life Balance

One aspect that resonated through the data was that a desirable work-life balance was not simply the negotiation of the role as an academic and the role in non-work domains and 'third-places' (such as committees or conferences among other places) – it is a negotiation of various roles within work, as Interviewee 4 reported *"it's about the relationship between teaching and research at work and supervising and collegial behaviour"*, and the negotiation of one's relationships within non-work domains. Thus Interviewee 4 clearly explained,

> *…being a good colleague, doing a decent job of teaching and supervising, focusing on your research – and research means doing fieldwork, reading **and** writing. So really work is bifurcated to all **kinds** of different things. Which is interesting but complicated to manage I think. There's also the admin of all of it. And then on the home-side, it's about the relationship between spending enough time one-on-one with your child, as a family, with your partner, your friends, with new people like with new friends, doing things on my own.*

This perspective is along the same line as Crooker et al.'s (2002) definition (in the Literature Review) not including some of the complexity that they take into account in their definition – they refer to the stability characterised by the balancing of a person's life complexity (and tensions) and dynamism (or extent of change) with environment and personal resources.

There were participants who emphasised that included in the nature of work-life balance is the notion of **choice**. Therefore it can be understood that a desirable balance is something that one chooses to negotiate and maintain. Interviewee 7 explained,

> *And at the end of the day, I **know** that I can make a decision not to do this. It's actually up to me in the end.*

However, Interviewee 6 further explained that in order to be *"brilliant"* in the field she works in, one has to make a choice between being a *"brilliant scientist or a high-flying scientist and have a functional family".* However, this sentiment was not shared with many of the other participants. Even so some participants gave reports of having to sacrifice certain things in either the work domain or life outside work.

Interviewee 8 described work-life balance as an **ideal**,

> *I think I would describe it as… it's ideal really. I don't know whether it can be realised. A situation where you feel although your work is demanding, you can cope with it and you have enough time to do it. If not perfectly – at least in a constant way and the same applying to your family that um everybody is satisfied with it. You and the people around you are satisfied with the amount of time, energy and effort you are spending with them or putting into family life or work.*

This perspective echoes the definition of work-life balance provided by Greenblatt (2002), who states that it is "the absence of unacceptable levels of conflict between work and nonwork demands" (p. 179). The individual is able to meet their real and perceived work and personal obligations and thus satisfy the main needs of the individual and the people that they are committed to support (Greenblatt, 2002). Interviewee 6 has a somewhat negative report of work-life balance as an ideal or image,

> *It's an image. It's kind of a protection – 'Here I am, I am successful with everything'. So that you'll think that I'm better and I don't think that this is just for women… and that's why you have to be honest with yourself and realise that you're doing it your way and not necessarily that you can't achieve that some of these others are achieving and they say 'oh no, you couldn't do it'.*

Interviewee 6 therefore explained that one must achieve one's balance in one's own way and she also explained, *"being able to enjoy both work and life helps and also not being resentful of one or the other"* with regards to achieving a desirable work-life balance.

One reflection to note is that the researcher had the assumption that work-life balance is the 'ideal' that female academics seek and actively work towards, however the data reveals that not all participants found it as something necessary for a happy and rounded life. Life and work are not separate domains in their perspectives. For instance Interviewee 3 expressed,

> *I will just say that there is an assumption in all your question that the two can be differentiated and should be, there is the normative assumption that balance is a good thing and that it's desirable or whatever and I think in my case it's quite hard to separate the two so one could see that as a negative thing or one can see that as a very positive thing but I have an interest in my job and I'm enjoying my life so much that it isn't much of a problem*.

This was an important reflection in the data collection period. The reflection meant that the researcher's opinion that work-life balance was an ideal that women want to achieve needed to be essentially eliminated at the beginning of the interviews so that the participants did not feel uncomfortable if the assumption did not relate to them. The important aspect that was noted to participants was that the study *explored* work-life balance and that *all* their experiences were important to the study.

Values

When participants were asked about their cultural values, there was often confusion around the question and so it was extended to simply a discussion of the values that the participants lived by. The reports generally centred on the **philanthropic** or humanist values of the participants, Interviewee 10 reported

> *I suppose my values are humanist… that I do feel very responsible for lots of things and people; I take too much responsibility upon myself, I sort of know this but I do and that's sometimes why I feel obliged to return and reply to emails at night and on the weekends etc. … And I suppose I do feel that duty given the history of South Africa, I do have a sense of one…in some sense I do need to be (how can I…I'm trying to think of the right word)* ***mentor*** *people – more than perhaps one would need to in a country with a more normal history.*

This philanthropic value seems to further enforce the role identity of participants as an academic. There is the underlying understanding in some of the participants' reports that as an academic one has a responsibility to give back to one's students and one's country.

Interviewee 5 reported how she has a responsibility to improve people's quality of life but as discussed above, there comes a time when one has to stop working,

> *I suppose to be able to make a difference. So that you know if you can do something to improve the quality of life that people, I think that would my long term aim. And I suppose your family and kids presumably you have to do some good more than you do harm. But in general you can actually go and make a difference. But at the same time to be able to draw the boundaries and kind of say 'I've done enough now, I'm going to creep back into my shell'.*

There is an attempt on the participant's part to create and maintain the boundaries between work and non-work domains but moreover, the participant is also reporting on how at times creating the boundary can be difficult and a negotiation of sorts.

Interviewee 4 reported taking on responsibilities that relate to protesting for human rights in and outside of the University context because of a strong obligation,

> *I feel a very strong commitment to being a good citizen, of the University and of my society and so if things are not working as they should I feel a very strong obligation to try and assist with strategies for changing that.*

This philanthropic value system was important as the data revealed that these values of humanism, improving other's quality of life, being a good citizen among others influence the maintenance of work-life balance in most cases. The participants reported working harder and for longer hours and thus creating more imbalance, for the betterment of society. Interviewee 6 expressed, "*I think [my values] make it harder to do the balance because you're not lying to yourself on the other side. You know when your balance is off."*

Partner Support

Participants with **partners** in their non-work domain varied quite a bit in terms of the reported partner's role in the achievement of work-life balance. One of the reported experiences of partner support as a promoter of work-life balance was Interviewee 2 who described,

> *…I absolutely consider co-parenting my key strategy in achieving the work balance. I could not do it; I mean I really couldn't do it if I didn't have a partner who would do it. Although you then, I mean that has its own problems because you can, you kind of get into a bit of 'check book accounting' in your relationship.*

Another report of a supportive partnering was by Interviewee 4,

> *And I also have an extremely supportive partner who's very good with admin and helps with that kind of stuff. She's there, she's amazing, she does things like files bills and organises taxes and that kind of thing so um, if I were doing this on my own, I just don't think it would be possible or at least I would have to step back from a great number of things…So the partnership has been a good thing.*

Both participants reported that co-parenting (to a large extent) had been helpful in the maintenance of work-life balance.

Interviewee 3 had a unique experience as she reported that her partner worked in the University context and he had to work at home as well. She felt that she had to follow his

example and work at home too – this seemed to distract from maintaining boundaries and constructing the boundaries between work and life outside of work.

Personality

An additional factor that the data suggested implicated the participant's work-life balance was their **personality** in the context of work behaviour. Many participants reported that working hard is part of their personality or their character, for instance Interviewee 9 reported

> *I think it has something to do with the person that I am because I just love to do my work, I just love to. I'm sure other people don't have the same problem as me because they are able to put their work on the side and have fun.*

And Interviewee 3 reported,

> *Perhaps it has to do with my character, it might well be that I choose to throw myself in, ya, maybe.*

Additionally Interviewee 2 explained,

> *I mean, no I think, that a lot of the issues with work-life balance are determined by obviously by who you are and how you approach work actually but I suppose how you approach family.*

This perspective, to a large extent, ties in with the perspective that work-life balance is a choice as was discussed in Crooker et al., (2002) study. They explained that the choice to balance life and work (combined with the degree to which organisations assist in these endeavours) will have an effect on individual's career, mental health, stress levels, as well as life satisfaction (Crooker et al., 2002). The participants in the current study were all hard working, successful, and driven women who were passionate about their work and their role (and identity) as an academic.

Conclusion

The data revealed 6 main themes from the interviews of female academics at a South African University. These themes were *Balancing, Spillover, Conflict, Institutional Influence, Governmental Influence, and Personal Aspects*.

The data revealed that as an occupation, academia has large degree of flexibility which is in line with the literature discussed above. There is flexibility in the hours that academics work as well as the variation of work tasks and activities that are done on a day-to-day basis. This flexibility was seen by some participants as an avenue for the achievement of work-life balance. For instance Interviewee 9 expressed that "*the flexibility then allows for you to create that work-life balance"*. However, there appeared to be a negative aspect to the flexibility that is found in the job; as Interviewee 10 explained, *"research, I mean you can carry on reading forever – papers, I mean you can write papers forever. So it doesn't stop – there's no point in which you say I've done enough now".*

Therefore, it would mean that female academics have to ensure that they construct and negotiate the boundaries between work and non-work domains. The data revealed that several women had negotiated and maintained those boundaries to an extent and used the flexibility of academia to enhance their work-life balance. On the other hand, other participants communicated that the boundaries between work and non-work or 'third-places' were not very distinct and were *"muddled"* as Interviewee 3 described. This indicated that academia and working at the University also allows for a high degree of permeability of boundaries. It also brings to light the confusion that can occur in cases of extreme role integration (outlined by the Boundary Theory). This construction and negotiation of boundaries was explored in the *Balancing* and *Spillover* themes below. No participant said that they had fully achieved a balance between work and their life outside of work. Hogarth et al. (2001) made the point that few people are likely to attain a perfect work-life balance and this was made apparent from the analysis of the current research data. This connects to the understanding of work-life balance as an ideal or image that is difficult to accomplish. Another important aspect was the *differences* seen in the participants' reports. The differences are an indication of the diversity of experiences that females have of work-life balance.

An academic career does allow for flexibility and there is the chance (or choices) to create a balance. But an academic career can also allow for a great deal of boundary blurring or spillover as a result of that flexibility. The data suggests that there is a very fine line where one can make use of the flexibility to promote one's own work-life balance *or* the flexibility becomes a hindrance to achieving a balance between work and life outside of work. Here the data suggests that the negotiation is about saying 'no' and allowing time for oneself or one's family outside of the work environment. However, it must be noted that not everyone

incorporates the idea of work-life balance as one that is important in their happiness in life. Perhaps this is a shortfall with the notion of work-life balance. The assumption that everyone, especially females, would want to negotiate, construct and maintain the boundaries (that may not exist in the first place) was not shared with all the participants.

Overall there was a trend for the participants to have role integration versus role segmentation as a result of highly flexible and permeable boundaries and according to the Boundary Theory, this can cause a blurring of roles and can foster interruptions, confusion and conflict. The theme of *Conflict* explored role conflict and conflict between boundaries that the data revealed.

Role identity was reported as a major component in the negotiation of work-life balance for several of the participants. The theory highlighted that integrated roles may have similar identities (Ashforth et al., 2000) and this point was emphasised by the participants. The role of 'academic' was very central to the participants' identity. Their work was reported to be completed frequently in a physical location outside of the workplace and family responsibilities or non-work activities were allowed to take place at odd times including times that are generally dedicated to work. This also provided an indication that their work role identities are strong and thus transitions between roles were frequent and did not require a great amount of conflict. However, as Boundary Theory suggest, this did create a fair amount of boundary blurring and ambiguity, especially for participants who reported a lack of work-life balance.

The research incorporated the role of institution and government policies in the achievement of work-life balance for female academics. There was minimal overlap of the role that the different Departments and Schools play in the achievement of work-life balance; some departments were very helpful and understanding whereas others were less proactive. The main institution maintained basic policies such as maternity leave and flexible working hours that certainly influence the achievement of work-life balance. However the participants did offer strategies that the institution can implement in order for work-life balance to be more of a focus of the institution (See Implications for Research below). The data indicated that it is relatively difficult to achieve a work-life balance if the institution that one works for is not supportive of and proactive in that vision for its employees. In the broader scope, the participants were not clear on the role that the South African Government plays in the achievement of work-life balance for female academics – there was the discussion of

maternity leave, the specification of working hours and other basic policies. However, the general lack of knowledge on the Governments role indicates a more deep-rooted issue; the lack of discussion and practice around work-life balance in South Africa as compared to other countries in the world. These issues then become barriers that make it more difficult for women to negotiate and maintain a desired work-life balance.

The last theme that was examined was the *Personal Aspects* theme. This section delved into some of the individual understandings of work-life balance and the challenges that female academics face in achieving this balance. The participants' values and perspectives of the concept of work-life balance was a focus of the section. Participants' personality and partner support were important to explore in order to gather a better understanding of the construction, negotiation, maintenance and crossing of boundaries of female academics

Implications for Research

Practical Implications

The participants offered suggestions and advice on ways and strategies to achieve work-life balance. This is both with regards to how the institution can assist as well as specific recommendations for women entering the field of academics. Below is a combination of the suggestions and advice.

Institutional

One of the participants explained that it is important for the institution to recognise the systematic inequalities and challenges that women face. Another contribution to work-life balance is to make sure that there are fair work-load policies in each department. Coupled with this is the need to create a culture (institutional-wide and department-wide) where people with children are open about having children and what that means to them. Further ways that an institution can assist in supporting work-life is to promote women into management who have families and who understand the struggle to find balance and to encourage a more humane environment (to see workers as human beings and not work-horses). One participant who was near to retirement proposed that institutions have more individualisation around the issue of retirement because these employees may be able to dedicate more time to work as a result of less non-work responsibilities.

A practical suggestion is for the institution to offer mentoring and skills retreats or the opportunity to work with other more experienced co-workers (and specifically co-writing for inexperienced researchers in a University context). Also specific to a university context, one participant advised that the institution creates a separate space outside their main office for academics to focus on research. An experience that was positive to one participant was the support that was given in her research in terms of funding and administrative support – this, however, was not the general experience for all the participants.

Female Academics

Several participants advised that women entering the field of academics should focus on their career if they want to advance in that career. They could possibly put off having children but should definitely publish as much as they can before having children. Another suggestion in terms of having children is to spread out the years between children. There was a suggestion for female academics to schedule time for research and be strict on how that time is utilised. In the same vein as the discussion above about saying "no", several participants advised that females do not take on too much responsibility and they should learn to stand up to colleagues about what they are not prepared to do (without being a "bad colleague"). One suggestion as a way to help in achieving work-life balance was to talk to other people about how to manage the balance on a day-to-day basis. Women should therefore be assertive and more demanding around asking for (justified) help. The participants emphasised that women should not be too hard on themselves when they struggle with the balance because everyone struggles. They must remember that there are people around them to help. With regards to practical actions that can assist within an institution, one participant recommended finding a suitable and reputable mentor. Seeking professional help, such as a therapist or a life coach, was another suggestion. Being creative with teaching and research and possibly aligning the two was a decision that helped one participant.

With regards to non-work life, one participant emphasised that women should make sure that their family does not feel neglected. Waking up early in the morning and possibly exercising was something that several participants did. The weekends were emphasised as an important time to keep free of work if possible.

It is also apparent that there should be more awareness and practical implementation of the role of the South African government in the achievement of work-life balance. There needs to be more support for women, men and families in order to create a country that fosters healthy family environments.

Theoretical Implications

Boundary Theory provided the backbone of the research and was used in the construction of the research instrument. For the most part, it gave depth in the analysis of the data in terms of the way the participants constructed, negotiated, maintained, and crossed boundaries between

work and life outside of work. The notion of role integration and the advantages and disadvantages of flexible and permeable role boundaries was certainly confirmed through the reports of the participants. There was evidence from several participants that boundaries between domains can be temporal, physical and/or cognitive perimeters, however for other participants the idea of boundaries between work and non-work domains was not as distinct as the theory proposes. This may have been as a result of a number of factors, including the absence of children in their lives. But it is important to note that the idea of creating 'mental' boundaries between domains did not appear to be a necessity for some participants to be happy. Again, this may emphasise the importance of role identity even further. The data also revealed that culture was not as much of an influence as the theory indicated. In fact, the questions regarding culture evoked a response from most of the participants that highlighted their values and, for some, the strength of their role identity as an academic.

There was a definite contrast between some of the participants to the extent to which the idea of work-life balance applied to their lives. There is an underlying assumption with work-life balance, especially with its conceptualisation in the current research, that an imbalance is a negative state. However, this did not resonate with all the participants and as mentioned in the literature this could possibly be because individual's perception of balance may not be that they have to give equal attention to work and non-work domains.

Recommendation for Future Research

Future research can perhaps examine the role that context and culture plays in people's achievement of work-life balance more closely. Perhaps choosing a sample where there is an emphasis on culture would help in that exploration. It would also be interesting to contrast the current research with the perceptions of those who work in an environment that can be described as having highly segmented roles between work and non-work. An intriguing research could be done around perceptions of employers and management on the role of work-life balance in the workplace. Some participants of the current research expressed that they did not believe that there is or should be a difference between males and females with regard to the support given by the University. It would therefore be interesting to explore the opinions of male academics on the topic of work-life balance.

Limitations of Research

The sampling of the research was one limitation. Even though the sample fit the requirements of the study through the use of purposive sampling, there was little variety in terms of the ethnicity of the sample. This is partly because of the sampling method as women were emailed after being found on the University website. A further limitation is that the whole sample was from the same University. Perhaps greater variation would have been found in the experiences and perceptions if other Universities were included. It is likely that the data collected from the ten females interviewed was limited in the full exploration of their experiences (as well as other women's experiences) of work-life balance but given the lack of responses from female academics and time constraints it was difficult to consider conducting more interviews. Thus although the findings of the research may not be transferable to all females (or specifically female academics), the sample was chosen so that the findings are likely to be applicable for understanding the negotiation of work-life balance for people who share common characteristics with the participants in the study.

Another possible limitation was that the interviews took place in the offices of the participants. This was done for the convenience of both the participants and the researcher. However, this allowed for disturbances of students and colleagues and possibly even made the participants focus on the role of an academic as opposed to their roles outside of the workplace.

Conclusion

Work-life balance is a topic that attempts to understand the conflict that people have in ensuring that they give equal, if not sufficient, time and energy to work and life outside of work. Most of the participants' perspectives on work-life balance were consistent with this interpretation of the concept. Other perceptions of work-life balance were that it is an ideal or a choice. The data also confirmed that female academics generally have flexible and permeable boundaries between different domains. This is consistent with previous literature and research. The analysis revealed that the role of an academic can entail a fair amount of role integration between work and non-work roles. The reported outcomes of this role integration confirm some of the Boundary Theory's assumptions including reported experiences of confusion. Furthermore the data emphasised the centrality of role identification in the negotiation of work-life balance. Although Boundary Theory was the foundation of the research instrument and the analysis, there were aspects of the data that was better explained using the definitions of work-life balance that were provided in the Literature Review. For instance, the data found less of an importance in culture in the maintenance of the participants' work-life balance. This is indicative of the complex nature of work-life balance and that *balance* is not the same for different individuals. Finally, there needs to be a considerable amount discussion and action within South African institutions and government with regards to supporting and encouraging citizens in finding balance in their lives. Work-life balance, even with its numerous understandings, can be a positive goal for individuals and organisations to strive towards in their own way.

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Appendix

- Appendix 1: Interview Schedule
- Appendix 2: Cover Letter and Consent for Participation and Recording Form
- Appendix 3: Thematic Analysis Table