# THE EFFECT OF COWORKING SPACES ON WORK-LIFE AND WORK-FAMILY BOUNDARIES

by

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# ABSTRACT

ASHLEIGH N. DICKSON. The effect of coworking spaces on work-life and work-family boundaries. (Under the direction of DR. JILL YAVORSKY)

Coworking spaces have recently grown in popularity as a third workspace with benefits of both working from home and traditional office spaces. The goal of the current study was to examine how employees working in coworking spaces construct and navigate the boundaries between work and life in this working space. Two research questions were asked: how are work-life boundaries conceptualized and navigated for those in coworking spaces, and are there gender or parental differences in how these boundaries are conceptualized and navigated? To answer these questions, border theory was applied to 78 in-depth interviews with individuals who work primarily in coworking spaces using a constant comparative analysis. Five major themes emerged from the data. First, employees that left traditional office spaces enjoy the autonomy and flexibility they have when working in a coworking space. Second, employees that now work in a coworking space instead of working from home report feeling less isolated and less distracted from family and chores. Third, employees that want to integrate their work and life spheres (especially women) can bring their family to work and create social friendships that extend beyond the coworking space. Fourth, employees who want to separate their work and life can use segmentation strategies such as using physical and temporal boundaries to strengthen the border between work and life. Finally, the benefits of coworking extend beyond work-life boundaries and balance to increase well-being, provide collaboration and accountability, and create a community of passion around work.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS


CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW 5

- 2.1 Work-Life Interactions 5
- 2.2 Border Theory 6
- 2.3 Gender and Work-Life 7
- 2.4 Coworking and Work-Life Interactions 9

CHAPTER 3: METHOD 14

- 3.1 Coworking Spaces 14
- 3.2 Participants 15
- 3.3 Interviews 15
- 3.4 Analyses 16

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS 19

- 4.1 Coworking Compared to Traditional Office 19
- 4.2 Coworking Compared to Working from Home 21
- 4.3 Integrating Work-Life Boundaries 23
- 4.4 Segmenting Work-Life Boundaries 27
- 4.5 Other Coworking Advantages: Well-Being and Work-Benefits 31
- 4.6 Negative Case Analysis 33

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS 36

- 5.1 Implications 39
- 5.2 Limitations and Future Research Directions 40

REFERENCES 42

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE 53

APPENDIX B: COWORKING SPACES 54

APPENDIX C:PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS 55

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In recent years, work-life topics have become more central in organizational research. Balancing work and nonwork life has become more challenging as more women enter the workforce and more couples become dual earners (Carless & Wintle, 2007; Cowan & Bochantin, 2009; Pew Research Center, 2015; Smith, 2015). Organizations have begun to offer more flexible working conditions, allowing an increased number of U.S. workers flexibility in when and where they work (Bochantin & Cowan, 2016a). For example, more employees are beginning to telecommute, or work from locations outside of the traditional office (Thompson et al., 2015). The ability to work from a flexible location, traditionally a home office, saves employees the need to commute to and from work daily and increases their autonomy (Harpaz, 2002). Employees who can work remotely report increased commitment to their organizations as well as more effort into their work (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). Organizations also benefit from the arrangement through increased productivity, motivation, and satisfaction from their employees as well as, in some cases, saving money on physical space (Harpaz, 2002).

While many with telecommuting options choose to work at home, others have been moving their work to a new kind of office space: coworking spaces. Coworking spaces offer the autonomy of working from home while diminishing distractions from home life (Sundsted et al., 2009). They also help address feelings of isolation and loneliness that some workers experience from working alone in these new arrangements (Daniel et al., 2018; Davies & Tollervey, 2013). Coworking spaces may allow a more balanced life for both parents and nonparents by allowing employees with flexible

schedules to access space at hours that traditional offices may not offer, varying workspaces, and coworkers without them being actual colleagues from the same company (who may be more inclined to monitor their productivity or time in the space; Kojo & Nenonen, 2017; Orel, 2019; Robelski et al., 2019; Tremblay & Scaillerez, 2020).

The first working location identified as a "coworking space" was founded in 2005 in San Francisco (Waters-Lynch et al., 2016). The founder, Brad Neuberg, advertised the space as having the "office of a traditional corporate job, but in a very unique way" (Neuberg, 2005, para. 2). Since then, coworking has grown rapidly. According to the 2019 Global Coworking Survey, over 2 million people are working in more than 22,000 coworking spaces around the world (Foertsch, 2019). While the largest coworking spaces (some with over 300 members) are in megacities such as New York and London, more locations are being established in medium and small cities (Foertsch, 2019).

Coworking spaces attract typically younger to mid-age independent contractors, entrepreneurs, or telecommuters. Although at the beginning of coworking, most members were men, women have gained a significant presence in recent years (Foertsch, 2017). Cultures of the spaces typically encourage more relaxed dress codes, language, and social groups (Waters-Lynch et al., 2016). Social interactions are a core value of coworking spaces (Waters-Lynch et al., 2016), with the idea of community being a central theme. The designs of the spaces often encourage sociality, for example offering open and transparent workspaces and encouraging a blend of work and play (van Meel & Vos, 2001). Many coworking spaces, such as WeWork and Next Space, also offer private office options but advertise the open workspace as a central selling point for potential coworking members (Waters-Lynch et al., 2016). Many coworking spaces also have

features such as spacious kitchens and lounge areas offering amenities such as free coffee and tea to encourage social interaction. Those who choose to work from a coworking space rather than working from home often report that the social aspect is one of the most important factors in their decision, wanting to be able to share their ideas and feel less isolated (DeGuzman & Tang, 2011; Grossman, 2007; Waters-Lynch et al., 2016). Coworkers enjoy the convenience, flexibility, and autonomy of working from home while maintaining the community, collaboration, and access of traditional office spaces (Sundsted et al., 2009).

Though coworking spaces may offer a partial solution to work-life issues, most research has focused on telecommuters working from home. Telecommuting and more flexible work arrangements are linked to less work-family issues (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). However, working from home may also blur the boundaries between work and home, which in turn increases work-life problems (Kossek et al., 2006; Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006). Many of the issues with work-life balance for telecommuters stems from being at home. Current research has not examined how working primarily in a coworking space influences an individual's boundaries between work and life. In this study, I fill this gap and explore how coworking influences workers' boundaries between work and life.

Based on content-coding of 78 in-depth interviews and extensive notes from over 700 ethnography hours, specifically, I examine how individuals working in coworking spaces conceptualize and navigate the boundaries between work and non-work life. Additionally, I examine whether there are differences in how men and women (parents or non-parents) in coworking spaces perceive borders between work and non-work life.

Building on literature on family, work, and telecommuting, this study highlights how coworking spaces compare to traditional office spaces and working from home as well as how employees enact and manage the borders between work and life. It also underscores how border theory may be applied in coworking spaces and furthers our understanding of gender differences in how boundaries are made and crossed.

In the following sections, I summarize the literature on work-life and work-family constructs, border theory, and coworking. Then, I provide details on the method and data analysis used to study and apply these concepts to coworking and answer my research questions. Finally, I discuss the findings of the study and potential theoretical and practical implications.

# CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Work-Life Interactions

Work-life research became a distinct area of focus beginning in the 1960s, primarily focused on work and family research. Although definitions can vary, generally scholars conceptualize work-life issues as the interaction between two spheres in an individual's life: the work sphere and the life sphere. The work sphere includes any activity related to paid labor for an individual. The life sphere then captures life outside of work, including family, friends, communities, and hobbies (Brough et al., 2014; Fisher et al., 2009; Joseph & Sebastian, 2019; Smeltzer et al., 2016). This definition has been expanded from "work-family," to be more inclusive of workers who are single or do not necessarily have a family but still value their life outside work.

Much of the focus in work-life research has been on issues surrounding work-life balance. Work-life balance focuses on the idea that employees should aim to have equal satisfaction with both work and non-work life over time (Kirby et al., 2003; Wayne et al., 2017). Though this idea of balance is popular, recent studies cast doubt on the goal of living a "balanced" life – whether this is a reasonable goal to aim for or if balance is even possible (Bochantin, 2016). This might be especially true given the commonality of work-life conflict, in which the demands of one area consistently make it harder to meet the demands of the other area (Bochantin & Cowan, 2016b; Clark, 2000). Notably, work-life conflict has been associated with many outcomes, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, burnout, marital and family satisfaction, and life satisfaction (Amstad et al., 2011). Thus, it is critical to understand how work and life interplay.

Building on this work, scholars have developed border theory to more aptly describe processes associated with the permeability of work and home responsibilities. According to this theory, work and non-work life reside in two different areas that have flexible borders or boundaries between the two, allowing one to influence the other (Clark, 2000). This study draws on border theory to investigate the influence of coworking spaces on work and non-work life boundaries.

## 2.2 Border Theory

Border theory provides a framework that helps us understand how individuals create and maintain boundaries and how they navigate across the borders between the two spheres (Clark, 2000). These boundaries can be flexible and permeable (a “weak” border) or inflexible and impermeable (a “strong” border)(Clark, 2000). Those who must navigate the boundaries between the spheres are identified as border-crossers (Clark, 2000).

Previous research has suggested that individuals deal with boundary crossing through either segmenting or integrating the two areas (Bochantin & Cowan, 2016a). However, most individuals do not fall solidly into one category, segmentors or integrators (Ammons, 2013; Bulger et al., 2007; Kossek et al., 2012). Instead, the boundaries between the two are distinct, and employees may choose to segment or integrate different parts of their work and non-work life along a continuum in the way that best suits their lives (Matthews & Barnes-Farrell, 2010). There are two primary boundary concepts: boundary preferences and boundary enactments (Allen et al., 2014). Boundary *preferences* are focused on the ideal segmentation or integration that an individual wishes to maintain (Ammons, 2013; Kreiner, 2006). Boundary *enactment* is the actual

segmentation or integration that the individual uses when navigating the boundaries between work and non-work life.

Flexible hours and locations, in turn, allow for more flexible boundaries between work and home. However, working from home may integrate the work and home sphere to a greater degree than many individuals would like, causing increased boundary violations. Coworking then may help alleviate work-family concerns by rebuilding that boundary between work and home and helping to enact their boundary preferences. Coworking spaces offer a space outside of the home which creates a physical border that employees cross while traveling to the coworking location or back home.

**2.3 Gender and Work-Life**

Research on gender differences in work-life research suggests that women and men experience similar levels of work-life conflict. For example, based on a meta-analysis of 350 independent samples ($N > 250{,}000$ workers), Shockley and colleagues (2017) found that gender and work-family conflict are not significantly related when work/family hours, work/family salience, and work/family boundaries are accounted for (Shockley et al., 2017). Similar levels are likely due in part to selection effects of who remains employed full-time, given that some women reduce their paid hours to accommodate for the additional burden known as the "second shift," where work does not end when they leave their paid employment (Artis & Pavalko, 2003; Hochschild & Machung, 2012). In other words, the fact that men and women experience similar levels of work-life conflict may be because women who experienced the highest level of work-life conflict have already dropped out of the labor market (Weeden et al., 2016) given expectations that women, in particular, prioritize their family over their careers (Risman,

2004). Indeed, this second shift consists of the household and childcare responsibilities that fall outside of work hours and land in the non-work life domain. Although married women are more than twice as likely to work full-time today as they were in 1970, married men have not increased their household work to the same degree that women have increased their time in paid work (Bianchi et al., 2012). Although men have increased their time spent with children in recent decades, men (particularly fathers) still report significantly more leisure time than women, during which time women focus on housework and childcare (Dush et al., 2017). Although women want men to participate in a more egalitarian division of labor by taking on additional childcare and household responsibilities (Apparala et al., 2003; Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001), many factors keep men from participating more in non-paid work at home. These factors include societal norms around family work as “women’s work,” the devaluation of women’s work, expectations to comply and meet “ideal worker” norms that they work long hours in their paid jobs, and women’s gatekeeping in household-related tasks (Besen-Cassino, 2019; Sherman, 2017). Research has thus suggested that women who are also mothers experience more stress than men in trying to manage the demands of both work and non-work life (Erickson, 2005; Gerstel & Sarkisian, 2006; Perry-Jenkins & Folk, 1994).

Despite this, there is also evidence that men are beginning to take on more housework and childcare. Men with flexible work arrangements have taken on more housework and childcare compared to men working in traditional offices (Carlson et al., 2020). Since most employees in coworking spaces have flexibility in their work time and place, the population in the current study may have fewer gender differences in their work-life borders than in other populations.

Although many couples are married and have children, some couples fit only one or neither of those categories. Twenty-five percent of parents living with a child in the US are unmarried and 35% of unmarried parents are cohabiting (Livingston, 2018). Looking at adults without children, 37% of non-parents report not planning to have children at any point in the future (Livingston & Horowitz, 2018). Couples that are unmarried and/or do not have children must still consider how they divide paid and unpaid labor, which is present regardless of marital or parental status. Single individuals, regardless of parental status, must navigate household work and their life outside of paid labor. Similarly, cohabitating couples must divide unpaid household labor whether childcare is involved or not. Separate from marital or parental status, the way men and women navigate the boundaries between paid and unpaid labor is likely a consideration that influences their work-life experience. These considerations apply whether the parents are working from a traditional office, home, or a coworking space.

## 2.4 Coworking and Work-Life Interactions

Few studies have looked at work-life boundaries in coworking spaces. A search of PsycINFO, Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, and the Gender Studies Database yielded a total of two peer-reviewed journal articles on coworking (or co-working) spaces and work-life interactions (or work-life balance or work-family balance or work-life conflict or work-family conflict). However, a similar area of research, telecommuting, has a more robust set of literature and may provide insights into how coworking may influence work-life interactions.

Telecommuting is defined as the ability for employees to work outside of the central workplace using technology to interact with others within and for their job

(Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Recent advances in technology have made it easier than ever for workers to work from home (Messenger & Gschwind, 2016). Employees who are able to work from home report working more hours, working more intensely during those hours, and expanding more voluntary efforts (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). Even if they find their jobs to be more pleasurable and stimulating due to the greater autonomy in their flexible work locations (Felstead & Henseke, 2017), workers who primarily work from home may have trouble switching off at the end of the workday (Marsh & Musson, 2008; Mirchandani, 2000). Indeed, remote workers report more negative spill-over from their family lives to their work responsibilities (Felstead & Henseke, 2017), potentially because these employees have greater accessibility and proximity to their families in their everyday work settings (Eddleston & Mulki, 2017).

Examining telecommuting through the lens of border theory, telecommuters tend to have more permeable boundaries and experience increased reports of non-work life interfering with work (Jostell & Hemlin, 2018). Working physically within one's home does not create the same physical boundary that others experience when they leave their homes to go to a specific work location such as an organization's office. Interruptions from family members, pets, chores, and errands may cross the invisible border between work and non-work life for these employees, causing increased conflict. To compensate for this lack of distinct boundaries, telecommuters are more likely to use segmentation strategies and cues such as time, space, and communication with coworkers to reinstate those boundaries (Fonner & Stache, 2012). Telecommuters may create temporal patterns to help set when their workday begins and ends, such as planning with children's or spouse's schedules in mind, so their workdays begin when their family leaves the home

and end when the family returns to the home. They may also set aside certain spaces as workspaces to create a more physical boundary. For example, they may begin their workday when they enter their home office and end the workday when they leave the home office. Finally, they may use communication with coworkers and managers to help signal the beginning or end of the workday by emailing a coworker when they begin work or are ending the workday or increasing emails during their designated work time to signal that their workday has begun. However, some do find that it is easier to integrate work and non-work life when working from home. They may not find it beneficial to set up the same boundaries that others find helpful for signaling the beginning and end of the workday. In one study, participants use a metaphor of flowing water, allowing the two areas of their lives to drift back and forth as needed (Fonner & Stache, 2012). Women who telecommute were more likely to use segmenting cues than men who telecommute (Fonner & Stache, 2012).

Despite the increased border flexibility and boundary violations that employees face when working from home, many still prefer the flexibility that working remotely offers them. Many of the negative consequences reported for these employees may be counteracted using coworking spaces. Coworking spaces may reinstate the boundaries between work and non-work life by providing a working space outside of the home to provide cues of when the responsibilities of work end and non-work life begin. The commute to and from the coworking space can serve as a physical border that signals when their workday begins and ends. Entering the doors of the coworking space may provide another boundary that signals the workday for these employees. Research supports that coworking locations offer a space for employees where they can enjoy the

flexibility of working remotely while solving reported issues such as isolation, lack of self-motivation, and diminished productivity (Brown, 2017; Gerdenitsch et al., 2016; Merkel, 2015; Orel, 2019; Spinuzzi, 2012). If an employee needed to leave work early to pick up a sick child or take a family member to the doctor, they could continue working from home without the negative consequences that may come if they had to leave a typical office early. If scheduling conflicts come up, employees may have a workspace available over the weekend or with extended hours. Single or childless individuals may especially benefit from the extended hours coworking spaces allow, as their schedule may be less dependent on others.

Border theory provides a frame through which we can examine how border crossing between the work and non-work life spheres is negotiated. Though the potential effect of coworking spaces on work and non-work life may be inferred from previous research on border theory and telecommuting, this study aims to connect data to theory. While coworking provides the flexibility and autonomy of working from home, individuals using coworking spaces may be able to create a separate work domain through physical borders (i.e., the coworking space itself). It is currently unknown, however, how border crossers making use of coworking spaces view the boundaries between their work and home life and how coworking plays into those boundaries. The gender of the border crosser may also influence the boundaries of coworkers. The lack of research on how coworking influences the work-life boundaries of those using the spaces leads to the following research questions:

**RQ1**: How are the boundaries between work and non-work life conceptualized and navigated by individuals primarily working in coworking spaces?

**RQ2**: Are there differences in how men and women (parents or non-parents) in coworking spaces conceptualize and navigate the borders between work and non-work life?

# CHAPTER 3: METHOD

This study was conducted using in-depth interviews with 78 individuals who used a coworking location as their primary workspace. There were seven different coworking organizations from which participants were sampled, all within the same metropolitan area in the Southeastern United States. Four members of the research team worked in the various coworking locations throughout a four- to five-month period. The team members spent several weeks in the space observing and getting to know others in the spaces. The members asked those that they talked with if they or anyone they know in the space would be open to interviews, leading to a snowball sampling. The interviews were supplemented with more than 700 hours of field observation. Participants were asked questions on their experiences with coworking, social- and work-related interactions, and the benefits and pitfalls of coworking.

## 3.1 Coworking Spaces

As mentioned, there were seven coworking organizations from a mid-to-large sized city in the Southeast sampled in this study. Each coworking space had a different location, layout, atmosphere, and type of members. All spaces included members of a variety of industries and occupations, though a few had higher concentrations of certain occupations and industries. For example, one coworking space included a higher concentration of creative employees such as painters and woodworkers, while another contained a higher number of entrepreneurs. Each coworking space offered a variety of working arrangements, including open spaces for anyone to use and dedicated offices. Prices ranged from $140 to $500 per month for flexible open space seating to $500 to $4,500 per month for dedicated office space.

### 3.2 Participants

Interview participants were selected from the available population in these seven coworking spaces. Participants were recruited by team members during their time in the coworking spaces. A diverse group of interviewees participated in the study. Approximately half of the participants were women (51%). The range of ages was 18 to 72, with the mean age being 35. A majority of participants were white (67%), 13% were black, 10% Asian, 4% Latino/a, and 6% mixed or biracial. Thirty-six of the participants were married (46%), five were cohabitating with a partner (6%), three were separated, divorced, or widowed (4%), and the rest were single. Forty-one percent of participants reported having children.

Participants worked in a variety of occupations and industries and had a variety of incomes and work characteristics. Interviewees reported their annual earned incomes as less than $25,000 (18%), between $25,000 and 49,999 (17%), between $75,000 and 99,999 (16%), and over $100,000 (24%). Most participants had a bachelor’s degree or higher and 60% managed other employees in their firm. The average length of membership at their coworking space was 14.5 months. All following names of participants are pseudonyms.

### 3.3 Interviews

Interviews ranged in duration from just over 20 minutes to 82 minutes (average length = 50.56 minutes). Three were conducted over the phone while the remaining 75 interviews were in-person. All but two interviews were digitally recorded; two individuals declined the interviewer’s request to record the interview. In these two interviews, the interviewer took detailed notes on the participants’ responses. I

transcribed half of the recorded interviews. The remaining interviews were transcribed by a highly reliable transcription service and then I checked the transcripts for accuracy. Approximately 1,023 pages of single-spaced text were transcribed for the 78 interviews.

The interview guide began with a series of questions on the participant's tenure at, reasons for joining, and likes and dislikes of their coworking space. Participants were also asked if they have worked in a more traditional/typical office setting, and if so asked how the experience of that setting compares to coworking. Questions then moved into formal and informal rules, business-related and social activities in the space, and the culture of the space. The interview then turned to relationships and interactions with coworkers, how gender affects the space, and business-related benefits of coworking. The final set of questions asked directly about work-life interactions and how coworking has affected their time and relationships at home (See Appendix A for interview questions focused on work-life interactions).

**3.4 Analyses**

An inductive technique—constant comparative— (see Corbin & Strauss, 2014) was used to analyze the data. This iterative, multiphase approach allowed continuous improvement of greater analytic depth for certain codes and categories identified in the analysis. It also allowed me to identify codes and categories that reflected the participants' own words. First, I used open coding to capture preliminary themes. I began by reading through the interviews to familiarize myself with the data. This open coding focused on going through each interview and identifying sections that relate to work-life interactions in any way. These sections were identified based on the participant's wording and context. This was a necessary step as the interviews focused on gender

interactions and other unrelated aspects of coworking for the majority of interviews. This first round of broad coding yielded 139 pages of text single-spaced (13.6% of the total interview transcript).

Once I completed open coding, I then began a slightly more focused coding of the sections related to work, life, family, and any other topics related to the proposed research questions, similar to the approach used by Tracy et al., 2006. For this initial coding, I went line-by-line through the text and created as many open codes as were needed. This coding yielded 185 individual codes.

In the next phase, axial coding, I then began to combine and narrow down these codes. This step of the coding will be further discussed in the following paragraph. Although I considered sensitizing topics before data collection and analysis (i.e., work-life conflict and work-life balance, particularly in dual-earner couples; division of labor and breadwinning status; gender and work-life interactions), I did not define constructs or themes of interest a priori as I wanted the codes to come naturally from what the participants said.

Coding was done in NVivo 12. As I went through open codes, I kept a separate document for memos in NVivo to allow a space to record my thoughts and initial reactions. Once coding was almost complete, (~75%) I began a codebook in Excel to organize the open codes, conceptual definitions, and examples. This was helpful both for this step and subsequent coding. After completing the open and focused coding, I read back through my data and re-checked the codes. This allowed me to make sure all sections that were code-able had been coded.

After working through the codes, I went back to my research questions and the literature. This guided me as I began to narrow and re-organize the themes into hierarchies. I then read through the sub-codes to check how they fit into the larger theme. This process is referred to as axial coding and a separate codebook was created for themes, with the same categories mentioned above (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). The goal of this codebook was to allow for deeper thinking on what participants said and when they said it. The definitions in this codebook are more detailed than before. Once I reread all the codes and checked back through the interviews to assure everything had been coded, I worked through the themes and further connected them to my research questions.

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the analysis, I also performed a negative case analysis (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln, 1985). As I went through the steps of the analysis, I also actively looked for codes and examples that did not match the majority of the other participants. Instances that did not fit the overall pattern provoked deeper thought and analysis which in turn helped strengthen the overall themes (Patton, 1999). These negative cases are reported in the discussion with the other findings.

# CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Over three-fourths of our participants reported that working in a coworking space improved their work-life balance. Half of the remaining participants reported that their work-life balance was the same as before coworking. The majority of participants felt that being in a coworking space was either positive or neutral for their work-life boundaries. Participants felt they were more productive and had more social interactions than working at home while avoiding the cubicles and office politics of traditional offices. Participants also felt that they had the flexibility to enact their boundary preferences in coworking spaces.

Five primary themes arose from the participants' interviews. For those who had been in traditional office settings before, coworking provided an escape from the rigidity of traditional offices. For those who had been working at home, working in a coworking space allowed them to have a separate space away from distractions at home. Those who wanted to integrate their work and life enjoyed the flexibility to bring their children to work and to make social friends in the coworking space. Those who instead preferred to segment their work and life used schedules and commutes to create stronger boundaries between the two. And finally, participants mentioned that there were other benefits of coworking spaces such as better well-being and a sense of community that do not directly influence their work-life boundaries but improve both their work and life.

## 4.1 Coworking Compared to Traditional Office

For many participants, coming to a coworking space provided an escape from traditional office spaces. Thirty-two participants reported previously working in a traditional office space before coming to a coworking space. While previous research on

telecommuting has focused on coworking spaces compared to working from home, this representation allows comparisons to the traditional office as well. While previous research has delved into how coworking spaces provide benefits of both working from home and working in a traditional office (Ross & Ressia, 2015), this research allowed me to examine why employees move from traditional offices to coworking spaces.

Participants reported feeling trapped, stuck, and burnt out in their former office spaces. Nina (36, single Asian/Pacific Islander woman, healthcare consultant) voiced a struggle with one of the typical office set-ups: “I was in a cubicle for a while in a corporate setting, many years, and I had some level of burnout from being in a cubicle.” Harper (42, married white mother, artist) similarly felt bound, especially by the schedule expectations: “I always felt like I was trapped from whatever time I went in to the time I left.” Jaylen (32, divorced white woman, business owner) similarly felt trapped at the desk: “I think there was a lot more pressure to be seen at your computer, be seen working, getting in early, leaving late… you had to stay there till 5:00. It was like, you can play on Snapchat, but no one leaves before 5:00. It just was silly.” Participants wanted to escape these feelings.

Others wanted to escape office politics and obligations. Flora (33, single white woman, regional admission recruiter) enjoyed having the freedom to focus on her work: “I love that I’m not a part of the politics on campus. I love it… there are so many things that I don’t have to hear or deal with [now].” Others wanted to avoid obligatory social interactions. Daniel (38, cohabiting black man, artist) felt that there was a sense of dependency in traditional office spaces: “In a typical office environment, it’s like the people I interact with do have… either they need things from me or I need things from

them… [in the coworking space] nobody's here asking me like, 'Where's this?' or 'I need this…' nobody's looking to me for very much of anything." "I don't feel like I have to come in and socialize for an hour of my day. I can come in and literally just work," Georgia (33, married white woman, sales). Coworking spaces allowed these participants a space to get away from some of the constraints they experienced before.

Many who came to coworking from more traditional spaces also wanted more freedom. Six participants brought up feeling like someone is always watching over your shoulder when you are in a traditional office space. Penny (30, married white woman, tech sales) summarized this feeling well: "… you don't have anybody looking over your shoulder or there's no office politics… it's all the things you want out of an office minus some of the things you didn't love about your big corporate office…" Similarly, Dev (26, single Asian/Pacific Islander man, graphic designer) described this freedom from being outside a traditional office: "You don't get nervous when your boss is walking around the stuff like that. It's just a bit more permissive." It is not surprising, then that almost a third of these participants brought up flexibility as a key benefit of coworking over more traditional office spaces.

**4.2 Coworking Compared to Working from Home**

Comparatively, thirty-seven participants reported working from home before coming to the coworking space. They found that they needed space outside of the home where there would be fewer interruptions. This was especially true for those who are married or have children. Participants who were married were almost twice as likely to bring up distractions at home, with 45% of married participants bringing up distractions at home compared to 24% of non-married participants. One of the participants, Joe (34,

married white man, creative director), brought up needing a space to focus away from his wife: "Biggest reason [for joining a coworking space] is that I was gonna be working from home in the new job with [company name] and my wife, we both had home offices… I can't work at home because she'll come knock on my door and ask me how I'm doing in the middle of the day and stuff like that." Others similarly reported needing separation from a spouse working from home.

Parents also needed space away from their children during the workday. Forty-three percent of those working from home were parents. As a representative example, Charles (35, married black and Asian/Pacific Islander father, small business owner) captured the struggle that parents working from home face: "Well what brought me in was the ability to just, you know, get uninterrupted time. I have kids so there's no ... and rightfully so. If I'm home, I should be bothered by kids…" Parents need space outside of the home to work without family-related distractions.

Other distractions can come up even for those that are not married or parents. Regardless of marital or parenthood status, all adults have responsibilities that can be hard to separate from. Shawn (72, married white father, architect) brought this idea up in his interview:

> "… we tried working from home, which was not very successful for all the reasons that working from home is difficult for folks…. Because you keep getting distracted, something needs to be done or you, you know, have to get the washing out of the washing machine, all that stuff, right?"

For many of the coworkers, having a separate workspace helps them to focus on their work without the added distractions of working from home. Even simple chores such as

needing to do laundry can be a distraction when working from home. For those who want to separate from their daily life tasks, having a coworking space to focus in helps create both physical and mental separation to focus on work.

Interestingly, a larger percentage of men brought up distractions from home than women, despite comparable percentages of men and women who were parents in the sample. While only 26% of the women brought up the potential distractions of working from home, 41% of men discussed how distracting working from home can be. This will be discussed further in the following themes on integration and segmentation.

### 4.3 Integrating Work-Life Boundaries

When discussing the advantages and disadvantages of working in a coworking space, 41 participants (67% women; 45% parents) brought up forms of integrating or blurring the boundaries between work and life. One of the key benefits that parents mentioned was the flexibility to bring children to work if needed. Others highlighted the role of social interactions in coworking spaces, blurring the lines between their work lives and social lives.

Ten participants (60% women) mentioned being able to bring their children to work as an advantage of working in a coworking space. Harper (42, married white mother, artist) mentioned how helpful this is: “The kids love being here… Anytime I need to come, they’re happy to come and then half the time, they don’t want to leave when it’s time to go.” Valerie’s (36, married white mother, content marketing) son also loves coming to the space: “He thinks my office is the coolest.” Sometimes, it is not even that children enjoy coming; it is necessary at times. “If I had to bring my child on days off, I could still bring her in if she is sick” (Anna, 36, married Asian/Pacific Islander

mother, self-employed). Both children and pets are welcome at many of the spaces; as Victor (35, married white father, consultant) said: "… one thing that specifically coworking has allowed me to do is my daughters come in here all the time, and there's no bring-your-kid-to-work day. It's any day you want. Same with dogs. There's no bring-your-dog-today." Many parents appreciate being able to bring their children into the space, whether it is out of convenience or necessity.

Another important aspect of blurring work-life boundaries for coworkers is social interactions. Many of the participants stated they wanted to be around people and felt lonely working alone. Coworking spaces provide a space for employees to have social interactions with those who are working near them in the space. These social interactions blur the boundary between work and life by allowing social experiences for the coworkers that they could not have working from home. For example, one participant had just lost her mom and needed somewhere outside of her home to concentrate: "I really needed a great environment where I can go and sit with other people, many people, get to know them, get to know the culture and have more productivity on whatever I do" (Emma, 31, married Asian/Pacific Islander woman, entrepreneur).

Other participants, especially women, reported similar feelings of needing social interactions that are not available when working from home. Eight of the women participants (24%) brought up feelings of isolation and loneliness that led them to join coworking spaces. Mia (31, single black woman, entrepreneur) pointed to social interactions as "psychologically helpful." She continued to say that this is important because "To be constantly by yourself, in your own head, especially if you are a thinker, you are constantly overthinking, and sometimes you just need that separation from

yourself." Two of the men (6%) also brought up isolation or feeling alone as a driver behind finding a coworking space. Daniel (38, cohabiting black man, artist) mentioned how feeling alone can hurt his work: "The main reason [I joined a coworking space] was because I don't like working in a vacuum. When I'm alone I get very ... Anything that's frustrating becomes distracting." For some, social interactions can help them work better by allowing them a space to get out of their mind and interact with others.

The community feeling was not only important for those no longer working from home – some of the participants came from a more traditional office for a coworking space. They similarly reported the benefits of the connections in coworking places.

> "What I love about coworking is the connections that happen, right? If it was just me and the two guys, and the recent lady that we brought on, it would only be us and we'd be, I feel like, super isolated. I like getting to know people and just having connections, and so when we worked at a bigger company, we all worked together, or we all were the same company, but it was still very much like we only chatted with people in our industry, right? Here, it gives the opportunity for different levels of discourse to take place, and all of a sudden, you can start learning about what other people do with their industry and just trying to find ways to possibly collaborate." (Marnie, 32, single white woman, designer)

For these participants, working in a coworking space allowed them to form deeper connections with those working around them.

For some, the social interactions played a part in their work-life balance, providing a social circle for those without family here:

> "Because I moved from a different country, I didn't have any friends… because you're new at a place, I used to work 80 hours a week, so there was no work/life balance… [coworking space] is the place where it all started, I guess, for me. My entire friend circle is because of [coworking space]." (Dev, 26, single Asian/Pacific Islander man, graphic designer)

These friendships in coworking spaces differ from those in traditional offices because the friendships feel more similar to social friendships than coworker relationships. Those in coworking spaces choose the space to work from based on a variety of factors such as location, cost, and the community. This choice may be part of the distinction between friends in coworking spaces compared to coworkers in traditional office spaces. Another important distinction is that the friendship is not based on work and therefore feels separate from the work sphere, allowing the blur into the life sphere. Not reporting to the organization may allow those in coworking spaces to feel more autonomy and choice when making friends in coworking organizations. It may also take away the fear of judgment because everyone is working for different organizations so there is not added concern of work friends reporting back to the boss. Regardless of what is causing the distinction, our participants made it clear that they consider the friends they make in coworking spaces to be social friends rather than work friends.

The connections and communities built by coworking spaces were a large part of what drew participants, especially women, to their locations and what keeps them there. Coworking spaces help provide social networks that may expand beyond the work sphere into the life sphere. It can also help them feel more productive in their time at work. The

separation from work and increased social interactions were often what drew these individuals to coworking spaces.

Though many participants joined for the social interactions coworking spaces provide, many noted that coworking spaces could be a distraction themselves. While they may not have distractions from home or their families, several participants mentioned that social interactions can sometimes be disruptive to their workflow. Gary (27, single black man, professional speaker) nicely summarized this issue: “anytime you’re around people, it’s easy, easy, easy to get off track.” Other participants told stories about others in the space that are known for being distracting and having to find ways to distance themselves when others disrupt their work. Daniel (38, cohabiting black man, artist) discussed his own experience with this:

> “The only thing that I really experience is like one of the workers here is very chatty and I'm pretty talkative myself. I think she's even chattier than me. She won't take subtle social cues. I've never said, "All right. I've gotta get to work." And then she still kept talking, but sort of subtle things like changes of body language or certain things. She doesn't necessarily catch those, and she'll keep talking.”

Joe (34, married white man, creative director) also mentions the social distraction that comes with coworking: “I've had times in there where I'm trying to work and there is someone again waving at you. That really distracts the shit out of you. It's like, ‘Dude, I have work.’” Even small interactions can make someone lose focus, which can be a problem for anyone in a space where many people are working. Most of the time, though, the social interactions are welcomed and even encouraged.

### 4.4 Segmenting Work-Life Boundaries

While many employees take advantage of the ability to blur boundaries in coworking spaces, whether out of desire or necessity, others use coworking spaces to force a distinction between their work and life. Forty-three participants (22 women, 24 married or cohabiting, 16 parents) brought up topics around keeping life and work separate while working in a coworking space. Thirteen of these participants said that working in a coworking space has led to better boundaries between their work and life, while others talked about how they create structure within the coworking space. Many use time and space to keep their work and lives separate. Participants also discussed how keeping the two segmented benefits their lives.

Seventeen of the participants brought up using the coworking space as a physical boundary between work and life. When they are in the coworking space, that is the space where they work; when they are outside of the space, they do not work. Tanya (24, single white woman, photographer) mentions using that separation to make it clear that when she is in her coworking space, she is not taking social calls: "And now I tell my friends, I'm like, 'Hey, I'm at [coworking space]. I'll call you when I leave at six.' Or whenever. So I'm able to kind of set that tone of, this is my office and I'm not sitting on the couch, not answering your calls, I am in a room with people and I don't want to walk outside to take this call." In the words of Luke (18, single Asian/Pacific Islander man, graphic designer), "Separation is good for the heart or… that thing." These participants use the space as a physical border between work and home.

Another way that participants mentioned taking advantage of the coworking space as a physical boundary was by using the commute to and from the space as a chance to

cross the border between the two spheres. Carlos (31, cohabiting multi-racial man, business owner) said, "… it's weird but I actually kind of like having a commute. I think it is helpful for me to actually have a little downtime between finishing work here, and then getting home, so that I can kind of decompress in the car." Wendy (30, single white woman, artist) uses her commute to work as a chance to change her mindset: "When I get here, it resets my thinking. I'm in work mode, so I tend to be way more productive when I'm here." Hope (34, single white woman, creative director) similarly mentioned how the physical separation and commute help her shift her thinking:

> "I have to drive to work. So, because of that, that eliminated the amount of work that I do at home. So, it kind of protects that space, which was a great relief, and I think that's been really helpful, not only just physically space-wise but also emotionally, spiritually, however you want to think about it. Just having that separation, that's been huge. I think, just like I talked about earlier, just the ritual of getting in the car and driving to work, I never realized how much I loved that time."

In these cases, driving to work is a way of crossing the border between work and home.

An equal number of women and men brought this up as a strategy (9 women and 8 men). Interestingly, though, men that used the space as a physical boundary were more likely to be fathers (5 fathers compared to 3 not), while women used physical boundaries equally whether they were mothers or not. The three men who were not parents talked about liking having the option of working from home but also wanting to keep work and life separate when they can. For three of the fathers, however, it felt like more of a necessity. Micah (46, married white father, statistician) mentioned that he goes to the

coworking space to focus: “I have a nine-year-old son who thinks I’m home and I should be playing with him. Which… you could tell him no, but you’d have to tell him no every day.” Ron (31, married white father, consultant) has made it clear to his family that “when I come here, they know that I’m gonna get work done.” Finally, Brendon (36, married white father, IT Professional) works his schedule around his time with his family:

> “I work hard, play hard so I will work and then I will go home, and I shut it off, and I just do family time, and then I do my entrepreneurial brainstorming stuff after kids go to bed for an hour if that or just spend time with my wife, and then do it again the next day. I’m pretty black and white with that.”

The other two fathers also mention that working from home is more difficult and they need additional separation.

Five participants (3 women) use an additional type of border between work and home: time. These coworkers create a routine not only using the commute to work but also scheduling when to be in the work sphere and when to leave the work sphere. Georgia (33, married white woman, sales) plans her days ahead of time to keep work and home separate: “I've tried to be better since I started this new job, having, okay, this is what my day is going to look like today. I'm planning my day and having a planned end to that day, and when I get home I'm done with my day.” Micah (46, married white father, statistician) mentioned keeping a traditional schedule: “I typically am here between 8 and 8:30, I go home around 5, 5:30. I just get up and go to work.” Five o’clock is also Charles’ (35, married black and Asian/Pacific Islander father, small business owner) work cut-off: “Don’t even call me after 5:00. If I can’t get you during the day,

that's all family time. I'm immersed in my family." These temporal borders help these employees set the beginning and end of their workdays.

For these participants, the biggest benefactors of their work-life segmentation were their spouses. Six participants (3 women, 1 mother, and 1 father) felt that working in a coworking space has helped improve their relationship with their spouse. Four of these participants (3 men; 1 father) talked about having more time to spend focused on their spouse. Jaylen (32, divorced white woman, business owner) mentioned having more quality time with her former husband. Benny (26, married white man, curriculum coordinator) said, "…I can sometimes tailor my work schedule more around her schedule… I think it's benefitted my ability to see my wife, for sure." Chase (48, married white father, digital marketer) brought up why it's better now that he's working in a coworking space: "… when I was working from home all the time, I was just always… I couldn't be working during dinner or any given time I could be working and so that wasn't fair to her because then I would just be distracted when I went to her." Both the person in the coworking space and their spouse may see benefits from the flexibility allowed in a coworking space.

**4.5 Other Coworking Advantages: Well-Being and Work Benefits**

There were several important factors that participants mentioned that did not neatly fit into one of the other four themes. These were unique to coworking spaces and did not necessarily relate to integrating or segmenting work and life. Participants mentioned how the spaces improve their well-being and provide support for them. Though not directly related to work-life boundaries, there were also a few benefits of coworking that may indirectly make their work or life easier.

Women were twice as likely to mention how working in a coworking space had a positive effect on their mental health and well-being. Interestingly, married women were more likely to mention well-being (3 of the six). All three men that talked about the positive well-being effects were single. Tanya (24, single white woman, photographer) was the only single woman in the group and mentioned the difference you feel when you work in a coworking space: “You know, you close your laptop and you just don’t feel as fulfilled… when I leave here, I feel just a total productive, happy person.” Kevin (31, single white man, director of brand management) reported feeling less productive “but I’m also happier with what I do, and I love being around people. I think it basically evens out…” Dev (26, single Asian/Pacific Islander man, graphic designer) echoed a similar positive mindset: “… you don’t get depressed easily here. I get disappointed easily if something doesn’t work, I get frustrated really easily. But when you’re here, it just doesn’t happen.” The positive mindsets reported by the participants translate to better mental health and well-being.

Another benefit of coworking is the support that participants found within the coworking space. Participants mention perks such as collaboration, accountability, and positive influence. Collaboration was mentioned several times, which is interesting when you consider that most coworkers are not working for the same company or even in the same industry. “I like being around people and having those relationships and people you can throw ideas off” (Gary (27, single black man, professional speaker). Many coworking spaces encourage collaboration over competition; Dev (26, single Asian/Pacific Islander man, graphic designer) mentioned that in his space, “We help each other out, even competition. There is no competition here.” Fellow coworkers also help hold others

accountable. Olivia (32, married Asian/Pacific Islander mother, customer service) mentioned, "I know people, we always tell each other, why are you here? Let's go home. We'll tell each other and try to keep each other accountable for different things." Daniel (38, cohabiting black man, artist) wraps up the positive influence found in many coworking spaces: "…everything is just pretty supportive. Like everything feels like if I need something like this, you know, it's available here." These spaces offer not only social interactions but the chance to collaborate with others and hold those around you accountable.

Finally, there are some small benefits of coworking that may have longer-term effects on individuals' lives. For Mia (31, single black woman, entrepreneur), it is the convenience and "family atmosphere." Valerie (36, married white mother, content marketing) and Gary (27, single black man, professional speaker) talk about the effect of working around others that have a passion and energy that helps drive you. Valerie also brought up two other perks of coworking: "So even though I don't come 24 hours a day, the option that I can come 24 hours a day is always cool. Endless amount of caffeine if I need it with the coffee." And finally, Cameron (no demographic information) mentions the spirit that he believes drives people to work in coworking spaces: "I've had this unique perspective of why people do all this, and it's because they want to start something cool." According to these participants, coworking has a lot to offer, both from a work-life perspective and from a broader perspective.

### 4.6 Negative Case Analysis

Though the majority of the participants reported personal benefits to their work-life boundaries and work-life balance since moving to a coworking space, there were a

small number of participants (10 participants, or 15%) that do not believe coworking has affected the boundaries between their work and life. Of those ten participants, five mentioned that they believe their job or the industry they are in affects their work-life boundary rather than the coworking location itself. As Steven (no demographic information) said, "I don't know if it's the actual spaces influenced it as much as just the nature of what we're doing." Micah (46, married white father, statistician) similarly brought up his industry as having more to do with work-life balance than coworking spaces: "The work-life balance thing has nothing to do ... It would be no difference than if I was going to an office every day. That's just biotech." According to Jeane (no demographic information):

> "…it has nothing to do with coworking space. It has everything to do with the company. I think flexibility of your job is within the job not where it is. The flexibility of work-life balance could be based on someone's transportation or hours or whatever, but it's still based on the job versus the location of the job."

For these participants, their jobs have a larger influence on their work-life boundaries than the coworking location itself.

For several of the employees, overwork was also an issue affecting the lack of work-life balance, mainly with men (5 of the 6 participants). "For me, I take a lot of work with me home. Shouldn't be that way, but I just feel I have that type of responsibility everywhere I go" (Stan, 37, single Hispanic/Latino father, software engineer). These participants feel that they have to work, whether it is in the space or at home. "I hold a million different positions and different jobs… I work like 80-hour weeks, and so I'm just an overworker" (Evelyn, 24, married White woman, digital marketing). In these

cases, work and life are often inseparable; they are blurred to the point where there is no distinguishable boundary; when asked about work-life boundaries, Jack (32, single white man, software engineer) simply responded: “For me, there is none.” In some jobs and for some people, work-life balance or even boundaries may not seem realistic or even be on an individual’s mind.

Although Cameron (no demographic information) indicated that moving to a coworking space has had a positive effect on his work-life boundaries, he had some thoughts on the topic that provide an interesting counterpoint to the potential benefits of coworking:

> “… when you're young and you're passionate, you've had every opportunity in the world to dream big and build something big, work-life balance really isn't as important as it is when you get older and a bit more established and settled down. Does coworking facilitate a work-life balance? Probably not. Do people that really love coworking care about a work-life balance? Probably not. Are they passionate and a bit out of balance? Probably so, that's why they're attracted to coworking because it's all about working.”

Interestingly, all of the women in this group were married, while four of the five men were single. Two of the women were mothers and one of the men was a father. There were no significant age differences. Though most of the participants reported having more positive attitudes related to their work-life boundary, moving to a coworking space is not a guarantee that one’s work-life boundaries will grow stronger or boundaries will blur. For some, coworking spaces may allow them to better separate work and life; for others, the blurring of those boundaries may be the key benefit.

# CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Many benefits come with working in a coworking space, including, for some, more clear work-life boundaries. Though certain disadvantages also come with coworking spaces, it is evident that those disadvantages are outweighed by the benefits for most participants. People in coworking spaces often choose to move to coworking spaces to get out of the house or out of traditional offices and away from mundane daily distractions. They also move into these spaces to be around others who are working and modeling productive behavior and report being inspired to work harder as a result. Though social interactions can sometimes be distracting, they are also part of what draws these employees into the spaces.

For participants that left traditional office spaces before joining a coworking space, coworking spaces provide an escape from cubicles and office politics. These workers can enjoy the flexibility of working remotely while still benefitting from the structure of a commute and work routine (Fonner & Stache, 2012). Coworking spaces provide these employees with the physical space and borders of traditional office spaces without the rigidity of many traditional offices.

Coworking spaces also offer distinct benefits from working at home. Though both those who work from home and work from coworking spaces are considered telecommuters or remote workers, there are key distinctions between working from home and working in a designated space. As expected, workers in coworking spaces reported enjoying the autonomy and increased productivity of working remotely (Fonner & Stache, 2012). Unlike those working from home, however, our participants reported feeling less lonely and isolated and more motivated in coworking spaces (Brown, 2017;

Eddleston & Mulki, 2017; Gerdenitsch et al., 2016; Merkel, 2015; Orel, 2019; Spinuzzi, 2012).

An additional benefit of working from a coworking space instead of from home or a more traditional office is the flexibility to adjust the strength of employees' borders between work and home. Those in coworking spaces appeared to be more likely to have their boundary enactments match their boundary preferences (Allen et al., 2014; Ammons, 2013; Clark, 2000; Kreiner, 2006; Matthews & Barnes-Farrell, 2010); those that want to keep work and life separate can, while those who want to integrate are also able to.

Participants that wanted to be able to better integrate their work and life enjoyed the weaker borders allowed in coworking spaces. Many parents mentioned bringing their children to work, both out of convenience and out of necessity. Participants also blurred the boundaries between work and life by creating social friendships within their work environments. These friendships often extended beyond the coworking space, with friends meeting for dinner, drinks, and even holidays. Though social interactions could be distracting at times, they were also a key benefit for many employees in choosing a space.

Other participants chose to work in coworking spaces because they wanted more separation between work and life (Fonner & Stache, 2012; Jostell & Hemlin, 2018). Many participants talked about the routines they have set up to keep work and life separate, including using commuting time as a chance to mentally cross between work and life (Fonner & Stache, 2012). These stronger boundaries help employees lessen the spill-over from family and home distractions into their work lives (Eddleston & Mulki,

2017; Felstead & Henseke, 2017). The routine also helps employees switch off at the end of the workday (Marsh & Musson, 2008; Mirchandani, 2000), which in turn improves their home life, including for some a better relationship with their spouse.

There were other benefits of coworking that improved employees' work and lives, though they were not directly related to work-life boundaries or balance. For example, participants reported improved well-being while working in the coworking space. Social interactions not only helped employees not feel lonely; they also provided opportunities for collaboration and accountability. Finally, the environment in the coworking space may have longer-term effects for those in the spaces. Employees are in a family atmosphere that is filled with passion (and caffeine) to help keep these employees motivated and driven.

Only a small subset of participants did not believe that their work-life boundaries benefitted from coworking. Most of these believed any work-life balance had more to do with their job or industry than the space itself. Others were "overworkers" and would be working overtime whether they were in the office, at home, or in a coworking space. The choice to be in a coworking space was not as central for these participants as their specific job demands.

For most of the participants, however, coworking provides a chance for them to get out of the house or out of the cubicle. They can have the autonomy and flexibility of working from home while maintaining the physical borders and community of working in an office. They can make their borders as strong (or weak) as they desire, allowing them to better enact their boundary preferences. Participants reported feeling more productive,

motivated, and connected in the coworking spaces. Though there are always distractions, these employees enjoy working in a coworking space and most of them plan to stay.

**5.1 Implications**

The goal of this study is to deepen our understanding of work-life borders for employees working primarily in coworking spaces. There is a large body of literature on work-life borders and how they are constructed and navigated for those in traditional office spaces as well as those working from home. Coworking spaces are a relatively recent trend and as such have not been studied as thoroughly.

The results of this study have several theoretical implications. First, this study expands border theory into coworking spaces by providing examples of how some in those spaces conceptualize and navigate the boundaries between work and home within this unique context. For some, it is important to keep the borders strong and keep the two spheres segmented. They may use strategies such as physical and temporal borders to cross between the two. For others, they prefer integrating work and life. Those in coworking spaces may choose to blur the boundaries between work and life by making social relationships in the space or bringing their family into the space.

Second, it furthers our understanding of the role of gender differences in how boundaries are constructed and crossed for those in coworking spaces. Mothers were twice as likely to integrate rather than segregate work and life. Integration may be necessary for mothers to fulfill their work, childcare, and housework responsibilities within a limited timeframe. Women in coworking spaces may also have selected into the space in part because they can bring their children to work if needed. Fathers, on the other hand, were slightly more likely to prefer segmenting. This may be in part because

of traditional “ideal worker” norms; fathers may feel pressure to keep their home or social life from interfering with work.

In addition to the theoretical implications above, there are several practical implications for this study. For those working in coworking spaces, this research may help them better understand how this relatively new workspace influences their home and work lives. For those considering moving to a coworking space from working at home or working in a traditional office, the findings may help them better understand the work-life implications of such a move. Furthering our understanding of coworking spaces may benefit both those in the spaces and those considering moving to those spaces.

### 5.2 Limitations and Future Research Directions

A key limitation of this study was that the original study focused more heavily on gender implications and social interactions occurring in the space than on work-life boundaries. Though plenty of valuable information was gathered from the work-life questions and earlier questions, interviews designed entirely around the work-life implications of coworking spaces may better address how the work-life boundaries of those in coworking spaces are navigated. Future research on this topic could take a mixed-methods approach to expand on this topic, exploring both current quantitative measures of work-life balance and asking open-ended questions or continuing interviews to find how boundaries change in the context of coworking spaces.

Future research could also take a more comparative approach and examine differences in work-life boundaries for those in coworking spaces, traditional offices, and home offices. This study relies on only employees working in coworking spaces. Therefore, comparisons cannot be made between the three work locations and how

location affects work-life boundaries. It would be valuable to be able to directly compare the implications for each workspace.

Another limitation is that the study focused on coworking spaces in one Southeastern metropolis area. This area notably has a relatively affordable cost of living. Findings could vary for other U.S. areas that have different costs of living. For example, in metropolitan areas in which the cost of living is particularly high and housing space is expensive to buy (e.g., New York City), people may have smaller houses and require greater boundaries from their work, especially if they do not have a designated workspace at home.

A final limitation of the study was potential sample bias. Employees working in coworking spaces have jobs that allow them to work outside of the workplace, likely excluding the majority of blue-collar and pink-collar workers and other jobs that require their employees to be physically present in the workplace. Our sample was also primarily white, and the majority were working professionals. The cost of coworking spaces excludes those who are not financially well-off enough to pay to work in a space outside of the traditional office or their home. While some companies may offer to cover the cost of employees working in these coworking spaces, the majority of our participants are paying for coworking spaces out of their own pockets, indicating that they are financially stable enough to take on this added expense. Those who do not see a benefit to paying for coworking spaces have likely self-selected out of the space. This would mean our sample is skewed toward those who believe working in the coworking spaces is worth the cost. Further sample bias may also come from who we were able to interview within the space. Those who have higher work-life conflict may not have had time to be a part of our

interviews. Though we tried to have a representative sample, sample bias may have still affected who was able to participate.

Despite the potential limitations, this study provides an in-depth look at how those in coworking spaces believe their work-life boundaries and work-life balance are influenced by working in coworking spaces. This is a nascent area of research and this study provides an initial step in the right direction for future research. As more research continues in this area, we will be able to further develop our understanding of coworking spaces as an alternative type of workspace for today's employees.

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# APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

*Coworking Space: Interview Guide* (Questions directly added to assess work-life interactions)

Personal Benefits of co-working space

*The last set of questions addresses things that you may believe are personal benefits, or perks, of working in a coworking space.*

- **Has working in this co-working space influenced your work-life balance? If so, how? If not, why do you think it hasn't?**
    - **How does this compare to where you worked last (home or a traditional office setting) in terms of meeting your work and family (work and personal) needs?**
    - **Has co-working facilitated greater boundaries between work and your life?**
    - **Follow up with probing questions if they have children**
    - **How do you think you working at a co-working space has influenced your time with family (partner or kids)?**

# APPENDIX B: COWORKING SPACES

| Coworking Space Pseudonym | Total Members | % of Women | % of Racial Minorities | Membership Types |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Top Productivity | 175 | 25% | 10% | offices, dedicated desks, and floating memberships |
| Synergy Place | 40 | 25% | 20% | offices and floating memberships |
| Idea Zone | 240 | 15% | 15% | offices and floating memberships |
| The Collective | 175 | 16% | 10% | offices and floating memberships |
| Visionary Coworking | | 40% | 20% | |
| Social Sphere | 200 | 50% | 30% | offices, dedicated desks, and floating memberships |
| Inspiration Station | | 60% | 10% | |
| Propel Space | 200 | 60% | 10% | offices and floating memberships |
| Imaginative Arena | 59 | 65% | 27% | offices and floating memberships |

# APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

| **Characteristics** | **% or Average** | **Min** | **Max** |
|---|---|---|---|
| % of Women | 51% | | |
| Ages | 35 | 18 | 72 |
| Average Length at Coworking Space (Months) | 14.5 | 1.0 | 48.0 |
| *Race* | | | |
| White (Non-Hispanic) | 67% | | |
| Black | 13% | | |
| Asian | 10% | | |
| Latino/Latina | 4% | | |
| Other Race/Mix Race | 6% | | |
| Annual Income (N=76) | | | |
| Under $25,000 | 18% | | |
| $25,000-$49,999 | 17% | | |
| $50,000-$74,999 | 25% | | |
| $75,000-$99,999 | 16% | | |
| $100,000 or Greater | 24% | | |
| Relationship Status | | | |
| Married | 47% | | |
| Single | 41% | | |
| Cohabiting | 5% | | |
| Divorced or Separated | 6% | | |
| Have children | 41% | | |
| Manage Others | 60% | | |
| Industrial Category | | | |
| Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation | 9% | | |
| Educational Services | 4% | | |
| Finance and Insurance | 3% | | |
| Information | 1% | | |
| Management of companies and enterprises | 3% | | |
| Manufacturing | 1% | | |
| Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services | 73% | | |
| Real Estate and Rental and Leasing | 4% | | |
| Transportation and Warehousing | 1% | | |
| Wholesale Trade | 1% | | |