SUMMARY OF THE THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

This thesis examined the boundary management of employees in a time in which the boundaries between work and home are no longer self-evidently defined by organizational and cultural guidelines. The diluted demarcation of the work-home boundaries has most and for all consequences for boundaries around the home domain. Previous research indicates that many employees allow their work to intrude more into their family lives than their families into their work (Hall & Richter, 1988; Frone et al., 1992a; Eagle, Miles & Icenogle; 1997). Therefore, the main objective of this study was to examine why employees integrate work into their home lives or, in contrast, why they separate work from their home lives.

The extent of integration of work in home life was examined by focusing on the boundary permeability of the home domain. Permeability is the degree to which someone who is physically at home allows psychological and behavioral elements from work to enter the home domain, and determines the extent of integration or separation of the two domains (Hall & Richter, 1988; Kreiner et al., 2006) 28. The central research question of this study is if and how work, home and individual characteristics influence home permeability. Further, we analyzed how these characteristics influence the consequences of high home permeability for work to family conflict. In this context we examined for which employees’ permeable home boundaries can be beneficial, and for which employees’ permeable home boundaries provoke work to family conflict. Finally, gender differences in the antecedents and consequences of home permeability were studied.

The research questions in this thesis were examined by means of both qualitative and quantitative data, collected in a Dutch multinational in the public and business services. Because research on work-home boundaries is still relatively new, such a mixed methods design enabled us to collect detailed information on boundary management in the own words of employees, and to incorporate this information in the quantitative part of this study. Twenty four employees, differing in gender, age, job level and job content were interviewed in-depth. These interviews helped to develop a quantitative survey that resulted in a valid sample of a 1,065 completed questionnaires.

This chapter provides an overview and discussion of the results of this thesis. The main research findings are summarized and the research questions answered. Throughout this chapter,

28 The concept of permeability can be applied to all kind of boundaries, national borders as well, etc.
we reflect on our findings and their implications for theory and policies in organizations. First, we discuss the concept of the boundaries around the home domain. Next, we discuss three factors that may influence how employees manage the permeability of their home boundaries. Successively we discuss the influence of work characteristics, home characteristics and boundary preferences on home permeability. After that, we discuss the influence of home permeability on WTF conflict. Subsequently, we discuss the methodological implications of our results and make suggestions for future research. We end with some concluding remarks.

THE BOUNDARIES AROUND THE HOME DOMAIN

Boundaries, or its twin concept borders, are widely used within different fields of science, such as social psychology, history, and sociology. Research topics such as identity, and ethnic and cultural group rights, have for instance been addressed by means of a study to boundaries. Boundaries can be described as ‘lines of demarcation between domains, defining the point at which domain-relevant behavior begins or ends’ (Campbell Clark 2000:756). Boundaries may be purely mental categorizations, but more often boundaries are translated within more visible, physical or institutional forms (Nippert-Eng, 1996a).

Boundaries are partially constructed by external factors - such as work and home characteristics - and partially created by means of individuals’ own behavior (Hall & Richter, 1988; Campbell Clark, 2000). Because boundaries are a result of the interaction between individuals and their environment, the study of boundaries is especially useful in examining why some individuals integrate work in their home lives, whereas others separate the two domains. This thesis focuses on the boundaries that individuals create themselves by means of their preferences and their behavior with respect to home permeability. In particular, we examine how more tangible work and home characteristics influence how employees manage the permeability of their home boundaries.

Boundaries are, besides from their visible, behavioral and institutional forms, conceptual and mental by nature (Zerubavel, 1991; Nippert-Eng 1996a). Therefore, it was essential for a thorough understanding of our results to explore the meaning of the concept of boundaries for employees of the multinational. In chapter two, we inductively explored the boundaries between work and home by means of a grounded theory approach (Glaser & and Strauss, 1967). Four types of boundaries that are relevant to the interviewees emerged from the interview material. These boundaries address space, time, mental overlap and social relations with co-workers. The
spatial boundary defines the line between work space and personal space. If work tasks are performed at home, work enters the personal space of employees. Some are willing to do that, for others the spatial boundary is impermeable. The temporal boundary delineates the working hours from the non-working hours. For most interviewees, this boundary addresses working overtime. Again, employees differ in their willingness to allow work to intrude on their private time. The mental boundary concerns thinking about work at home, and thinking about home at work. Particularly thinking about work at home is a prominent issue for our employees. Some interviewees prefer to forget about work; others don’t mind to think about work occasionally; few like it when they think about work a lot. The social boundary reflects two aspects: communicating with co-workers on personal matters and socializing with co-workers outside working hours. Again, the interviewees are divided about the desirability of mixing personal and the professional contacts. Especially meeting co-workers after official working hours is seen as prominent step towards friendship. The interviewees differed on their preferences and behavior for these boundaries; for some these boundaries were (preferably) impermeable of nature; for others (preferably) permeable of nature. The next section discusses the occurrence of permeable home boundaries more in-depth.

The prevalence of permeable home boundaries
Within work-family research there is a growing concern that due to modern technologies and work arrangements the boundaries between work and home are becoming increasingly blurred (e.g. Sennett, 1998; Desroche, Hilton & Larwood, 2005). If work can be done anytime and anywhere, where does it end? This concern may suggest that every employee reads work related papers at home, checks his or her email or has his or her mobile phone standing by during evenings and weekends. However, many employees still separate work from home. Almost half of our respondents seldom receive work related phone calls when they are home, seldom of think of work at home and seldom engage in work activities when they are home. Most of the time, these employees have an impermeable home boundary. More than ten percents never engages in work after working hours.

Nevertheless, more than thirty-five percent of our respondents are regularly occupied with work activities when they are home. Mostly, this is by thinking of work and performing work tasks. For these employees work does not end at the end of the working day, but stretches until they set a limit and say: ‘that’s it for today’.

Men have more often permeable home boundaries than women, especially when they have children. Employees who have a partner take their work more often home – mentally or practically – than employees who do not have a partner. Both male and female employees in
higher job levels have more permeable home boundaries than their co-workers who work in lower job levels. There is neither a significant direct relation between permeability and age, nor between age and job level. Consistent with previous research (Campbell Clark, 2002a), the more hours employees work according their contracts, the more employees have permeable home boundaries. Thus, work integrates in home life for a specific group of employees, namely, mostly male, in high job positions that require high levels of commitment, who have a partner and children, and who work many hours.

**THE INFLUENCE OF WORK CHARACTERISTICS ON HOME PERMEABILITY**

**Structural and cultural work characteristics**

One of the questions of this study is if work characteristics influence home permeability and, if so, in what way. Previous research has commonly acknowledged that work arrangements and cultural expectations within organizations can trigger and compel employees to integrate work in their home lives (e.g. Sennett, 1998; Rau & Hyland, 2002; Kreiner, 2006). Though the influence of work characteristics on home permeability was qualitatively studied before (Nippert-Eng, 1996a), until now the specific influence of several structural and cultural work characteristics has not been statistically examined. Therefore, this study contributes to existing research by empirically examining the effect of various work arrangements on home permeability.

In chapter three we studied the influence of several work characteristics on home permeability: telecommuting, flextime, working overtime, implicit pressure to work overtime coming from co-workers and/or managers, and the opportunity to separate (cf. Beach, 1989; Perlow, 1998; Rau & Hyland, 2002). It was hypothesized that work characteristics that stretch the traditional time and space markers will increase home permeability. Results indicate that work characteristics do indeed directly influence home permeability.

The primary influential factor in the work situation is the perception of employees that their job simply does not allow separation of home from work. Employees, who telecommute and those who feel pressure to work overtime from their co-workers and managers, report the lowest possibility to separate. Given that separation can facilitate the combination of work and home if the domains are very different (Campbell Clark, 2000), that separation is often highly valued (Pryor, 1983) and that it can diminish work-family conflict and role confusion and the blurring of boundaries, such perception of employees must be taken seriously.

Measuring and interpreting attitudes and perceptions in social research is however difficult (Alwin & Krosnick, 1991). What does an attitude measure; are objective circumstances responsible for this perception or is it because employees behave in a certain way they feel that
they have no other choice? Interpretation therefore requires caution. Nevertheless, if employees report that their job simply not allows them – and others who would engage in this job – to separate home from work, this suggests that they do not feel in control over the way they manage their home boundaries. This may have consequences for the experience of work family conflict: Thomas & Ganster (1995), for instance found that employees who feel in control over work and family matters experience lower levels of work family conflict. Moreover, work-family conflict can result in physical and psychological health problems (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). For organizations it is therefore essential, out of economical motives to reduce absence through illness as well, that employees feel in control - at least partly - over the extent that work integrates in their home lives.

As expected and consistent with previous research on telecommuting (Beach, 1989; Hill, Hawkins & Miller, 1996), telecommuting integrates work in home life. Employees who telecommute, think more often of work at home and interrupt more often family activities for work responsibilities. Even when employees telecommute rarely or only from time to time, home permeability increases. Thus, if separation is desired, it is essential to actively establish boundaries (Ahrentzen, 1990).

Previous research (Rau & Hyland, 2002) proposed that flextime increases temporal flexibility, while allowing for boundary separation. Contrary to this proposition, results show a positive association between flextime and boundary permeability. Analysis suggests that the effect of flextime on home permeability may be explained by a pressure to work overtime. Many parents make use of flextime to be able to pick up their children from school. If employees, however, feel pressured to work overtime, either because it is implicitly expected or because co-workers work longer hours, it can be difficult to end the work day when going home (Hochschild, 1997), and thus employees can be inclined to work overtime at home (Fernandez, 1990). Chapter four and five shows that men with children have higher permeable home boundaries than men who do not have children. If a family-supportive work arrangement, such as flextime, is not supported by a family-supportive work culture, it is difficult, if not impossible, to facilitate the combination of work and home. Previous research therefore argues that family-supportive workplace cultures reduce spillover rather than the availability of arrangements such as flextime (Mennino, Rubin & Brayfield, 2005; Brannen, 2005).

Implicit pressure to work overtime, especially coming from managers, has indeed a significant effect on home permeability. Though some interviewees told that they occasionally tried to resist the pressure to work overtime, they found it extremely difficult and not well-received. Especially young highly educated employees who do not have a long tenure with the company are vulnerable for such boundary control (see also Perlow, 1998). HRM-professionals
must therefore acknowledge that work arrangements such as flextime and telecommuting, are supported by a work culture that does not target employees who make use of these arrangements as non-career oriented (Kossek et al., 1999). Since work characteristics differ for employees in high and low level jobs, we discuss next how these work characteristics can affect employees in low and high job levels differently.

**Employees in low and high level jobs**

This study was not limited to a singular group of white collar workers, but incorporated employees within both low and high job levels. Consistent with previous research (Breedveld, 1998; Swanberg, Pitt-Catsouphes, & Drescher-Burke, 2005), we found both in our qualitative and our quantitative data that employees who work in low job levels have less access to work arrangements, such as telecommuting and flexible working hours than employees in higher job levels. Thus, respondents in low-level - manual or administrative - jobs are given less control over their own working hours and work place than respondents in knowledge based high-level jobs. Therefore, employees working in low level jobs have less option to integrate work and home if they wish to.

The participants of the interviews provided us with a more detailed insight on the work environments of employees in low and high job levels in the multinational. The work tasks of interviewees in high level jobs are not strictly demarcated. These employees have a global task description, but a far more rigid deadline that prescribes when the job must be finished. Their working hours and working place are not strictly defined: these employees can start late or leave early on their own account and are able to work at home occasionally if they wish to. There is however a downside. Most of them have a contract that explicitly rules out the possibility of payment of overtime. Many feel pressured to work overtime; practicing a ‘nine to five mentality’ is not easily accepted, by managers nor co-workers. Work has to be finished before the deadline; and work can always be finished because of a lack of strict temporal and spatial boundaries. As one of the participants reflected: ‘I just have to finish my work, and how I achieve this, that is my problem. And my responsibility.’ Perlow (1998) calls this pressure a form of or an autonomy paradox; others speak of a ‘greedy work place’ (Coser, 1974; Nippert-Eng, 1996a). The boundary autonomy of high level employees is therefore limited as well.

Consistent with results of the statistical analyses, the interviews show that the more employees separate work from home life, the less autonomy they have with respect to their working hours and work place. Most of these employees work in relatively low job levels, in administrative or manual functions. Their work context is rather Tayloristic by nature. Most have strict working hours and none have the opportunity to telecommute, though many of them would
prefer to telecommute occasionally or on a regular basis. Their work tasks are generally strictly defined, sometimes in very specific details. Thus, the boundaries around work are clearly marked for these employees. As we concluded in chapter three, just as high levels of home permeability can be involuntary, so can having impermeable home boundaries. The concern of work/family research and of HRM-professionals for the integration of work in home life should therefore be stretched out to the significant group of employees who are excluded from this development in the world of work.

THE INFLUENCE OF HOME CHARACTERISTICS ON HOME PERMEABILITY

The family situation and the division of paid and unpaid labor
The overall direct influence of home characteristics on the permeability of the home domain is modest. This is consistent with previous research that indicates that the integration of work in home life is a result of work rather than home antecedents (Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998; Byron, 2005). However, just as the work situation can demarcate how much autonomy employees have in managing the boundaries they desire, the homes of employees can do so as well. And, the home domain may define if integration is useful or on the contrary disadvantageous. Some previous research suggested that employees, who combine their work with considerable home responsibilities, are most likely to integrate work in their home lives (e.g. Kossek et al., 1999; Clay, 1995). Other studies indicated that employees who have few home responsibilities are better able to perform work tasks at home because work does not have to compete with home tasks (Nippert-Eng, 1996a; Perlow, 1998).

Chapter two shows that some interviewees with home responsibilities have permeable boundaries. Stretching regular working hours and places into their homes facilitate them to fulfill the needs of both work and home. However, interviewees who integrate work and home to the highest extent are those who do not have many family responsibilities. These young employees experience little to no restrictions from their home situation; they have no children and managing work and home is rarely based on strict agreements with their partner. As long as they do not cross their own biological and psychological boundaries, any level of integration or separation is possible. Previous research indicated that many of these young adults, especially young females, know that they have to make choices about the combination of work at home at some point; but until it comes to that they have much freedom of choice (Du Bois-Reymond, Te Poel & Ravesloot, 1998).
In chapter four, we elaborate on these findings by studying whether employees who have to combine their work with the care for children are most inclined to have permeable home boundaries, and, whether high home permeability is indeed beneficial for these employees. Since men and women combine work and home in different ways, we were especially interested in studying gender differences. Results show significant gender differences: whereas men with children generally have high permeable home boundaries, women with children generally have impermeable home boundaries that separate home from work. An interesting result, since previous research proposed that especially women with care responsibilities would be inclined to have permeable boundaries and to profit from them (Kossek et al 1999). We proposed that our results might be explained by the gender division of paid labor: in the Netherlands it is common that women reduce their hours in paid labor when they have children. In chapter five, we tested our proposition that the division of labor influences home permeability. We hypothesized that employees who are part of a household in which both partners – nearly – work fulltime will be inclined to have permeable home boundaries. Since women generally take on most of the home responsibilities (Nelson & Burke, 2002) – in dual earner families as well (Bielby & Bielby, 1989) - we expected this relation to be stronger for women than for men. Inconsistent with our expectation, dual earners do not have high permeable home boundaries. Since most of these employees do not have children, one possible explanation is that these employees are able to work overtime at the office. Another explanation could be that, because in dual earner households two partners are confronted with a busy work schedule, employees may wish to protect their homes from work intrusions by refusing to take their work home (Edgell Becker & Moen, 1999).

We expected that employees who are part of a household that unequally distributes the paid labor, will be most inclined to have permeable home boundaries when they work more hours than their partners. Since men generally take on most of the paid labor, it was hypothesized – and expected based on the results of chapter four – that men have higher permeable home boundaries if they are part of a household based on a one and a half breadwinner model, than women living in such households. Consistent with these expectations, results show that employees who have a partner with a secondary job are most inclined to have permeable home boundaries. In our sample these are all male. These male employees are part of a household in which their partner takes primary responsibility for home tasks while the employees have the autonomy to concede the demands of work. Results therefore suggest that being relieved of household obligations increases home permeability, rather than that juggling work and home responsibilities triggers employees to have high permeable home boundaries. Because of the gendered distribution of paid and unpaid labor in the Netherlands (Portegijs, Boelens & Olsthoorn, 2004; Tijdens, Van der Lippe
& De Ruiter, 2000), combining many work and home responsibilities seems rarely a direct reason for employees to integrate work into their homes.

**Family expectations**

Previous research (Nippert-Eng, 1996a; Campbell Clark, 2000; Perlow, 1998) indicated that family expectations influence home permeability, as was also suggested by the interviewees in our study (see chapter two). In accordance with this our statistical analyses show that the expectations of partners and/or children directly influence home permeability: if partners strongly appreciate it when employees come home early or when they do not object to working at home, employees are inclined to have more permeable home boundaries. Separate analyses for men and women point out gender differences. Whereas women do have more permeable home boundaries when their families do not object if they perform work tasks at home, family expectations do not influence men’s boundary permeability.

**THE INFLUENCE OF BOUNDARY PREFERENCES ON HOME PERMEABILITY**

**Preferences for integration or separation**

Previous research indicated that individuals have preferences on where and when they wish to draw the line between work and home (Nippert-Eng, 1996a; Campbell Clark, 2000). The main objective of employees in desiring integration or separation is to minimize difficulty in combining work and home (Ashforth et al., 2000; Rau & Hyland, 2002). In accordance with previous findings (e.g. Nippert-Eng, 1996a), both qualitative and quantitative data showed that employees differ in their preferences for integration or separation of work in home life. Some employees prefer mainly permeable boundaries, some mainly impermeable boundaries, and some prefer permeable boundaries in some aspects and impermeable boundaries on others.

Chapter two suggested that four mechanisms relate to boundary preferences. Having home responsibilities induced a preference for integration for some employees (mostly male), for other (just two female) employees home responsibilities induced a preference for separation. High level jobs and attaching great importance to work seemed to relate to a preference for permeable boundaries as well. In contrast, experiencing a reorganization as negative induced a preference for separation.

Consistent with previous research findings (Rothbard et al., 2005), results of chapter four showed that, controlled for the effects of work characteristics, boundary preferences influence how employees manage the permeability of their home boundaries. Employees who prefer to
separate home from work have less permeable boundaries than employees who prefer integration. People may choose to make use of work arrangements that fit their preferences, either by using the arrangements that are offered in their present job or by applying for jobs that match their preferences (Rau & Hyland, 2002). Chapter three supports this suggestion that there may be a self-selection mechanism at stake: individuals who prefer integration work in jobs with more temporal flexibility.

However, results suggest that if people do not have the opportunity to act on their preferences, permeability can also be involuntary pressed on to employees by means of their work characteristics. In chapter three we examined whether boundary preferences moderate the influence of the work characteristics on home permeability, in particular telecommuting. This is an important question since it indirectly asks whether employees are able to separate work from home if they wish to. The results suggest that boundary preferences do not serve as sufficient counter pressures to the positive effect of telecommuting on boundary permeability. Consequently, this may imply that employees who prefer separation but who telecommute cannot avoid high home permeability. This is of special interest, since chapter four showed that for employees who prefer to separate home from work, home permeability more likely results in WTF conflict. Thus, permeability does not necessarily reflect voluntary behavior. In fact, results indicate that telecommuting has a stronger impact on boundary permeability for employees who prefer separation, than for employees who prefer integration.

Two processes may increase the impact of telecommuting on home permeability for individuals favoring separation. First, if the home domain is exclusively dedicated to home and family life, interruptions from work attract much attention (Nippert-Eng, 1996b; Ashforth et al., 2000). Second, such separation increases the magnitude of change, making boundary crossing more difficult (Ashforth et al., 2000). In contrast, for individuals who perceive work and home as one domain of life, crossings are easy and hardly noticed.

Who prefers to integrate and who to separate?
Results of chapter two and four showed that employees who prefer integration generally work in high job levels, whereas employees who prefer separation generally work in low job levels. Many employees working in high level jobs are willing to integrate work in their home lives. At the same time, as we have discussed previously, this is also encouraged and expected by means of work arrangements - such as telecommuting- and a ‘long-hours culture’ on the work floor. Chapter two further showed that having many home responsibilities seems to induce a preference for integration of work and home. Interviewees with responsibilities at home generally prefer permeability since it enables them to fulfill the needs and demands for both home and work. In
addition, the importance of work seems to relate to the nature of employees’ boundary preferences. Employees who have a strong work ambition report strong preferences for permeable boundaries that allow work and home to overlap. However, when their work involvement becomes excessive and unhealthy, more impermeable boundaries are preferred. Finally, negatively perceived reorganizations appear to have a negative influence on the willingness of employees to integrate work and home. Particularly when employees feel little appreciation from their employers, they may respond by preferring impermeable home boundaries. Chapter two suggests that employees develop their boundary preferences in consideration with their own needs and those of their work and home environments. In this, boundary preferences seem the result of an assessment of the equilibrium between the investments and benefits of work and home life.

HOME PERMEABILITY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON WORK–TO-FAMILY CONFLICT

Previous research showed that high home permeability often results in WTF conflict (Campbell Clark 2002a,b; Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006). Consistent with these results, chapter four shows that the more employees have permeable home boundaries, the more WTF conflict they report. Past research provided less clarity on the conditions under which permeability results in WTF conflict. This thesis examined the influence of three factors on the relation between home permeability and WTF conflict: boundary preferences, household characteristics and gender.

The role of boundary preferences

Previous studies indicated that individuals differ in their preferences for the integration or separation of work and home life (Nippert-Eng, 1996a; Ashforth et al., 2000). This study adds to previous findings by showing that boundary preferences not only directly influence home permeability, but that they also play a moderating role in the antecedents and consequences of permeability as well. Chapter four further examined the interaction of boundary preferences on the relation between home permeability and WTF conflict. We expected that the impact of high home permeability on WTF conflict depends on the boundary preferences of employees. This expectation was confirmed: results indicate that the effect of permeability on WTF conflict differs for employees who prefer separation and for employees who prefer integration. High home permeability has a small effect on WTF conflict for employees who prefer integration; while it has a strong effect on WTF conflict for employees who prefer separation. Thus, permeability does not inevitably result in high levels of WTF conflict; if permeability is preferred, it gives less
cause for an increase of WTF conflict. However, integration can have a downside if employees prefer separation (Rothbard, Phillips and Dumas, 2005; Kreiner, 2006). Since many family friendly policies aim at the integration of work and home (such as telecommuting, Rau & Hyland, 2002; Hyland, Rowsome & Rowsome, 2005), and indeed increase home permeability as the results of chapter three show, caution is warranted as integration may provoke more conflict than it prevents. These arrangements, especially flextime, are desired by many employees (Van Hoof et al., 2002); but their attraction may depend on the level of work family conflict that employees experience. Making use of Boundary Theory, Rau and Hyland (2002) found that employees who experience high levels of conflict were attracted to organizations who offer flextime, whereas employees with low levels of conflict were attracted to organizations who offer telecommuting. These results, and the results of this present study, suggest that employees who prefer to separate home from work may not benefit from work arrangements that are classified as family friendly, such as telecommuting and flextime. Organizations must therefore be that employees differ in their preferences for integration, and that these preferences may affect the impact of home permeability on work-family conflict, and the desirability to make use of flexible work arrangements.

**Home permeability and work-to-family conflict: the role of the family situation**

Chapter five examined the effect of household characteristics on the relation between home permeability and WTF conflict. In this, we examined for which households permeable home boundaries can minimize WTF conflict, and for which households permeability can aggravate conflict. Results of chapter four and five show that the effect of home permeability on WTF conflict, depends on the home characteristics of employees. Though permeability results in higher levels of conflict for all households except singles, some home characteristics seem to buffer this effect. However, for none of the households did permeability have a beneficial effect on WTF conflict. For both men and women permeability has a strong, positive influence on WTF conflict; though permeability contributes more strongly to WTF for men than for women.

Consistent with the proposition of previous research (Kossek et al., 1999; Clay, 1995), having permeable home boundaries is less harmful when employees combine their work with the care for children. For both men and women, permeability results less often in WTF conflict when they have children. Home permeability results however less often in WTF conflict for women with children, than for men with children. Men are more likely to experience WTF conflict because of permeability than women in any case: with or without children. These findings support the notion that integration can be beneficial for combining work and home.
Home permeability and work-to-family conflict: the role of the distribution of paid and unpaid labor

For both men and women permeability results more often in WTF conflict when they are part of a dual earner family, though the relation between permeability and WTF conflict is stronger for men than for women in such circumstances. These households have to combine two demanding jobs with their home responsibilities (e.g. Hammer, Allen & Grigsby, 1997). When there is little time in a household for family responsibilities, bringing work home could make it even more difficult to get round to home life.

Results show that the relation between home permeability and WTF conflict differs for men and women under specific home characteristics. Consistent with previous research (Van der Lippe et al., 2003), we found that the working hours of a partner can reduce negative consequences of home permeability for male employees: men report the lowest levels of conflict when their partner has a secondary job. Men do report more conflict when they are single earners; perhaps partners who work themselves are more used to work interrupting home life. The total number of hours families work, is scarcely related to the effect of permeability on WTF conflict for female employees. Women who work less than their partners experience just slightly less conflict because of permeability than female dual earners.

An explanation can be that many women are primarily responsible for household responsibilities, regardless of the working hours of their partners. For women who are primarily responsible for performing the household tasks, permeability results more often in WTF conflict. Interestingly, for women who equally share the household tasks permeability is not significantly related to WTF conflict. Men experience considerably more conflict because of permeable home boundaries when employees equally share the household tasks and less when their partner performs these tasks.

In contrast to the notion of previous research that employees who divide work and home traditionally along gender lines seek to separate work and home (Felstead & Jewson, 2000), we found that employees in conventional households - in which men work more hours than women-, have the highest permeable home boundaries, and experience the lowest levels of conflict because of it. By decreasing work demands (Edgell Becker & Moen, 1999), the one and a half breadwinner model makes it possible for families to take care of both family needs and work demands. Therefore, interestingly, traditional households are most adapted to and capable of integrating work in home life. It is important to note once again that taking work home is not always a matter of choice. Chapter three showed that many employees feel that their jobs simply do not allow them to separate home from work. Singles and families with a ‘one and a half job
model’ will however be most likely to be able to face these challenges of integrating work in home life.

Integrating work in home life requires an active form of boundary management. If one partner is not primary responsible for fulfilling home responsibilities, home permeability can result in high levels of conflict, as is the case for many dual earner families. Though the distribution of household tasks does not directly influence home permeability, it can determine whether permeability leads to conflict or not. Because of the gendered division of labor in the Netherlands, men are able to fulfill the demands of contemporary jobs, while women make sure that WTF conflict is minimal. It is therefore of importance that organizations focus their attention on gender differences, not just in society but in their own organization as well (Benschop, 1996). Because women take on the majority of the household and care tasks, it is more difficult for women to be able to concede to the greedy demands for long working hours and constant availability of modern organizations, than it is for men (Van Echtelt, 2007). In this, women still provide the necessary backstage support for both men and modern organizations. By taking primary responsibility for home life, by taking on secondary jobs, women support their partners’ effort to succeed in work. This is by no means because women see themselves as subordinate to their partners; many employed women give priority to family in managing work and family (Bielby & Bielby, 1989) and desire to work less hours in paid employment than men (Van Hoof, Bruin, Schoemaker & Vroom, 2002).

The data in this study suggest that the relations between work and home contexts, permeability and its consequences for WTF conflict operate differently for men and women. Thus, future Boundary Theory research must not aim for an overall theoretical model that explains boundary management for all employees, but rather one that incorporates gender differences.

This study was performed within a multinational in the Netherlands. In studying how employees manage work and home, the Netherlands provide an interesting, but specific context. The Netherlands are known for their large number of one and a half breadwinner households, in which one partner works – almost – fulltime and the other works part-time. This type of dividing paid and unpaid labor still gains popularity among employees today. Results of this thesis show that this – gendered – division of labor deeply affects how employees manage the boundaries between work and home. We concluded that because of the gendered division of labor, having to combine work and home responsibilities rarely incites employees to integrate work in their homes. However, a study within a country in which both parents work more often on a fulltime basis, such as Sweden, might provide different or additional results. Our data shows that dual earners are less likely to integrate work in their homes; however many of our Dutch dual earners
do not have children living at home. If both partners work fulltime and do have children to care for, they may find it beneficial or necessary to integrate work in their home lives, as previous research suggested (Kossek et al., 1999). Though the Netherlands provide a specific context, working part-time is not a rarity in other countries: many women work part-time as well in Sweden and the United States (though more hours than Dutch women\textsuperscript{30}) (Keuzenkamp, Wennekers & Breedveld, 2006).

METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY

This section provides the methodological implications of this study. First, we discuss the generalizability of the case study compared to other organizations in the Netherlands, followed by the generalizability of the sample for the working population within the case study. Next, we discuss limitations of this study and provide some suggestions for future research.

Generalizability of the case study

The selected case study was chosen for its wide variation in work characteristics, and its history that reflects organizational transitions over the last century. In a relatively short period of time, this multinational has endured organizational, technological and cultural developments that affected the relation between work and home: the transition of mainly manual work to mainly knowledge work, the entering of female workers in the organization, the globalization of business services and the use of ICT. Many of the elder employees in the multinational witnessed these developments. Today, the employees in high level jobs are primarily engaged in knowledge work in which they are confronted with the demands and dynamics of the international operating multinational. In contrast, many of the employees who work in low level jobs, still work in a more Tayloristic setting. The work context of these employees is bounded by fixed working hours, one predetermined work place, and a detailed work description. In line with the organizational transitions, the multinational had an initiative role in the application of contemporary work arrangements, such as flextime and telecommuting. All in all, this case study is a good example of a contemporary Dutch organization that has to deal with the organizational changes within economical and labor markets. The present study presents a detailed examination of how employees within the context of their jobs and the organization manage the combination of work and home.

\textsuperscript{30} Dutch women generally work 22 hours a week; in Sweden women generally work 27,4 hours a week and in the US 32,7 hours a week (Keuzenkamp, Wennekers & Breedveld, 2006).
Other organizations in the Netherlands may differ from our case study in organizational size, work culture, gender distribution, the occurrence of reorganizations, and the use of flexible work arrangements. Work-life issues vary by organizational, job and cultural factors (Kossek et al. 1999; Kossek & Lambert, 2005). For example, if an organization does not offer their employees to telecommute (or if it is not possible because of the job, as with bus drivers) or work ends at a specific time each day, as with cashiers and some of our respondents, work may not enhance home permeability.

**Generalizability within the case study**

In three departments, all employees were addressed for the quantitative survey. Of two departments the response is representative on demographics for their population. For one department the final sample represents its population on gender and age, but deviates slightly for job level in that employees working in lower job levels responded less often than employees working in high job levels. Of one department, a stratified sample was drawn from its population, women and employees in very low and very high job levels were overrepresented. The response is representative for the sample on gender, but again employees in low job levels participated less frequently in the survey.

Though employees within low job levels were oversampled, employees working in higher job levels responded more often to our survey (17 percent, compared to 33 percent). Practical reasons could explain why employees in high job levels had a higher response than employees in low job levels: employees in higher job levels were able to fill-in the web survey, whereas employees in lower job levels were not able to do this and filled in a survey in print. However it is possible as well – and supported by the results of this thesis- that employees in higher job levels have different experiences and attitudes with respect to the boundaries between work and home. Consistent with previous research (Swanberg et al., 2005), in the present multinational, employees in high job levels have more access to flexible work arrangements and are more often confronted with a work culture that asks for long working hours. Therefore, employees who have permeable home boundaries may be more appealed to fill in a questionnaire on the integration of work in home life.

Since the study was conducted within one multinational, several work factors, such as organizational climate, were kept constant. Moreover, it provided for a better comparability of important work characteristics, such as flexible work arrangements and job level. Throughout the organization, one scale of job levels is used. Therefore we know that respondent ‘A’ who works in job level 6 can be compared with respondent ‘B’ who works in job level 6. In addition, because
of the use of both qualitative and quantitative data we were able to get insight into the specifics and particularities of the organization, and thus of the work context of our respondents.

The data for this study are not necessarily representative of how employees in and outside the Netherlands manage the boundaries between work and home. Nevertheless, because the central concepts in the theory on work-home boundaries were included and the situational context was synchronic for the respondents in this single case study, the data was suited for testing explanatory hypotheses. However, examining the hypotheses as tested in this thesis in other organizations will help to determine the generality of the results.

**Limitations of this study and recommendations for future research**

This study has some limitations that need to be taken into account when interpreting the results. Because the staffing of the organization reflect the highly gendered division of paid and unpaid labor in the Netherlands, our data was highly skewed on gender as well. Our data consisted of twice as many men (66 percent) than women (33 percent). As a result, some relations could not be examined for men and women separately, such as the distribution of paid labor – except for dual earners – and household tasks. This implies that for analyses in which we did not control for the division of labor or gender (some of the analyses in chapter four), gendered effects partly may be explained by the skewed gender division of paid and unpaid labor.

Previous research indicated that employees are in control of some aspects that influence how they manage the boundaries between work and home; other aspects delimit their discretion in boundary management (e.g. Campbell Clark, 2002a,b). The difficulty with (the measurement of) permeability is that it can reflect both intended openness of the home boundary and unintended ‘defenseless’ intrusion of work in home life (Campbell Clark, 2002a). The measurement of home permeability as used in this study does not make a distinction in this. Results of this thesis do however support the notion that home permeability reflects both voluntary and involuntary behavior of employees. For instance, results suggest that employees who prefer separation but who do telecommute cannot avoid home permeability. In addition, for employees who prefer separation, home permeability results more often in WTF conflict. Future research should therefore incorporate a measure of home permeability that reflects both the intended and unintended openness of the home boundary.

The flexible work arrangements in this study were limited to the use of flexible working hours and telecommuting. Though some of our respondents were available for ‘emergencies’ outside their working hours, they did not have to work in other atypical work arrangements, such as shift work. Previous research however indicated that especially employees who work in shifts
have difficulty in combining work and home (Presser, 2003; Jansen, Kant, Nijhuis, Swaen & Kristensen, 2004).

Results of this study suggest that employees manage the boundary permeability of their homes in interaction with their work, their family members and their own preferences. It is likely that these factors are taken into consideration all together, and employees will weigh up the pros and cons of each interest. Therefore, we would have preferred to perform a structural equation model analysis in order to test the multiple relations in the process of boundary management. Making use of latent variables, such a method would have enabled us to incorporate work and home characteristics, preferences, permeability and consequences in one model. However, because boundary management is such a complex process in which many relations are non-linear (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999; Eby et al., 2005), and because some of our variables were highly skewed, this study was not suited for establishing structural equation or general linear models. Moreover because of the various non-linear relations between the concepts, studying how employees manage their home boundaries, and at which costs and benefits, involves studying many interaction effects. In one study we were able to establish an interaction effect by adopting an interaction term, as is the most appropriate way to establish non-linear effects (Aiken & West, 1991). In two other studies however, due to high multicollinearity between the interaction terms and their single components, we were not able to do that. Though we were able to establish the interaction effects by means of categorizing the data, we were not able to examine which interaction effects have the strongest effect. In order to be able to analyze data for employees in less prevalent categories (such as employees – and especially women – who prefer integration; women who take on the majority of the paid labor; single parents; etc.), future research may require a very large sample size and a stronger overrepresentation of these minority categories. In addition, the highly gendered divided fulltime labor market in the Netherlands requires that these relations are tested as well in countries in which both partners work fulltime more often (for example Denmark). In this way, future research may elaborate on the present results and test the full model of relations as proposed in this thesis.

Throughout this thesis, boundary management has been typed as a process; by this we mean that employees do not manage their boundaries in a social vacuum, but in interaction with their surroundings. Results show that work and home contexts can influence, and sometimes prescribe, boundary permeability. And, in its turn, the boundary permeability of employees can have consequences for their environment, such as the rise of WTF conflict. The narratives in chapter two showed that employees adjust their boundary preferences in a continuous process of weighing up their own needs and those of work and home. For most employees, neither their work and home, nor their own preferences and boundary behavior are static by nature. It is likely
that as the employees’ environment changes, their preferences and behavior will change with them, as is indicated by previous research (Nippert-Eng, 1996a). Likewise, if employees experience a lot of conflict because of home permeability, employees may adjust their preferences towards more separation (Rau & Hyland, 2002). And since boundary preferences directly influence boundary permeability, as this thesis showed, employees may decrease their home permeability to shelter home life from work influences.

Chapter three suggested that employees’ perception of their opportunity to separate because of their jobs, is an important contributive factor on home permeability. In the conclusion of chapter three we proposed that having permeable home boundaries may also lead to the perception that the job offers little to no opportunity to separate. Since we gathered data at one point in time, assessing causality in this thesis is problematic. Future longitudinal research is therefore necessary to uncover the causal dynamics in boundary management. Moreover, future research could examine which other factors contribute to employees’ perception that their job offers no other choice than integration, and which employees perceive this the most. A similar issue with causality may apply to the relation between home permeability and boundary preferences. The operationalization of permeability reflects the individual’s perception of work intrusions in the home domain. It is however possible that these perceptions are influenced by their boundary preferences.

Finally, it is important to note that this thesis was not exhaustive; other factors can influence boundary management as well. Carlson and Kacmar (2000) found that life role values influence work family conflict. When family was highly valued, work influences had a great impact on individuals. In contrast, when work was highly valued, antecedents of the family domain had the most influence. Previous research based on Boundary theory suggested that boundary management may reflect the meanings individuals assign to both domains (Nippert-Eng, 1996a,b; Ashforth et al., 2000). Thus, life role values, like boundary preferences, may play a moderating role in the relation between home permeability and WTF conflict. Moreover, boundary preferences may reflect life role values as the interviews in chapter two suggested. Since boundary management is partly a ‘household decision’, the life role values of partners could play a role as well; previous research has indicated that women experience more conflict if their partner has a highly salient work role (Beutell & Greenhouse, 1982). The quantitative study of this thesis did not incorporate work pressure; future research could add to our findings by examining the role of work pressure on home permeability and its consequence for WTF conflict. After all, employees may only prefer integration, when they are inviting an enjoyable work aspects into their homes. Future research may also want incorporate individuals’ power and resources to reverse the impact of the work situation.
This thesis does not directly study the influence of technology on home permeability. It does study the influence of technology implicitly, since modern technologies make it possible that employees can telecommute from home or check their emails after working hours. However, previous studies found that the persistent use of a work-related mobile phone over a period of two years was associated with more negative work to family spillover (Chesley, 2005), than the use of computers. Though we did incorporate if employees receive work-related phone calls when they are at home, we did not explicitly studied if employees used a work-related mobile phone after working hours. Previous studies have pointed out the importance of work-family friendly cultures (e.g. Peper, Doorne-Huiskes & Den Dulk, 2005; Mennino, Rubin & Brayfield, 2005). Unfortunately, we do not know if the managers of our respondents encourage or discourage the use of telecommuting or flextime. In addition, this study did not incorporate the role of traveling to and from work in the transition between work and home. The interview narratives suggested that many employees perceive their journey between work and home as a transitional stage, a place in between the two domains, that helps them to crossover more easily and to find closure with one domain before entering the other.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This thesis aimed to examine why some employees tend to integrate work in their home lives, whereas others tend to separate the two domains. Further, we examined what the impact is of permeability on WTF conflict. The results show a complex process; employees do not only manage boundary permeability in different ways, the advantages and disadvantages differ for employees as well. Boundary permeability is primarily prescribed by the work situation: the perceived opportunity to separate, telecommuting, flextime and pressure to work overtime determine the boundary permeability to a large extent. This is a powerful influence, and one that is difficult to manage for employees. Employees who telecommute and who prefer separation cannot avoid high levels of home permeability. And, if employees favor separation, home permeability results in high levels of WTF conflict.

The strong influence of the work domain on their boundary behavior does not reduce employees to helpless beings. On the contrary: they manage work and home in interaction with their environments. Employees may make use of work arrangements that fit their preferences; take their work home to be able to spend time with their families and develop household strategies that facilitate the combination of work and home.
Though the direct influence of the home characteristics on permeability is modest, it does indirectly influence how individuals manage boundary permeability, and whether permeability leads to high levels of WTF conflict. This study showed that for some households, such as dual earners, high home permeability results in high levels of WTF conflict. Other households facilitate the integration of work in home life. Traditional households based on a conventional breadwinner model have the highest permeable home boundaries, and experience the lowest levels of conflict due to permeability. Employees who divided the paid labor equally with their partner do not have high home permeability, but experience the highest levels of conflict because of permeability. In this way, households with a traditional breadwinner division seem most adapted to the demands of today’s organizations.

The question is whether this is different from forty years ago, when wives stayed at home, supported their husbands in their work, and took care of the children. For many households in the Netherlands, this is not very different today: motherhood often implies that women reduce their working hours. Mothers generally have small jobs and big responsibilities at home. Whereas the perceptions of how families, men and women, should combine work and home (and primarily the care for children) show relatively little change; the work domain and its demands have changed: today’s organizations require flexibility and above all availability from their employees. And because of the still salient gender division of paid and unpaid labor, men are able to comply with the demands of work. Our data suggests that the integration of work in home life in the Netherlands is not so much a consequence of women’s participation in the labor market, of gender equality, but rather of changes in the work situation of employees.

Employees themselves are also susceptible for the convenience that comes along with the use of laptops and mobile phones. It can be easy to be able to work at home and it can also offer employees the autonomy they need to establish the boundaries they desire. However, for some employees it can be a pitfall as well. Nevertheless, if boundaries between work and home are not clearly marked, a balancing act of employees is required in answering the question: where to draw the line?