

When 'Work' Meets 'Home'

Temporal flexibility as lived experience

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ABSTRACT. This article reports on research that explored the experience of 25 professional management employees who worked regular periods from home, but remained full-time salaried employees. Based on interviews with these workers in their home using language, routines and observations as data the article tracks how organizational policies of flexibility translate into individuals' experience of lived temporalities. The article concludes with the view that such new forms of work organization are neither necessarily corrosive of character, nor do they provide the individual with unlimited opportunity to shape the work process beyond organizational control. Rather, they recast the relationship between 'home' and 'work', necessitating the individual to engage reflectively with both spheres. **KEY WORDS** • families • flexibility • identity • management professionals • temporalities

Introduction

This article is based on the premise that the segmentation, coordination, utilization and synchronization of time are at the core of controlling the organization of work. Emerging forms of organizing work – labelled 'virtual', 'dispersed' or 'networked' – are not exempt from these control processes and continue to draw on them, but additionally they have become subject to the discourses and practices of flexibility. In particular, temporal flexibility has become a widespread organizational practice used to facilitate organizational adaptability and designed to ultimately achieve competitive advantage (Casey et al., 1997; Reilly, 2001). Our investigation of temporal flexibility falls outside the 'time economy' of employment relations and associated policies of part-time work,

overtime, voluntarily reduced hours and so on. Rather, we focus on how temporal flexibility impacts on the lives of professional workers and is translated into lived experience.

The structure of this article is as follows. First, we provide a brief outline of the traditional segregation between 'work time' and 'home time' and examine why these two culturally different spheres are becoming more fused. We show how, traditionally, the culturally different spheres of 'work' and 'home' are coupled with different temporal regimes. Next, we provide a short outline of particular aspects of the contributions of two seminal writers, Giddens (1990, 1991) and Sennett (1998), for the theoretical accounts that informed the formulation of the research themes. Our research, which is outlined and presented in the third part, explores how temporal regimes are reconfirmed or changed when the discourses of two culturally different spheres meet. We use a social constructionist, non-representational approach to discourse that is explained in this section also. The following sections, research findings and the discussion, draw on the empirical data and on aspects of Giddens' and Sennett's work in order to reflect on the extent to which individuals do engage reflectively with their lives due to the relocation of 'work' into 'home'. We conclude by pointing to the inherent paradox of working at home, and consequent opportunities for researchers to study and observe how people find solutions to such paradoxes as answers to the existential dimension implied in them.

Time and Work

Time is a central factor in shaping the experience of work. In industrialized societies, the synchronization of individual activities into the overall production process has been a key feature of economic development (Hassard, 1989; Noon and Blyton, 1997). Adam (1990), in her sociological study on time, shows how the factors 'time', 'timing' and 'tempo' constitute the bedrock within which work is structured and experienced. These factors describe the duration of work (time – the working period), the arrangement of work (timing – the scheduling and sequencing of work activity) and work utilization (tempo – the pace and intensity of work activity). They are interrelated and shape how time is segmented and arranged in the production process. Taylor's (1967[1911]) principles of scientific management, in particular the time and motion studies, epitomize an externally controlled approach to exercising control over workers' time. Taylor's principles were based on the continuous and unrelenting external control of measurable time. E.P. Thompson (1967) argued that it was indeed the creation of a 'time-discipline' among the workforce, which provided a cornerstone for the development of an industrialized society. Thus, Thompson argues, internalized time discipline is typical of 'mature industrial societies of all

varieties [which] are marked by time-thrift and by a clear demarcation between "work" and "life" (p. 308). The tight link between 'time' and 'money', as it permeates western business today (Adam, 1995; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), is a metaphorical expression of this time-thrift, which regards time as a valuable currency. Time has become commodified; it is no longer passed, but spent. Thus 'time' becomes intrinsically tied to work and economic exchange: a measurement of inputs and outputs in the pursuit of efficiency.

As industrialization accelerated, 'work' became synonymous with 'employment', which in equal measures become separated from the domain of 'home'. 'Work' and 'home' became culturally distinct areas, associated with different social and gender roles ('the breadwinner', 'the homemaker'), scripts and practices, as well as with different spatial and temporal regimes. Daly (1996) describes these temporal regimes as either 'monochronic', i.e. sequential and shaped by schedules and associated with the work place, or 'polychronic', i.e. shaped by a set of simultaneous interactions and by the involvement of people in those transactions. These temporal regimes are also 'gendered' (Adam, 1990; Daly, 1996; Manrai and Manrai, 1995; Paolucci, 1996 and 1998; Steward, 2000), with 'women being more polychronic compared to men and able to combine work and social/leisure activities more than men' (Manrai and Manrai, 1995: 119). Also, polychronic regimes are more closely associated with the home environment. Adam (1995) observes that the inequalities between these different conceptualizations of time are hardly ever questioned in that activities governed by commodified work time are given unchallenged priority over those that are not convertible into currency: 'That is to say, time-generating and time-giving activities have no place in the meaning cluster of quantity, measure, dates and deadlines, of calculability, abstract exchange value, efficiency and profit' (p. 95). Boundaries between these two distinct discursive work and home areas used to be tight and clear (Clark-Campbell, 2000; Morf, 1989; Nippert-Eng, 1995). Both, however, demand unflinching commitment and loyalty from the individual. Both are 'greedy institutions' (Cosser, 1974: 77), which used to be clearly segregated.

However the discourses and practices associated with these 'modern times' have come under attack and have become subject to flexibility and change. Technological innovations, together with changing managerial strategies, create new opportunities to relocate parts of the production process into culturally different spheres, including that of 'home'. Homeworking is indisputably on the increase (Brocklehurst, 2001; Jackson and Van der Wielen, 1998) and straddles a multitude of different ethnic, gendered and educational groups (Felstead and Jewson, 1996; Huws, 1994; Salmi, 1996). The target group of this article – managerial professional staff – is no exception from this trend as recent surveys confirm (e.g. Institute of Employment Research, 2000; Work-Life Balance Survey, 2000).

It has been suggested that the relocation of 'work' into 'home' benefits both the employment organization and the individual (Apgar, 1999; Bailyn, 1988; Davenport and Pearlson, 1998; Fletcher and Bailyn, 1996; Kurland and Bailyn, 1999; Stanworth, 1998). The employment organization benefits in terms of reduced estate costs, increases in efficiency, creating and maintaining good morale among the workforce. The individual is said to benefit by increased autonomy, balancing work and life, and saving in cost and time in commuting. However, other contributions point to work intensification and the colonization of previously private enclaves linked to flexible relocation of work into other cultural arenas (Felstead and Jewson, 2000). But, the purpose of this article is not to weigh up the dis/advantages of working at home from either side of the employment relationship. Rather we analyse the consequences of the relocation of work for the construction of identities through the theoretical accounts provided by the work of Giddens (1990, 1991) and Sennett (1998).

Identity, Fragmentation and Working from Home

Giddens describes the most salient feature of modernization as the disembedding of social relations from their local context: 'by disembedding I mean the "lifting out" of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space' (1990: 21). Central to disembedding processes is the delineation of time and space, which are no longer tied together through the 'situatedness of place' (1991: 16). Place, therefore, becomes less significant as an external referent (1991: 146–7). Individuals are seen as knowing human agents, who are continuously engaged in working at their self-identity. We view identity here, not as something a person has, which has been the dominant view of western thought (Widdicombe, 1998), but as an ongoing process of construction of the self (Watson and Harris, 1999), played out primarily in and through a variety of discursive and behavioural activities. This view treats the ongoing construction of the self as a merging of the person and his or her social context and includes the gendering of identities (Gherardi, 1995; Williams, 2002). It echoes Giddens' ideas that people are cast in an ongoing process of reflexively monitoring their actions, and reviewing them in the light of new social situations or newly received knowledge, and that this process is one of identity construction.

In order to achieve a sense of identity, the individual needs to maintain and 'work at' a plausible, unfolding life narrative or biography (Linde, 1993). This can only be achieved through the provision of ontological security based on habit and routine: 'all individuals develop a framework of ontological security of some sort, based on routines of various forms' (Giddens, 1991: 44). The perpetual task of the individual is to create 'ontological reference points as an

integral aspect of "going on" in the contexts of day-to-day life'. These existential questions are played out on the level of everyday behaviour, including discursive activity:

In 'doing' everyday life, all human beings 'answer' the question of being; they do it by the nature of the activities they carry out. As with other existential questions . . . such 'answers' are lodged fundamentally on the level of behaviour. (p. 48)

By discursive activity, we view language and talk as 'doing things' (Tietze et al., forthcoming), rejecting the notion that the social world can be discovered as an entity 'out there', in which language has a merely representative function (Gergen, 1992). Instead, we see language as a fundamentally social phenomenon, through which the social world is constituted, contested, challenged and changed. Language use in this sense is constitutive of reality, in much the same way as any other behavioural routine.

The importance of behaviour based on routines, as an integral part of developing a continuous and authentic sense of self, is also noted by Sennett (1998). While both Giddens and Sennett are fully aware of the potential dangers of excessive, externally controlled routines, they both view them nevertheless as essential to the formation and sustaining of identity. It is only through the pursuit of long-term goals, the commitment to long-term aspects of human experience that such 'character' (or identity) is formed. Sennett, in particular, is highly sceptical about the possibility of forming such enduring bonds under the conditions of flexible capitalism. He writes: 'The conditions of time in the new capitalism have created a conflict between character and experience, the experience of disjointed time threatening the ability of people to form their character into sustained narratives' (p.31). The emergence and formation of character as based on the long-term aspects of emotional experience and expressed by loyalty and mutual commitment are threatened and eroded by the philosophies and practices of flexible capitalism, which is indeed antithetical to the crafting of meaningful narratives. Sennett, unlike Giddens, sees an irresolvable contradiction between 'flexible capitalism' and its epitome 'flexitime' and such long-term grounding of individual characters. For Sennett, such a human project is threatened by the flexibility inherent in new capitalism, its ideologies and short-term orientation, which is at direct loggerheads with the 'slow' emergence of character. Giddens, somehow more optimistically, sees individuals cast into freedom from tradition – an ontological position that requires of them to become authors of their own lives by keeping a particular narrative of identity going.

It seems to us that the work of both sociologists offers important ideas to better understand the processes of working from home. We see our cohort as being at the cusp of temporal flexibility, since they are an exemplar of working within space/time disembeddedness. They work remotely, physically separate

from their employment organizations. This raises several questions, which are pertinent to the theoretical ruminations outlined earlier. The homeworkers could be seen as being set free from both the constraints of the bureaucratic 'iron cage' as well as its ontologically secure and therefore meaningful routines and habits, its stable and unambiguous boundaries. According to both Giddens and Sennett, confronted with such freedom from external constraints, homeworkers strive to find a substitute for the lost security. However, Sennett sees the flexible practice of homeworking in particular as a threat to the formation of a meaningful life narrative, because surveillance is exercised through the computer screen, rendering the previously private enclave subject to the observation and control of the employer. Returning to the logic of the 'iron cage' metaphor, the question arises of how individuals cope with the ontological insecurity that results from the meeting of 'work' and 'home': do they copy the routines and habits of the traditional workplace – preferring the safety of the cage; do they start to develop new patterns that co-exist or even challenge the traditional patterns – are they leaving the cage so to speak? Or do they find themselves divided between two different modes of being, two rationales, not knowing where they belong and experiencing such freedom as a dubious and confusing blessing?

We started our research with these questions in mind. Through examining how professional homeworkers might be suspended between two different sets of traditions, each with their own meaning systems, we set out to examine how they resolve this suspension and maintain their identity(ies).

The Research Design

Working from a social-constructionist perspective (Berger and Luckmann, 1966), we took guidance from those approaches that developed a semiotic and sociological perspective on time (Adam, 1990, 1995; Nippert-Eng, 1995; Zerubavel, 1987, 1991) because, through such a perspective, the symbolic relations between the temporal, the social and the moral express themselves in material artefacts and observable behaviour. We describe our approach to understanding the construction of social reality as 'discursive' insofar as we view discourse as 'A connected set of statements, concepts, terms and expressions which constitutes a way of talking or writing about a particular issue, thus framing the way people understand and respond with respect to this issue' (Watson, 1995: 814). Discourses are viewed, then, as framing and influencing the way people understand their realities and act upon them. However, in doing so, people are actively re-shaping and developing such discourses. Thus, discourses are 'drawn on' by human actors in attempts to further and achieve particular projects. 'Drawing on' in this context means the utilization of particular discursive resources (such as particular expressions, practices and symbolic

behaviour as well as the deployment of artefacts) that are made socially available to all actors.

We visited 25 homeworkers, all British nationals, from diverse industrial (e.g. manufacturing, extraction, utilities), sectoral (public, private, charity) or functional (e.g. accounting; logistics, personnel, marketing, housing; health and safety) backgrounds. They were all in a long-term employment relationship with one employer as salaried employees and had been working from home for some time. In our sample the patterns of such home-based telework varied – some teleworked regularly (1.5 – 3 days a week), other did so more sporadically but for longer periods; others had no pattern at all. In this regard the irregularity of telework patterns in our sample echoes with other available literature (e.g. Felstead et al., 2001; Steward, 2000) in that there are no discernible patterns for professional groups who work at home. All our teleworkers can be described as management professionals, who had business/management education to degree level and who had established successful careers in the middle layers of their respective organizations. As such they were involved in high discretion work and self-directed in the pursuit and conduct of their activities. Their age span ranged from mid thirties to mid forties. We interviewed 13 men and 12 women. 18 were married or cohabited, 4 in long term relationships and 3 were single. 20 had children. Of those 18 cohabiting/married, 9 were traditional households with one breadwinner (of those 9 only 2 were female), the other 9 were dual career households (5 where the male was the main breadwinner, 4 where the female was the main breadwinner). All our respondents were 'voluntary' teleworkers who had chosen to work in this way.

In light of a lack of agreed definitions of telework or census information (see Steward, 2000), it is not possible to determine whether this sample is representative for other (professional) teleworking groups. Clearly, we do not suggest that our findings can be generalized to any other telework group. However, in terms of national background (see Hall, 1960; 1976 and 1979; Manrai and Manrai; 1995 for discussion of national culture and time), professional status, degree of self-directedness in the pursuit of work activity, age and attitude towards telework, our study group can be considered to be sufficiently homogeneous to allow for some collation of their accounts to shed light on the experience of telework time. Further, all our respondents had to develop practical solutions to the questions posed by the relocation of 'work' into 'home. As we have argued in our theoretical discussion, the development of such practical solutions is at the very core of identity work.

We conducted the first three visits together as a research team in order to ensure consistency in the questions we asked and what we 'looked for' in our observations. The 'interview part' of the visits were tape recorded and transcribed. Following on from the first three visits we found that how our respondents' talked about and experienced time could be understood within Adam's

(1990) three categories of 'time', 'timing' and 'tempo' as the basis of structuring and controlling their work. In the subsequent visits, after each of which we continued to meet and discuss transcripts, notes and impressions, we focused more strongly on such time-frames and how they were used by the homeworkers. We asked questions about the duration of work (time: the work period), the arrangement of work (timing: the scheduling and sequencing of work activity) and work utilisation (tempo: the pace and intensity of work). We asked our homeworkers how they managed the working day when working at home. These questions entailed cues about the role of routines, the beginning and end of the working day, how they managed unforeseen interruptions, how they motivated themselves to work, interacted with family and friends, clients and colleagues. The interviews were conducted in the home itself. This assisted the process of conducting them in an informal manner, so that the homeworkers were encouraged to talk freely and openly about their experience of working from home, rather than rigidly adhering to the interview schedule questions and format.

A previously agreed part of the interview process was to be given a 'tour of the house'. This provided us with some insight into whether work and home spaces were kept separate and boundaries quite stringently established (pointing to a re-enactment of the home-work divide), or whether the distinction had become blurred and relaxed. Frequently, partners, spouses, children, pets, neighbours (even builders!) were present, and several participated in the interviews. On some occasions we were invited to stay for lunch or an evening meal. These, of course, provided invaluable opportunities to observe the dynamics of 'work' and 'home' and complemented the interview data. For example, in one instance frequent work related telephone calls interrupted the family meal, which prompted a discussion about 'intrusion' versus 'flexibility'. Thus, we entered into ad hoc conversations with some of the participants and learned more about their interpretation of events.

In the first instance we let the words of our respondents speak to us to get some feel for their experience of temporalities. However, we also brought our pre-understanding (Gummesson, 1991) as researchers to our study and used our knowledge of time-frames to make sense of our respondents' words. In this regard data analysis contained a strong iterative element, in that we went 'backwards and forwards' between empirical findings and theory, so that they came to inform each other. This data analysis preceded the final theorising of the findings, which we conducted using Giddens' and Sennett's ideas on identity and character, focusing on whether the homeworkers developed new routines/habits that could accommodate a plurality of temporal regimes, or whether they largely continued to copy and live the temporalities of traditional workplaces.

Every researcher needs to find a solution about how to make sense of and present her findings; in this regard any presentation of data is 'crafted' (Watson, 1994; 2001) in that researchers make decisions about selection, organization

and evaluation of their raw findings. Thus, we ply our craft and in doing so present a mediated picture of the experiences of our respondents. The interpretation, however, is situated in contemporary debates and theoretical accounts, thereby providing context to our work. We decided to mould the data in this way so as to come closest to a continuing narrative that throws light on the theoretical debate through analysis of empirical findings. Therefore, in this paper we have not written case-based accounts, (although individual case studies have been formulated as part of the data analysis), but selected pertinent quotes and used them to 'shape' our account. These quotes are both 'unique' in that particular individuals uttered them, but they also 'typify' issues or themes that were expressed by other teleworkers, too. For example many teleworkers talked about internalized default assumptions about timing, but only one used the expression of an inner clock, which we, in turn, decided to use, because it succinctly and elegantly expressed the notion of internalized temporalities. Direct quotes from the data are put in italics. We have attributed such quotes to the respective interviewee and highlighted whenever such quotes were typical for particular gender patterns. Of course, particular themes were discussed in all our interviews: in order to stress this point, we have sometimes strung together short quotes taken from different interviews but about the same subject matter. These are highlighted as such and the subject matter is put in brackets after the quotes. We have also included some longer quotations to give the reader a feeling for the context in which they were made. We also include an appendix, in which further relevant examples of artefactual, observational and language data is reproduced in order to give the reader a better flavour of these resources and how they were utilized.

The Research Findings

In this section we discuss the data and how the homeworkers (and their families) coped with the relocation of paid work, its discourses and practices, into the culturally different sphere of home. We have ordered this section along the 'time', 'timing' and 'tempo' elements that structure the gainful work process. According to Adam (1990), these constitute the basic categories through which work activity is structured and controlled.

Time (working period)

None of our respondents adhered to a strict practice of working from 9 am to 5 pm at home. It was stressed several times that the *9 to 5 day no longer exists*. This could also be said to be true of the traditional workplace of course, but we found that internalized mechanisms, in the sense of Thompson's (1967) inter-

nalized time disciplines, provided a mental default mechanism about when to begin and end the working day. Homeworkers expressed this on the level of *I've got an inner clock that tells me when to start and when to begin* (Gerald, 35, Logistics manager). This time discipline was enacted through symbolic acts and artefacts such as wearing particular clothes, or following particular bodily regimes, or entering specific locations such as an office or a study. Both men and women undertook such enactments.

In the morning, routine behaviour seemed to be at its most rigid: the homeworkers attempted to be *at work* at a particular time, so that they could reap the motivational benefits of starting work *on time*, whenever that might be (quotes taken from various interviews; theme was the importance of keeping to particular schedules and difficulties in experiencing this). However, particularly in families with children, this was not always possible and renegotiations of daily routines, slight or even more radical deviations from the set routines, occurred frequently. Interestingly, male homeworkers got drawn, not always voluntarily, into the different temporalities of family lives and had to respond by *giving up the notion of untouchable work routines while the family is around* (Richard, 34, IT manager). The interruption of work routines was deemed *unavoidable* if small children were in the house, in which case *doing deals with the children* (Richard, 34, IT manager), the enforcement of closed-door policies through the use of 'closed' and 'open' signs at office doors mediated between the traditional work routines and the family patterns. Some respondents reported that the *normal continuous working day is often all bits and pieces* (Sarah, 34, HRD manager). For example, all respondents reported that they frequently interrupted 'work' to do domestic chores. These breaks punctuated the day at irregular intervals, in particular after lunch and during the afternoon. This was due to a *loss of concentration* (Eileen, 39, general manager of hospice) after a sustained period of work, but also to family commitments such as picking children up from nursery, going shopping and so on. While most interruptions of this kind were kept brief, at least half of our respondents also took time off to pursue more lengthy leisure activities or socialize with friends. This was seen as unproblematic, since the increase in flexibility enabled them to complete or continue with work at other times. All individuals established alternate sets of routines that co-existed or intermeshed with traditional work routines. It is perhaps significant that interruption were accepted as normal part of the working day by both men and women, but that in families with children the female teleworkers reported on increased experience of fragmentation compared to their male counterparts. We reflect this in two quotes chosen for their representative nature. Julie's (37, hospitality manager) remark that *Working at home really helps, but sometimes the day seems to consist of a so many little things, that don't add up to a full day! But on the whole it makes life easier* was typical of female commentaries on fragmentation issues. Whereas the males in our

study tended to echo John's (43, facility manager) observation that *There are, of course, interruptions from family and neighbours, but I keep them at bay pretty successfully.*

The end of the working day was even more open-ended than the beginning. In families with children, their rhythms and patterns shaped, sometimes determined, the end of the working day. Closing routines included: tidying up the work space; the preparation of the family meal; picking up children from nursery or school; changing into leisure clothes. However, the working day was frequently resumed later on and continued into the evening, and sometimes into the night. This was often the case for homeworkers with families. Weekends were not a taboo in terms of work activity and were described as *no longer the pure utopia of non-work*. Rather, as a temporal boundary separating 'work' and 'home', the weekend had lost its demarcation function, and had become *dented, mixed* or indeed *flexible* (quotes taken from various interviews; theme was the work–non-work boundary; its importance for the teleworker/family; how it was enacted).

The emerging pattern is that the duration of work (time) has indeed become more flexible. None of our respondents enacted the 9 to 5 custom as basic routine of the day, and many did not see the weekend as a work-free period. However, this is not to imply that these models have completely disappeared, rather they have become blurred at the boundaries, punctuated with different temporalities and sometimes directly challenged by the co-existence of other temporalities.

Timing (scheduling and sequencing of work activity)

The habits of scheduling the work tasks over the duration of the workday had similarly become enmeshed with the tasks of the domestic environment. Many of the routine work tasks such as checking emails, dealing with paper work or contacting clients were only loosely arranged in a schedule. In between and enmeshed in those tasks were domestic activities such as: *doing the laundry; nipping to the post office; picking up kids; going shopping; peeling potatoes*; or, as one homeworker wryly commented, *being in charge of the loo paper supplies* (quotes taken from various interviews; theme was the mingling of work and domestic task; the scheduling of activities). Both male and female teleworkers did engage in this kind of domestic activity, with men tending to be somewhat more reluctant and less frequently engaged than women. It is significant that domestic activities were not pursued in official 'breaks', but intermingled with work tasks, in particular during days that consisted more of *a shrapnel of tasks rather than a block of work* (Sarah, 34, PR manager). Task-based routines, both work and domestic, were combined in a way that required the homeworkers to continuously *string together all kinds of things, work and*

homework so to speak (Sarah, 34, PR manager). The experience of this more flexible scheduling of a multiplicity of tasks was frequently described as either *juggling/keeping balls in the air* or *balancing*. Or our respondents framed their experience in terms of *struggle* as in *an ongoing struggle to be all things to all people*. Some of our homeworkers found that their ever-availability *on both fronts* resulted in a disintegration of social contacts that had become increasingly *more frequent*, but also more *superficial* (quotes taken from various interviews; themes followed on from scheduling theme, where we explored the difficulties and dilemmas inherent in having [semi] flexible schedules and queried teleworkers about how they experienced and evaluated such flexible scheduling).

The role of task-based routines continued to be important and provided a sense of purposive goal to the homeworkers. However, there was flexibility in the sequencing of tasks, resulting in degrees of fragmentation and intermeshing of 'work' and 'home'. Our data do not suggest that these homeworkers were free to prioritize 'home' or 'family' schedules over 'work schedules'. However we did witness many instances where designated and deliberate attempts were made to combine the two. The metaphors of *juggling* and *struggling* resonate with a precarious balancing of different demands and tasks, which is perpetually threatened by disorder and chaos. In this regard, such mixed task-based routines provide both opportunity for integration and balance as much as they pose threats of disintegration and instability. However, female teleworkers on the whole expressed more routines of *juggling* and *struggling* than their male counterparts. Yvonne (46, course manager) put it as follows: *Well, being at home just means that you juggle things in a different way and at different times, but I am quite used to it anyway.*

Tempo (pace and intensity of work activity):

With regard to the pace and intensity of work all respondents described working at home as *very, very effective*. The intensive engagement with the work task was univocally associated with the absence of repetitive and frequent interruptions common in the traditional office, with its noise and hustle and bustle. Thus, despite the fragmentation of the work time and the enmeshing of work and domestic task, the involvement with the work task was described as *quite intense, focused and concentrated* – resulting in *more work being done in less time* (quotes taken from various interviews; theme of engagement with work). The uses of this 'saved time' varied. About half of our respondents pursued domestic and leisure activities instead or described it as *lazy time . . . time that slows down the show*; others used it to get *even more work done* – these different behaviours were driven by different reasons such as increasing work loads; career aspiration or for the enjoyment of the work task itself. It is perhaps in this

use of such 'saved time' that we found the most marked gendered differences. Female teleworkers, in particular those with children, used such saved time to engage more strongly with domestic responsibility and care; male teleworkers used such time more for their own enjoyment/leisure or to fill it with additional (paid) work activity.

The decisions that an individual needs to make with regard to the tempo of work concern what activities to substitute for 'saved time' – such decisions are key to a sense of self and the construction of identities. The question of what to do with the gains of effective working and the thus *saved time* was central to the question of how our respondents constructed their sense of self. While for some, in order to assume the identity of a *real professional* (such discussions about 'professionalism' cropped up, unprompted, in all interviews) they felt obliged to fill this time with purposeful (work) activity – those homeworkers reverted back to strict segregation practices, drawing *clear lines* (George, 36, office manager) around 'work' and 'home'. Both male and female teleworkers drew such lines, the difference between them being the degree of enforcing them vis-à-vis non-work demands. Jenny (36, manager of nursery), fairly typically, comments: *Of course, I have to draw the line somewhere between work and other things. But it is difficult sometimes, in particular when JJ (Jenny Junior, her daughter) is around. I tend to compromise.* Whereas Steven (40, accounts manager) comments: *The lines are drawn and clear. The children know that I am not to be approached. They're ok about this . . . they have to be.* For other homeworkers, this 'unfilled' time resonated with a sense of unease, restlessness and even agitation – posing questions of identity that remained mainly unanswered. It was only a small minority that joyfully and actively grasped the opportunities entailed in such 'saved time' and reconstructed their present, newly emerging identities in the light of their past experience: John (36, operations manager) is possibly an exception, but his words seem to suggest possibilities for changes in gendered identities that are inherent in telework: *it is a good time to be with my kids. I can now be the father I never was and I never had myself.*

Discussion: Temporal Flexibility and Identity Work

The relocation of 'work' into 'home' required our respondents to actively connect with and keep a hold on identity work. They had to engage with what it means to them to be 'a professional', 'a spouse', 'a parent', 'a colleague', 'a supervisor' and so on. These questions of identity were played out practically, via the enactment and establishment of routines and habits as the ontological bedrock within which such identities are formed (Giddens, 1991).

We found that the temporal regimes of traditional workplaces continued to exist as an internalized default mechanism that loosely shapes the organization

and control of work activity. Beyond the external controls of the work place, our respondents, both male and female, continued to exercise self-discipline in the management of their work. However, they also exercised degrees of genuine autonomy and self-determination in doing so. In order to achieve this, they had to make decisions about the temporal elements of their work and their home lives. These, in turn, were reified into routines and practices. Inherent in making such decisions are questions of identity and 'who one is'. In other words the everyday ordering of activity is no mean feat and far from being straightforward and unambiguous. Rather, it is intrinsically linked with ontological questions of identity. Our respondents described these processes frequently and consistently in terms of *struggling* and *juggling*. Our findings bear out the established 'polychronic' time orientation that is attributed to women (Adam, 1990; Daly, 1996; Manrai and Manrai, 1995; Paolucci, 1996 and 1998; Steward, 2000), which is indeed furthered in and through telework. What does the employment of such metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) tell us? The use of such metaphors addresses the practical difficulties in managing the complexities resulting from the meeting of two previously separate cultural spheres. In addition, they can be understood as reflecting and reproducing identity work, expressing the precarious and inchoate processes of creating and shifting between perceived aspects of the self. The earlier quoted example of one homemaker who joyfully embraced the opportunity of spending more time with his children points to the benevolent possibilities inherent in working at home, insofar as the homemaker is engaging *more* meaningfully with his children. However, working at home did not result in such welcomed reorientation in all cases. Other solutions comprised the reversal to quite traditional separation of roles acted out through routines and symbolic acts (e.g. dress codes) that stressed segregation. In sum, we found both the re-enactment of traditional (temporal) routines as well as degrees of freedom to experiment and play with new or reworked routines. Always, they co-existed. Frequently, they made for uneasy bedfellows.

We found Sennett's (1998) analysis helpful in understanding some of the dilemmas that our homeworkers face, such as the struggle to engage 'deeply' and 'meaningfully' with both 'work' and 'home'; both of which are 'greedy institutions' demanding unflinching and continuous dedication (Cosser, 1974: 77). The experience of some of our homeworkers of increased, yet more superficial, social contacts confirms Sennett's (1998) critical stance about flexibility and whether it can ever 'make a more engaged human being' (p. 45). Our respondents had developed some tolerance in the face of such fragmentation; some found this diversity of engagement stimulating and exciting. This echoes Sennett's description of 'Davos man' (pp. 60–3) and his lack of temporal attachment (an ability to unproblematically let go of the past) and his confidence to accept fragmentation. However, Sennett also points out that such traits might benefit those in power and wealth, but that such flexibility is likely to prove a

poisoned chalice for those in less privileged positions, because they are subjected to the arbitrariness of fickle market demands or capricious changes in ideologies. The ambivalence about working at home displayed by some of our homeworkers might well express their 'middle' position in their respective organizational hierarchies – a position that afforded them some of the benefits of flexible times, as much as they subjected them to the potential for disorder and a sense of loss of place.

However, our data did not confirm Sennett's unwavering dictum on working at home – 'the most flexible of flexiness', that the surveillance of labour processes is often greater for those absent from the office than for those who are present' (p. 58). Thus, one of Sennett's arguments is that the discourses of flexibility can actually exacerbate the stifling and soul-destroying mindless routines of bureaucracy. Indeed, much of the literature addresses homeworking from a managerial perspective of remaining in control of physically absent employees (Gray et al., 1993; Huws et al., 1990; Rifkin, 1995). We did not find this theme played out empirically. Our data echo some survey evidence (Huws, 1993) and case study evidence (Brocklehurst, 2001) that 'home' does not become subject to externally controlled surveillance apparatus. Instead, we found that internalized time disciplines provide a strong mental framework through which both work and home lives were organized and controlled. However, this is not to say that through internalized self-discipline our homeworkers have become mindless puppets on the invisible string of organizational agents. Along with Giddens (1990, 1991), we see our homeworkers as knowing human agents whose choices reflect and constitute the ongoing processes of an emerging life narrative. The role of routines and habits is to provide the essential ontological security to achieve an unbroken sense of identity. One of the hallmarks of high modernity is that the construction of one's identity has become more problematic in the light of the absence of locally grounded traditions. Therefore, individuals are required to reflectively engage in creating such a life project for themselves. Empirically, this was played out in the utilization of the commodified 'time-exchange discourse', its vocabulary and its temporal routines to establish a sense of order and continuity, while simultaneously bending those rules and habits so as to achieve more integrated lives. Thus, in drawing on such a discursive framework, it also became subject to challenge and change. The power of the discourse of commodified time exchange thus becomes eroded in a continuous process of exposure to different rationalities and rhythms.

Faced with such rationalities, it seems to us that our homeworkers could not but engage in identity work, but that the realization of unbroken life projects remains precarious indeed. When this delicate balance falters, working at home may implode into an experience of chaos and disintegration, on the one hand, or result in an automatic re-establishment of rigid order and regimented temporalities.

Conclusion

Working at home brings to the forefront important questions about the formation of human characters and identities. The theoretical accounts of Giddens (1990, 1991) and Sennett (1998) make central to such formation the articulation of life narratives. Working at home is both reflective and constitutive of such (high) modern deliberations in that, through working at home, old discourses of externalized temporal controls and associated practices and habits meet with emergent discourses that have not yet been fully articulated. Currently, such new discourses are experienced as a mixed blessing of blurring temporalities and concomitant insecurity and anxiety. In other words, these discourses do not necessarily co-exist happily – rather they vie for power and control, colliding, competing and collapsing into one another in some homes, rigidly separated in others. However, it is premature to argue either way: that either the discourse of commodified time exchange has finally succeeded in a hostile take-over of the ‘home’, or that the alluring, inescapable temporalities of ‘home’ have overcome the cruel confines of the time economy. Rather, what we observe is a redrawing of boundaries between ‘work’ and ‘home’ that recasts their mutually dependent relationship.

At the core of working at home lies a paradox in that it both *unites* ‘work’ and ‘home’ – providing an opportunity for more integrated narratives – as much as it *fragments* by introducing different temporalities into the private realm – making it harder to commit in a meaningful way to either arena. We see these paradoxes as a consequence of working at home, because it juxtaposes two previously distinct cultural spheres. This requires the relocated workers and their families to develop ‘coping strategies’ informed by family contingencies, task exigencies, situational expedience as well as personal preference. In doing so, they address the quagmire of complexity and continue to make sense vis-a-vis their unfolding narratives. This is a precarious process, whose paradoxes provide not only an ongoing challenge to the homeworkers and their families, but present a rich field of enquiry for social researchers to observe, analyse and comment on the processes of unfolding cultural change.

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APPENDIX: Discursive Resources

	Discursive resources indicative of commodified time exchange	Discursive resources indicative of time-giving	Expressions of conflict and struggle
Language data	<p><i>Catch phrases</i> such as: ‘pretend I am not here’; ‘I’ll see you at seven’ (= ‘go away’); ‘the most accurate clock is the internal one’.</p> <p><i>Expressions of ‘time management’</i>: ‘We budget our time more carefully’;</p> <p><i>Machine/assembly line metaphors</i> such as: ‘both [work and family] need to run like clockwork’; ‘we are doing family from 5 to 7’.</p>	<p><i>Expression of new identities</i>: ‘I am more of a father now’; ‘I actually have time to talk to my neighbour’; ‘working at home has got its allure – I am rediscovering my garden’.</p>	<p><i>Metaphors of ‘struggling’</i>; ‘balancing’; being ‘torn’ or ‘stretched’ or metaphors of being ‘sucked in’, ‘eaten’, ‘overburdened’.</p> <p><i>Expressions of refusal/resistance</i>: ‘I refuse to give my children a “time slot”, but work seems always to be there.’</p> <p><i>Use of swearwords; joking, irony or sarcasm</i>: ‘The whole f***** day is one big mess’; ‘the blooming delivery man just would not go away and kept on talking’.</p>
Routines and practices	<p><i>Rigid routines/practices</i> emulating traditional work: ‘We keep strict office hours in this house’. ‘I always dress professionally: nothing but suit, white shirt and tie will do.’</p> <p>‘When “at work” I treat the children professionally, brief and with some courtesy.’</p>	<p><i>Interrupted/changed/re-prioritized routines</i>: ‘I do interrupt work to do other things’; ‘as a family we string together our days’; ‘we always share breakfast and lunch, this is more important’.</p>	<p><i>Attempts to establish a degree of order</i>: ‘I really needed to think hard about what to do and when’; ‘it’s never really sorted, every day is difficult’; ‘there are some set routines in theory, in practice it is more complex’.</p>
Artefacts and artefactual arrangement	<p><i>Re-creation of traditional office</i>; clear demarcation – e.g. ‘open’ or ‘closed’ signs at office door.</p> <p><i>Usage</i> of ‘office’ diary, cups, coffee, etc. as separate from ‘home’.</p>	<p><i>Less rigid boundaries</i>: artefactual cluttering criss-crossing the divide (e.g. children’s toys; files from work).</p> <p><i>Usage</i> of shared diaries, cutlery, meals.</p>	<p><i>Struggles of access</i>, e.g. to computer, in particular if situated in ‘office’.</p> <p><i>Continuous expansion of effort</i> to keep ‘home’ and ‘work’ under control: ‘it just never ends. I just do not know these days where what is.’</p>