

Home-based Telework, Gender, and the Synchronization of Work and Family: Perspectives of Teleworkers and their Co-residents

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This article explores the relationship between work–family roles and boundaries, and gender, among home-based teleworkers and their families. Previous literature suggests two alternative models of the implications of home-based work for gendered experiences of work and family: the new opportunities for flexibility model and the exploitation model. Drawing on the findings of a qualitative study of home-based workers and their co-residents, we argue that these models are not mutually exclusive. We explore the gendered processes whereby teleworking can simultaneously enhance work–life balance while perpetuating traditional work and family roles.

Keywords: telework, gender, work–family interface

Introduction: teleworking, work and family

There has been some debate about whether the growing trend for home-based telework (Bulos and Chaker, 1995) will challenge or reinforce gendered work and family roles (Dooley, 1996; Haddon and Silverstone, 1993; Huws *et al.*, 1996; Silver, 1993). This article explores the relationship between work–family roles and boundaries, and gender, among home-based teleworkers and their families. We first review literature on teleworking, which suggests two views on the implications of home-based work for gendered experiences of work and family. We then present the findings of a small-scale, exploratory study of home-based workers and also their co-residents, whose home is also the teleworkers' workplace (a neglected perspective in previous research), drawing on their accounts to explore the synchronization of work and family in these households.

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Research on the work–family interface predominantly conceptualizes work as occurring in centralized locations outside the home (Shamir, 1992). Less is known about the management of the work–home interface when the workplace is also the home. The changing nature of work, including increased flexibility and less clear boundaries between work and home, has contributed to a growth in home-based teleworking and other forms of white-collar work performed at home. Scarpitti (1994) argues that the growth of telework is part of a rising demand for flexibility and reconciliation of work and family, but it is not clear that these relationships are so straightforward. Gender mediates relationships between work and family (Lewis, 1994; Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1999), and is also an important variable affecting the experience of telework. For example, Haddon and Silverstone argue that, 'It is quite clear that the experience of telework, its meaning and the capacity to manage it within the home, are all fundamentally determined by the gender of the teleworker, and the particular gendered politics of the household' (1993, p. 144). There are two approaches to conceptualizing the relationship between telework and other forms of home-based work, on the one hand, and gender roles and the work–family interface, on the other. These two approaches have appeared in the literature under various names; in order to maintain continuity, we will refer to them as the 'new opportunities for flexibility model' and the 'exploitation model' (Huws *et al.*, 1996).

The new opportunities for flexibility model

Huws *et al.* (1996) argue that this model views telework as the solution to problems of balancing work and family, particularly for women. Increased flexibility will facilitate the management of work and family. Dooley (1996), for example, argues that one of telework's advantages is that it gives access to work for people for whom childcare responsibilities would restrict participation in conventional on-site work. Silver (1993) argues that this model envisages the breakdown of traditional roles in that male domestic participation will increase as a result of the lack of spatial separation of work and family. This is a view that emphasizes entrepreneurship and individual freedom (Haddon and Silverstone, 1993).

The exploitation model

This model views telework as a way of perpetuating the exploitation of women in terms of both paid work, and the domestic burden of responsibility (Haddon and Silverstone, 1993). From this perspective home-based work is constructed as a form of employment that leads to women being

exploited, isolated socially, subject to demands from both family and employer, and subject to control by their husbands (Silver, 1993). Proponents of this approach concentrate on the benefits of gender inequality to employers and see female home-based workers as an informal sector of the capitalist economy that uses exploitative practices.

Research on telework and other home-based work has focused on a number of themes that are related to these two models: motivation for telework and the relative primacy of work and family for teleworkers; the domestic division of labour in teleworkers' families; and the nature and management of the work-family interface.

Motivation for teleworking: the relative primacy of work and family

Telework can be a strategic response to occupational (Haddon and Silverstone, 1993), and family circumstances (Haddon, 1992), although women are more likely than men to report that childcare is a motivation for telework (Olson and Primps, 1984; Haddon and Silverstone, 1993), and are more likely to fit their work responsibilities around their family responsibilities (Huws *et al.*, 1990; Haddon and Silverstone, 1993). For some, combining homework and childcare is not a choice but the only way to overcome the high cost and low availability of childcare (Vedel, 1984; Christensen, 1987). For example, in a study of predominantly female clerical teleworkers, Olson and Primps (1984) found that working from home was often perceived as the only feasible way to combine childcare and paid employment (because of reluctance to use, or lack of affordability of, full-time childcare). They constructed the situation as one in which employers 'allowed' them to work from home, providing their only means of reconciling their need to earn income and their childcare responsibilities. These clerical workers, therefore, accepted poorer terms and conditions, lower wages, and less autonomy (compared to their on-site equivalents). Similarly, Phizacklea and Wolkowitz (1995) found parallels between telework and traditional homework; they argue that women continue to tolerate working conditions at home where they are under-valued and under-paid and where their work is trivialized by the men they live with because they have internalized traditional roles, because of the continued marginalization of women within the workforce, and because of the scarcity and high cost of childcare and domestic services. So although telework has the capacity to increase carers' participation in paid employment, it can also allow the exploitation of workers with childcare responsibilities, reinforce the domestic burden of women, and perpetuate the marginalization of female employment.

The division of domestic responsibility

Domestic responsibility is an important indicator of whether home-based telework challenges traditional gender roles, and increases gender equity within the household. Does this change, for example, when it is the man who is working at home? The evidence here is somewhat mixed.

There are some suggestions that male teleworkers may sometimes undertake substantial domestic work and even assume the role of 'househusband' (Huws *et al.*, 1996). Caution must be exercised, however, in attributing change to the effects of home-based working; some suggest (Burgess, 1997, for example) that men's domestic participation is slowly increasing in the population generally. Most evidence suggests that the distribution of domestic labour that existed before the commencement of telework — whether equitable or inequitable — tends to prevail (Haddon and Silverstone, 1993; Silver, 1993; Hill *et al.*, 1996). Teleworking *per se*, therefore, appears to have little impact on household responsibilities. Silver concludes that 'working at home does not "liberate" men to do more housework' (1993, p. 195).

The nature and management of the work–family interface

Home-based telework can weaken the boundary between work and home (Gurstein, 1991; Pitt-Catsouphes and Marchetta, 1991; Haddon, 1992; Telecottage Association, 1993; Schepp, 1995), but there is evidence of diverse and gendered impacts of removing the spatial division between work and family. Olson and Primps (1984) argue that, because of increased flexibility and autonomy, telework can facilitate the scheduling and management of work and family; and there is evidence that teleworking parents of pre-school children report that working from home significantly increases their ability to manage multiple roles. However, Silver (1993) found no significant differences between homeworkers and on-site workers in their ability to take time off during work hours to attend to personal or family matters. Hill *et al.* (1996) argue that telework can be both a positive and a negative influence on people's ability to manage work and non-work. Despite finding no significant differences between home-based mobile teleworkers and equivalent office workers on self-report measures of work and family balance, they did find differences between these two groups on qualitative measures of their perceived ability to manage work and family. Hill *et al.* offer two possible explanations for these findings (and their finding that teleworkers perceive their work–family boundaries to be more blurred): first, that instead of using the flexibility that is gained in location and timing of work to better balance work and family, teleworkers are sticking quite strictly to conventional patterns of working time and using

flexibility to allow overwork by extending work into traditionally non-work hours; or, second, that there is a curvilinear relationship between the ability to balance work and family and flexibility of work hours and locations — i.e., a certain amount of flexibility is useful, but for some people too much flexibility can lead to a loss of the ability to control overzealous work tendencies. It is also possible that other factors mediate the relationship between flexibility and work–family management — particularly gender, but also factors such as family structure or occupation.

Silver (1993) found that professional, female homeworkers reported greater role conflict than their on-site equivalents, but that working-class female homeworkers experienced less interference between work and family than their on-site equivalents. However, she argues that they experience less interference because they combine work and non-work tasks during their working day, and receive help from other family members (with the domestic work and the paid work). Although this may appear to support the new opportunities for flexibility model, Silver argues that the employers of such women are getting the unpaid labour of family members and transferring the cost of overheads to the women. Furthermore, Silver found that the level of assistance with paid work that women homeworkers receive is less than that received by men.

Co-residents' roles

Co-residents' increased participation in, or help with, the paid work is a process that is unlikely to be gender neutral. Receiving unpaid help with work from family members is more likely for men (Silver, 1993), and female partners often shield male homeworkers from distractions (Haddon and Silverstone, 1993). Huws *et al.* (1990) argue that when men work at home they tend to have a separate room to work in, and their wives often shield them from children, distractions and unwanted visitors and telephone calls; whereas women more often work in a communal area (such as the kitchen or living room) and have to look after children at the same time. This lack of private space can exacerbate work–family conflict for women (Haddon and Tucknutt, 1991).

Insofar as teleworkers live with other family members, these co-residents become crucial actors in the construction of the home as a workplace. An understanding of the experiences and perspectives of co-residents is thus important to enrich our understanding of teleworkers' accounts and of the relationships between telework, gender and family. Rosanna Hertz argues that 'the notion that one partner can speak for both needs to be abandoned' (1995, p. 429), and advocates that research on dual earner families examines multiple accounts. However, research on home-based teleworkers has largely neglected the voices of co-residents in a home that is also a

workplace, basing discussions of the impact of telework on the single accounts of teleworkers themselves. Our exploratory research examines the impact of home-based teleworking on gender, work and family, and the usefulness of the two models discussed above, drawing on the accounts of both teleworkers and their co-residents.

The research

There are many different definitions and conceptualizations of telework (Sullivan, 1997). Increasingly, telework is defined as working remotely using information and communication technology (ICT) links (Huws *et al.*, 1996). This definition implies only that the work is remote from the employer, and therefore not necessarily in the home. The focus of this research is on the impact of work that is done in the home and therefore, when referring to telework we are restricting ourselves to work that is home-based. The literature tends to differentiate between telework and homework by defining telework as using ICTs to link the worker and employer or client. However, because the focus of this research is not on organizational factors or the impact of ICTs on the family, we have not excluded from our definition white-collar home-based workers who do not have such links.

This study used 28 in-depth semi-structured interviews: 14 with home-based teleworkers and 14 with their co-residents. Participants were recruited using opportunity and snowball sampling. This included contacting employers, advertising in specialist publications and word of mouth. The teleworkers were engaged in various types of employment (for example, computer contracting, laboratory work, secretarial work, music production, computer aided design and publishing) and were working various numbers of hours. Ten of the teleworkers were working full-time (six men and four women), and four were working part-time (all women). Eight of the teleworkers (four men and four women) were self-employed; six (two men and four women) were employed. They were living in locations throughout England. Eight were female and six were male. Their mean age was 40; the mean age for males was 41, for women it was 40. The majority of the co-residents (12) were the spouse or partner of the teleworker. Six of the adult co-residents were female and six were male. The other (2) co-residents were children of the teleworker (both female). The mean age of the adult co-residents was 41; the mean age for women was 39, and for men 43. The two children were aged 18 and 13. Table 1 gives details of the participants.

Participants were interviewed, separately, in their homes. Semi-structured interviewing was used because it allows the interviewee to bring their own issues and areas of relevance to the interview (Banister *et al.*, 1994; Haddon and Silverstone, 1993), which is particularly useful in exploratory

Table 1: Details of the participants

Name ¹	Sex	Type of work
Anne	Female	Full-time teleworker ²
Mary	Female	Daughter of a full-time teleworker
Stuart	Male	Full-time teleworker
Karen	Female	Partner of a full-time teleworker, working part-time
Tim	Male	Full-time teleworker
Tanya	Female	Partner of a full-time teleworker, working part-time
Sara	Female	Part-time teleworker ³
Jim	Male	Partner of a full-time teleworker, working full-time
Sheila	Female	Full-time teleworker
Bob	Male	Partner of a full-time teleworker, working full-time
Paul	Male	Occasional teleworker ⁴
Susan	Female	Partner of occasional teleworker, working part-time
Craig	Male	Full-time teleworker
Julie	Female	Partner of full-time teleworker, working full-time
Kate	Female	Occasional teleworker
Graham	Male	Partner of part-time teleworker, working full-time
Annette	Female	Part-time occasional teleworker ⁵
Trevor	Male	Partner of occasional teleworker, working full-time
Alan	Male	Full-time teleworker
Jane	Female	Partner of full-time teleworker, working full-time
Maureen	Female	Part-time occasional teleworker
Adam	Male	Partner of part-time occasional teleworker, retired
Marilyn	Female	Part-time occasional teleworker
Paula	Female	Daughter of part-time occasional teleworker
Paul	Male	Occasional teleworker
Beth	Female	Partner of occasional teleworker, not in paid employment
Louise	Female	Occasional teleworker
John	Male	Partner of occasional teleworker, working part-time

Notes:

¹ These names are all pseudonyms.

² A person who works full-time and spends a very high proportion of that time working at home.

³ A person who works part-time and spends a very high proportion of that time working at home.

⁴ A person who works full-time and spends part of that time working at home and part working on-site.

⁵ A person who works part-time and spends part of that time working at home and part working on-site.

research such as this. Interviews examined the synchronization of work and family for teleworkers and co-residents. Each interview was based, initially, on an interview schedule consisting of a range of topics relating to work and family. The schedules were used as a guide and were reviewed and revised throughout the research process.

The interviews were taped, transcribed and thematically analysed. The transcripts were read and reviewed, drawing out sections that related to the aims of the research. This involved noting common themes, differences (within and between transcripts) and inconsistencies. From this, category files (Mason, 1994) were constructed, which consisted of excerpts from transcripts relating to emergent themes or conceptual categories. Analytical notes were also made in these files during their construction. Excerpts were included in certain files on the basis of their relationship to the theme represented by that category file, and not on the basis of their agreement with other excerpts. Thus, examination of divergent cases and those where agreement existed between participants was achieved. The category files were then subject to further review and cross-comparison in relation to the aims of the study. The transcripts were analysed by looking at the teleworkers as a group, by looking at the co-residents as a group, and also by looking at each teleworker and their respective co-resident as a dyad. Some of these emergent themes are presented and discussed below, with illustrative quotes that exemplify certain points.

Results

Motivation for telework and the allocation of household responsibility

Consistent with previous research, the reasons that these teleworkers give for working at home are highly gendered. These reasons fall into two groups: domestic and family reasons (e.g., childcare) and work-related and individual reasons (e.g., working from home as a first step in self-employment, avoiding office politics). Childcare was a major motivation for working at home for the women, but not for the men.

Six of the women teleworkers (i.e., all those who had children) said either that childcare was their original, or their main, motivation for becoming teleworkers. For example, Sara (part-time teleworker, 34) says, 'I started teleworking because I had my children and didn't want to leave them to go back to work, but I still wanted to do something interesting.' Despite her view that 'Women are having to make a choice between looking after children and conventional work, and I don't really see why they should have to make that choice,' she also states, 'I didn't want to miss out on him. I saw lots of nannies and childminders and there was nothing wrong with them, they were just fine but' These women constructed telework as an opportunity for flexibility. The autonomy over when to do their work allowed them to fit it around their children's timetables.

Family commitments were much more marginal in the men's accounts of their decision-making. Although five of the men had children, only one, Paul (full-time teleworker, 35), viewed childcare as a reason for teleworking

— and even then it was not presented as his sole motive. He says that the time saved by not travelling to work meant that ‘in the mornings and the evenings I could be with the baby’. He later says that it ‘wasn’t the only reason actually’. In contrast the following excerpt shows Stuart (full-time teleworker, 38) talking about his children:

Interviewer Did you ever combine doing your work at home with looking after your children?

Stuart No. No I didn’t. I’m afraid we’re terribly sexist in this house. I very rarely look after the children.

Interviewer So, that wasn’t in any way important in your motivation for pursuing that pattern of work?

Stuart No, not at all. Although now that Vanessa’s a bit older occasionally Karen will leave her, but I don’t have to look after her. So that wasn’t a consideration at all.

In most of the families in this sample, and particularly those in which the women worked part-time, there was a consensus that the men were the major providers and the women the primary caregivers. Paul (occasional teleworker, 57) says, ‘We have a fairly traditional split of responsibilities in this house.’ His wife, Susan (58) says, ‘My job is not the breadwinning, it’s the jam. We notice the difference if I’m not working, but we wouldn’t starve.’ Level of income and particularly women’s part-time work reinforced traditional gender roles.

Although it appears that the allocation of household roles remains unchanged by telework, it is nevertheless possible that male teleworkers may perform more household work simply by virtue of being the one who is at home. Only one of the interviewees, a male teleworker, felt that he does more domestic labour when he is working at home. He feels that the time he saves by not having to commute allows him to make more of a contribution. He says, ‘Well, just being around, and making the tea or the breakfast.’

However, most of the teleworkers and co-residents felt that the distribution of domestic work within their family had stayed more or less the same, regardless of whether the man or the woman worked at home. The patterns of domestic work and responsibility, which are revealed in these accounts, are similar to patterns observed in previous research on the allocation of domestic roles in British households. That is, despite evidence that men’s participation may be growing in some areas of domestic work, the major responsibility still lies mainly with women (Brannen *et al.*, 1994; Hardill *et al.*, 1997). Research suggests that this is also the case in Scandinavian and North American countries (Baxter, 1997). Teleworking does not appear to

increase men's participation in domestic labour. Rather, the results support previous findings (Haddon and Silverstone, 1993) that the level of parity that existed before telework is likely to prevail. Telework may not have the power to drastically change the gendered allocation of domestic work, given the persistence of wider structural forces (Dempsey, 1997) and the importance of the gender ideologies that exist within the household (Greenstein, 1996).

Thus, there was no indication among the teleworkers, or the co-residents, that working at home has, in itself, affected the allocation of caring and income generation within these families. In fact, in many of these households there was a tendency, among both teleworkers and co-residents, to consider the presence of a relatively traditional, gendered, distribution of household responsibilities as an unremarkable, ordinary feature of their lives. This can be understood in terms of a 'traditional role discourse' which 'carries the assumption that a gendered division of labour can be explained by saying it is "just" traditional. Men do some things ... and women do others ... because that is the way things are and always have been' (Blain, 1994, p. 530). This type of talk was very common among the participants of this research. In addition to the way household responsibilities were discussed, the amount that they were talked about can also be related to this discourse. That is, very little was said about the way that domestic labour and responsibilities were distributed in most of these families. This was constructed as an obvious, ordinary, thing that is just the way it is — and perhaps, therefore, becomes a non-issue that does not warrant much discussion. In this way, a situation that may be unequal is constructed as one that is fair — and, more importantly, is inevitable — and gendered patterns of responsibility are continuously reconstructed within the family. This perpetuates a 'myth of equality' (Knudson-Martin and Mahoney, 1998, p. 88). The potential for home-based work to provide new opportunities for flexibility is therefore undermined by the taken-for-granted nature of gendered work and family roles in many of these families.

Women's lower income and their identity as secondary rather than co-provider reduce their power in household relations and privilege men's work (Potuchek, 1992). However, many of the women teleworkers talk about choosing to take a caring role within the family, and — as above — seem to consider this as inevitable or natural. Maureen (part-time teleworker, 44) says, 'I think if I really had wanted to go back [to on-site work after having children] earlier, I would have gone back. I think it was my choice ... I was quite happy being at home for 10 years and being a Mum.' However, their work is also very important to them. Annette (part-time teleworker, 50) says that, when her children were younger, she worked not just for financial reasons but because she 'wanted something for me as well', thus playing down her financial contribution to the household.

These findings support previous evidence that men are more likely to begin teleworking for work-related and individual reasons and women for domestic reasons (Olson and Primps, 1984). While work is central to the identity of both the women and the men, the women teleworkers also view their domestic, and especially their motherhood role, as central and construct telework as a flexible strategy and an opportunity to combine this with paid work. The male teleworkers, on the other hand, see teleworking as an opportunity to 'help' with childcare, but do not see this as a primary reason for working from home.

This could be viewed as supportive of the 'exploitation model' in that women are being given a double-edged opportunity: the opportunity to sustain their careers while still organizing their lives primarily around their children and still performing the majority of childcare. However, the women's accounts present this as a positive opportunity; they do not express dissatisfaction with their primary carer role. From their perspective the 'new opportunities for flexibility' model holds true. Telework facilitates the management of work and childcare, but it does so without challenging the gendered division of responsibilities. Thus these workers bring a gendered primary orientation to telework, which influences their experiences of the advantages of this form of work and their approach to their paid and unpaid work.

Gendered perceptions of the advantages of working at home

The teleworkers — both male and female — reported similar numbers of work-related and family-related advantages to working at home. The types of work-related advantages that were cited were also similar for men and women. The most commonly cited advantage in the area of work was increased independence and autonomy in the scheduling of their work.

Although the men and women both placed similar emphasis on work-related and family-related advantages, the nature of the family-related advantages was quite different. For the women, the emphasis was centred on fulfilling their domestic role and satisfactorily managing their work and family obligations, while the male teleworkers constructed the family-related advantages of telework in terms of the traditional role discourse. That is, telework enables them to 'help' with family work and spend time with the children. So, for example, Paul (full-time teleworker, 35) says that working from home 'means that I've got more energy to look after them if Louise [his wife] wants to go out by herself'. Craig (full-time teleworker, 45) talks about being able to see his daughter at breakfast time: 'I'm here in the morning when my daughter goes to school ... most of the time when I was working further away I wouldn't see her.' It is interesting that Craig sees this as an advantage, because his wife makes an observation, about their daughter's viewpoint, which reveals a different perception:

'She's noticed the working in the evening more, because she's used to him being available once he's in.' This illustrates the importance of multiple perspectives.

Women and men tend to have different perceptions of what constitutes involvement in their family role (Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1999), and men are more likely than women to see their domestic work as voluntary, rather than obligatory (Perkins and DeMeis, 1996). The men's perception of family-related advantages of teleworking, among these participants, as being about spending time with the family and 'helping' their wives with domestic responsibility clearly indicates that they construct the major responsibility for domestic matters and childcare as resting with the women in these households. The women's perception that the family-related advantages are about fulfilling domestic roles, achieving domestic work and managing work and family further supports this.

Gender identity

The construction of men's family roles as secondary even when working from home, by men as well as women participants, may be important for the maintenance of male identity (Mederer, 1993). The home environment is often associated with femininity and paid work, especially outside the home, as central to dominant conceptualizations of masculinity (Morgan, 1992; Connell, 1995). Huws *et al.* (1996) argue that for women the experience of working from home is likely to confirm their traditional gender identity, but that for men, it may be a feminizing experience that threatens their traditional gender identity. They suggest that this may be stressful and threatening for some men, but for others it may be liberating and lead to greater satisfaction and a more complete existence. In this respect parallels may be drawn with men working in gender atypical jobs. Masculinity is challenged by working in jobs that are either traditionally associated with women, or are dominated numerically by women (Heickes, 1992; Allan, 1993). Men may respond to this in a number of ways: for example, by reconstructing the job to counteract the 'feminine' connotations (Pringle, 1993), or by reconstructing their own masculinity (Lupton, 1999). Similarly, it is possible that, for men who work at home, constructing the family-related advantages of working at home as 'help', rather than as a central part of the gender role may be one way in which they can construct their homeworking in a way that controls the potential threat to their masculinity.

The work-family boundary

With the exception of one male and one female teleworker, all reported that working at home had led to a breakdown in the psychological distinction between work and family. As Tim (full-time teleworker, 42) says, 'It's very

difficult now to keep work and domestic life separate because they get all jumbled up.' The blurring of work–family boundaries is not necessarily seen as a negative (or positive) thing by all teleworkers and co-residents. Furthermore, the same individual can see blurred boundaries as positive in some ways and negative in others. The teleworkers attribute the breakdown of work and family boundaries to the proximity of work and home, to the lack of commuting and, to some extent, personal characteristics. Maureen (part-time teleworker, 44) talks about the fact that the equipment she uses to work at home is ever-present in their dining room: 'But it's always there, and that's a little bit ... whereas when I've been into work, that's it I've done work. Finished. Done. That's it.' The physical boundary between work and home seems to be crucial. Paul (full-time teleworker, 35) says, 'If I was [working] down here, or not in a separate space that could be isolated, then, yes, it would be extremely difficult [to keep work and family separate].'

Some teleworkers note that the time spent travelling between work and home is useful for making the transition from one sphere to the other, and that because they do not spend this time travelling they find this transition more difficult to achieve. Anne (part-time teleworker, 43) says, 'It's not as though I'm commuting and by the time I've arrived on the train I've sort of left everything else behind me and I'm into work mode.' Some co-residents also offer this reason. Julie (wife of a full-time teleworker, 44) says that, although things that happened to Craig at work before working at home impacted on the family, it was perhaps less because 'he'd probably had the journey to mull it over and calm down a bit'.

Many of the teleworkers also attribute their blurred work–family boundary to having high levels of involvement and interest in their work, and attribute this to their individual characteristics, as well as to working at home. Stuart (full-time teleworker, 38) says, 'I can't imagine what it would be like not to work, because I enjoy work, and I've never had the sort of ... I've never needed that boundary that says I look forward to 5 o'clock when I finish. You know, and I get in the car and go home and do things which are non-work.'

While participants discuss many of these aspects of teleworking in gender-neutral terms, it is clear that experiences of the work–family interface are deeply gendered. There are gender differences in the nature and direction of perceived spillover or interference between the two domains, in the ways in which the flexibility provided by teleworking is used, and in the extent to which co-residents from the home are 'sucked into' the work domain. It has long been noted that work–family boundaries are asymmetrically permeable for men and women (Pleck, 1977). It is more legitimate for work to interfere with family for men, and family to interfere with work for women and there is a tendency for men to experience more interference from work to family, and women from family to work when the workplace is located away from the home (MacEwen and Barling, 1994). Our study

suggests similar effects for home-based workers. The men who reported blurred boundaries, all of whom were fathers, felt that the impact of work on the home was greater than that of the family on their work.

For the women working from home, however, parental status and level of career involvement may mediate this. The women teleworkers with young children felt that family interfered with work more than work with family. Three of the women experienced more interference of work with family. Of these women, two have no children and are highly involved in their careers. The third woman attributes the direction of her work–family interference to the fact that she allocates a very small amount of her time to work compared to that which she allocates to her children. She fits her work around her children's timetables.

One of the ways in which the blurred work–family boundary manifests itself is in a tendency to work hours in excess of what might be considered normal (Hill *et al.*, 1996), a trend that has also been noted among on-site workers with access to flexible working arrangements (Holt and Thaulow, 1996). Tim (full-time teleworker, 42) says, 'Work fills every part of your life. Instead of actually trying to do decorating or housework or playing with the child, it's very easy to go back upstairs and get on with things.' However, this tendency was reported by five out of six men, compared with only two out of eight women — neither of whom are mothers. Thus, while the women with children were more likely to use the flexibility gained by working at home to balance work and family, the men were more likely to put in extra hours and to use flexibility to overwork.

Weakened work–family boundaries are also manifested in teleworkers, particularly men, receiving help in their work from co-residents. The type of help given includes answering the telephone and taking messages, helping with the actual work, and providing practical support in relation to equipment and resources. Tim (full-time teleworker, 42) says: 'I would give [my wife Tanya] jobs to do. I've been known in the past to ask her, would you stuff these envelopes?' The support that the teleworkers receive from their families can sometimes be a source of discontent for the co-residents. Karen (wife of full-time teleworker, 31) describes a time when she was at home because she was looking after their young daughter, but was expected to help with her husband's work: 'So that's one of the things that annoyed me. He seemed to think that I'd got a lot of free time on my hands, when I was here. He'd give me jobs to do. He didn't seem to recognize that I was looking after a young child.' Julie (wife of full-time teleworker, 44) feels that the people who call their house in relation to Craig's work are often rude and abrupt with her and her daughter. She says about her daughter, 'She'll pick the phone up and answer it and people will just say Craig's name very abruptly, you know, and she says they're adults, they can say please as well as the next person.' Julie feels that this is because the callers are 'in business mode and we're not'.

Thus, telework's impact on the roles of co-residents is also gendered. That help with the actual work itself was more often given to the male teleworkers is possibly a reflection of the persistence of traditional roles within these families. This is because, while the male teleworkers' partners tended to work part-time and be around the house caring for children, the partners of the female teleworkers were generally out at work themselves during the day and therefore less available to help with the teleworker's work. Again, it seems that this may be as much the result of gendered expectations, as it is the result of homeworking. However, the teleworkers who received help with the work from their co-residents were also predominantly self-employed. It is possible that other family members are much more likely to help in a family business than they are to give unpaid labour to someone else's employer. The impact of self-employment could usefully be explored in future research. Thus home-based telework can facilitate the breaking down of rigid boundaries between work and family, but the impact of this remains gendered for this group. Teleworking is largely used to support family work for the women who are mothers, and to support the demands of paid work for the men.

Strategies for combining domestic work with paid work

Although the teleworkers felt that working from home may have little impact on quantities of domestic work, it does appear to change the way in which domestic work is performed. This change consists of an increase in the combined performance of work and family tasks. Nine out of the fourteen teleworkers reported combining tasks. Craig (full-time teleworker, 45), when asked about the impact of working at home on the domestic tasks he performs, says:

Probably on balance, they've stayed the same in terms of the amount of time. But perhaps the nature of them has changed a bit. I probably find that I do less [domestic] things in the evening. If I'm busy I won't take on something that is going to take up a lot of time as I would have done if I'd been working in the office. But during the day, the small bits that I do have increased.

The co-residents also observed this tendency to combine tasks. Paula (daughter of a part-time teleworker, 18) explains that when her mother is working from home she 'gets a lot of housework done' because she 'fits it in with her work'.

The interviews indicated that combining tasks is often a deliberate strategy adopted by teleworkers and is perceived as one of its big advantages. A commonly expressed belief amongst both the teleworkers and the co-residents is that telework helps with carrying out domestic work. Marilyn (part-time teleworker, 39) in comparing working at home with the

days when she goes into work, says, 'You've got to ... get things out of the freezer for dinner in the evening, whereas if you're here all that sort of thing's a lot easier.' Maureen (part-time teleworker, 44) says that, 'It has made it so much easier to keep everything sort of ticking over without actually having to come in and do it after work.' Adam (husband of a part-time teleworker, 46), says that his wife working at home 'gives us the flexibility, for example, it's mundane things like if she's got a wash on, she can do the washing while she's working, stop for a minute and put it out on the line, and then go back and do a bit more'.

In addition to being a deliberate strategy, combining tasks also happens unintentionally because work is being distracted by non-work. Anne (part-time teleworker, 43) describes how this caused her problems when she began to work from home:

I did used to find things like I was trying to do everything at once. I was stuffing the washing in the washing machine and then coming down here [to work] and then 'oh! I've got to hang out the washing' and going out and pegging the washing out and then coming and doing some more work and then 'Oh God! It's raining!' and all that kind of thing.

Combining tasks was more common among the women than the men in this study. Seven of the eight women reported combining tasks, but only two of the six men. Of the five teleworkers who did not report combining tasks, only one was a woman. This is congruent with previous research findings that female teleworkers are more likely than male teleworkers to swap rapidly between domestic and work tasks while at home (Haddon and Silverstone, 1993). Indeed, there is evidence that women, in general, are more likely to perform tasks from different roles simultaneously (Hochschild, 1989). This can be related to gendered experiences of time, which is discussed in more detail below.

These women teleworkers are thus more likely than their male counterparts to fit their work around their domestic responsibilities, as are British women in general (Scott and Burchell, 1994). Working at home has allowed these women to fulfil their domestic role, but also to fulfil their personal need to work. They can work without feeling that they are not satisfactorily fulfilling their responsibility to care for the family. This supports Dooley's (1996) assertion that homeworking facilitates the participation of people with caring responsibilities in paid employment (the new opportunities for flexibility model). However, caring responsibilities are still distributed unequally within the family on the basis of gender.

These findings can at the same time be interpreted as support for the exploitation model. These women say they 'choose' to look after their children themselves and do not see themselves as co-breadwinners. These 'choices' may be partially explained by the use of discourses that support the unequal distribution of family responsibilities. Furthermore, the women's

belief that there is a lack of high quality, affordable, available childcare options indicates that that this is, at best, a constrained choice — as are many of the choices men and women make about employment (Crompton and Harris, 1998). Teleworking can enable women to work and care. Nevertheless it can be argued that insofar as homeworkers' career prospects can suffer as a result of being less visible in the work-place (Barling, 1990; Huws *et al.*, 1990), the use of home-based telework to bolster traditional gendered family roles perpetuates the marginalization of women's employment.

The two models are thus not mutually exclusive. Telework may both increase opportunities for flexibility, and in doing so also contribute to and perpetuate the disadvantage of women. Gender also appears to interact with other factors, such as the nature of the job, and especially the amount of autonomy and control it provides in influencing the division of family work. Hardwick and Salaff found that 'for both male and female teleworkers, the amount of control over the time and place in which they do their paid work determines how they take care of their children' (1997, p. 1). They categorize teleworkers in terms of whether their job is 'hot' (i.e., characterized by uncontrollable work flow, the need for immediate responses, and less ability to determine when work will be carried out), or 'cool' (i.e., characterized by a steady work flow, less need for immediate responses, and a greater ability to determine when work will be carried out). Teleworkers with 'hot' jobs had less control over their participation in childcare and needed to fit their childcare around their job while teleworkers with 'cool' jobs found it much easier to participate in childcare and were able to fit their work around their children's timetables. However, Hardwick and Salaff argue that, because many men do not have the major responsibility for childcare and domestic work, they are more likely to be in 'hot' jobs than women are. This, in turn, may perpetuate the unequal division of family roles as men's 'hot' jobs preclude their increased involvement, and women's 'cool' jobs compound their greater domestic responsibility.

Gendered constructions of time

The differences that emerged in the combining and prioritizing of paid work and family within these households may be understood in the context of gendered constructions of time. It has been argued that men and women experience time differently (Daly, 1996), and that this stems from their traditional areas of responsibility, and from their different socialization (Hall, 1983; Seymour, 1992; Shaw, 1992; Gilligan, 1982). Traditionally masculine domains, such as paid work, are characterized by 'monochronic time' (which predominantly involves experiencing tasks sequentially), whereas a traditional domestic environment is characterized by 'polychronic time' (which predominantly involves experiencing tasks simultaneously; Hall, 1983). These different experiences of time have also been called, respectively,

'industrial time' and 'domestic time'. Another element of women's different experience of time is that women may have a lower sense of entitlement than men to control over time (Papanek, 1990; Lewis, 1997).

Haddon and Silverstone (1993) propose that male teleworkers use industrial time structures, whereas females use domestic time structures. Orientation towards domestic time, they argue, increases work-family integration and leads to work and non-work tasks being performed simultaneously or alternately. The findings of this study support the assertion that female homeworkers tend to juggle work and domestic tasks (Olson and Primps, 1984; Haddon and Silverstone, 1993), and that women tend to have a higher degree of synergy between work and family than men (Chester and Grossman, 1990; Hantrais, 1993; Andrews and Bailyn, 1993).

Daly (1996) argues that, despite evidence indicating that people do not experience time in universal ways, family research has always assumed it to be quantifiable and objective. He argues that the subjective meanings, politics and structures that surround time have not been directly investigated. In order to address this, he advocates that time is re-conceptualized as subjective, political and value-laden, and as something that different family members have different levels of autonomy over and to which they feel different levels of entitlement. In our study, it is clear that men and women have different experiences of time. The tendency of these female teleworkers to experience greater interference from home to work and their increased tendency to combine work and domestic tasks both support the assertion that women are more likely to work to the 'polychronic' time structures that have traditionally been associated with domestic time. Similarly, the men's tendency towards lower integration of work and family and their tendency not to combine work and non-work tasks suggest that they are more likely to adhere to 'monochronic' time structures. The results indicate that men and women's different experiences and gendered constructions of time have an impact upon the synchronization of work and family in these teleworking families. A focus on the phenomenology of time in future research on gender, work and family in teleworking households might further expand our understanding of the role of meanings and experience of time and sense of entitlement to control over time in the reproduction or challenging of gender when the spatial boundary between work and family is removed.

Conclusion

This study is limited in its broader generalizability by the number of participants, and the preponderance of part-time work among the women teleworkers and co-residents — although this does reflect patterns of employment in Britain (Brannen and Moss, 1999). This exploratory study does,

however, provide some tentative support for both the 'new opportunities for flexibility' and the 'exploitation' models of the relationships between home-based telework, gender and the home-work interface. We have argued that these models are not mutually exclusive. Home-based telework can simultaneously enable women to combine multiple roles, while reinforcing gendered experiences of work and family, whether it is a man or woman who is based at home. This research reveals a complexity that neither model can fully explain and indicates the need to develop a model that incorporates home-based telework's potential to be both exploitative *and* create new opportunities for flexibility. This model has to take account of gendered processes within the family and especially gendered experiences of time.

Home-based work may have the potential to re-converge work and family, challenging gender asymmetries for couples with a commitment to gender equality. It is clear, however, that home-based work does not in itself facilitate the breakdown of traditional gender roles nor alter the gendered allocation of domestic work and childcare. Indeed, when it is women who are home-based, it can compound gender inequality by reinforcing their greater responsibility for childcare and the management of the family. This study does not enable us to comment on exploitation by employers. However, it does suggest that home-based work may be considered to be exploitative within the home. However, the women's accounts indicate that they do not construct the situation in this way. Their accounts consistently describe how their lives are made easier by the flexibility that telework brings them, and how they 'chose' (albeit a constrained choice) to put their family before their participation in paid work. Home-based work has the potential to create new opportunities for integrating work and family by blurring the boundaries between these institutions. However, in this study these opportunities are used differently by female and male teleworkers. We have argued that the predominance of a traditional role discourse among this group of teleworkers and their co-residents serves to reproduce gender inequalities and reinforce gendered experiences of time. The women teleworkers, especially mothers, tend to combine work and family within the elasticity of domestic time while the male teleworkers import industrial time into the home. They preserve the distinction between work and family time despite the lack of spatial boundaries and with the support of women partners.

It has been argued that men in gender atypical work take their privilege and power into female-dominated jobs (e.g., Kvande, 1998). Our study suggests that this extends to work in the home, where men are relatively privileged, for example, in the allocation of domestic work and in their tendency to receive more help with their work from family members. Maintaining a greater degree of separation than women between work and home, and having a greater tendency than women to stick to the traditional industrial time patterns that are associated with the male model of work

may be ways in which male homeworkers resist the challenge to masculinity and maintain their gender identity. This suggests that looking at gender identities is one of the ways in which our understanding of homeworking's impact on gender roles can be furthered. Future research should aim to explore the ways in which homeworking challenges conceptualizations of masculinity and how men, and women, react to this challenge. Another way in which future research can extend theoretical models of gender, homeworking and the work–family interface is by further examination of factors that interact with gender in this context. Examples of such factors are job characteristics, self-employment and the pre-existing ideologies and constructions of gender that are brought to homeworking households.

Although home-based teleworking does not negate the need for childcare for young children, it can create flexibility to work around family demands. It is often presented as an example of a 'family friendly' employment policy: that is a policy designed to enable employees to integrate work and family. Other policies designated as family friendly, such as part-time work, term-time only working and career breaks, are taken up mainly by women, and tend to marginalize those who deviate from standard work rather than challenging organizational culture (Lewis, 1997). These working patterns also tend to perpetuate women's subordinate role in the household because of their lower earnings (Brannen and Moss, 1992). Home-based work is carried out by both men and women and therefore has the potential to bring about change in both organizations and families. However, the reasons for taking up this kind of work and the ways in which it is used to manage the work–family interface are highly gendered. Teleworking may be family friendly in the sense of enabling women to combine work and family, but it is not necessarily gender-equitable in its operation and effects.

Finally, this study also demonstrates the value of examining the accounts of co-residents, as well as teleworkers themselves, when exploring effects on the household. Although there was consensus between teleworker and co-resident in many areas, this was not always the case, and different perspectives can be illuminating. This study indicates that working at home does affect the lives of co-residents and can be a source of family conflict. Future research on home-based telework should not overlook the fact that this work goes on in people's homes and affects other household members. We need to know more about how the nature of the work undertaken and of the employment contract, or self-employment, mediates the impact on households, and about how household members negotiate time, space and power in these circumstances.

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