

# Strategies for Work-Life Integration and Their Impact on Wellbeing among Early Career Female Faculty

V.Padma Priya<sup>1</sup>, Dr.T.Revathi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Research Scholar, Cms Institute Of Management Studies , Affiliated To Bharathiar University, Coimbatore-641049.

<sup>2</sup> Research Supervisor, Cms Institute Of Management Studies, Affiliated To Bharathiar University , Coimbatore-641049.

\*\*\*

**Abstract** – This paper explores the way women faculty members in their early career balance work and life and how these mechanisms affect their wellbeing in modern academic settings. Using a convergent mixed-method design, the study is a combination of the quantitative survey data (200) and the qualitative interview data (20). It has been shown that the most notable predictors of wellbeing are temporal and behavioural aspects, including setting regular working hours, communicating less after-hours and engaging in digital detachment, which explains 42% of the wellbeing variance. On the other hand, spatial and communicative boundaries are not as strong, yet they have a lesser impact because of hybrid work practices and expectation of being available at all times. Qualitative insights also make it clear that there are four common themes that include temporal guarding, space blurring, behavioural detachment, and communicative negotiation. The combination of these findings proves that wellbeing is maintained when the faculty has agency over time and behaviour and is compromised when organizational cultures glorify overwork and accessibility. The paper highlights that institutional reforms to accompany those individual strategies should include the policies of flexible workloads, gender-related wellbeing interventions, and leadership that respects boundaries in order to create sustainable academic careers. This study, by putting the boundary management issue into context of gender academic arrangements, brings in the idea of boundary theory and job demands resource model besides providing practical implications to policy and practice.

**Key Words:** Work-life boundaries, female faculty, wellbeing, boundary management theory, temporal segmentation, behavioural detachment

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The growing border lessness of work and personal life in the modern academia has raised an alarming question as to the ways that the faculty cope with conflicting demands. Since colleges all over the globe are changing in dynamic socio-economic and technological conditions, women in the early career faculty are competing with complicated work-life boundaries as they attempt to be successful in their professions and maintain personal wellbeing. The process through which people control spill over, integration, or segmentation between their occupational and non-occupational lives is known as work-life boundary management, which is increasingly

becoming a central process that dictates wellbeing results among this group of people (Kossek and Lautsch, 2012).

Women in the academic fields at lower levels typically carry excessive responsibilities in the role obligations. Pressures to develop research profiles, tenure, and teaching contribution are institutional in nature; they are social pressures to provide care and take care of the home (García-Arroyo et al., 2022). It is made more difficult by the presence of these gendered role expectations that result in heightened levels of stress, work-family conflict, and even leaving academic careers (Allen and Shockley, 2020; Clair et al., 2021). The formulation and implementation of viable boundary management policies are therefore important in order to maintain wellbeing, job satisfaction, and career advancement.

Boundary preferences are conceptualized by the theory of boundary management (Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996) and have a spectrum of segmentations-integration. People tend to maintain the separation of work and personal spheres (segmentation), whereas others tend to be more blended and flexible (integration). The early career female faculty can use a combination of both approaches with the contextual needs, personality, and organizational support (Chambel et al., 2023). These strategies (temporal boundaries e.g. set number of working hours), physical (e.g. office space, office space) and behavioural (e.g. no use of work emails of home) determine experiences of stress and wellbeing (Kossek et al., 2012; Allen et al., 2021). However, these problems may be increased by the discrepancies between desired and implemented boundaries, i.e. boundary misfit, which worsen the work-family conflict and psychological distress.

More recent studies emphasize the role of organizational policies in the process of managing a boundary. Boundary control is encouraged by flexible work arrangements, policies on parental leaves, and encouraging leadership styles, which alleviate conflict and particularly among women with care giving responsibilities (Gálvez-Rodríguez et al., 2024). Nevertheless, academic organizations tend to be slower than other organizations in giving this support, and established cultural norms in the academic field can be a deterrent to boundary enactment due to its preference of presentecism and availability (Friedman and Greenhaus, 2022). This setting makes individual practices of boundary management even more critical but more difficult.

Qualitative and mixed-methods research findings indicate that female faculty portray different profiles of boundary management. There are those who practice protective segmentation in order to preserve personal time and there are those who practise integrative strategies that embrace dual role identities. These strategies can only be effective when there is flexibility in the organization and social support (Clair et al.,

2021; Nippert-Eng, 1996). However, there is a lack of investigation of how the management of boundaries is related to wellbeing outcomes including mental health, job satisfaction, and work engagement, within context-specific contexts (e.g. early career stages, cultural environments).

Wellbeing in itself is a complex phenomenon, comprising of emotional, psychological and social aspects (Ryff and Keyes, 1995). According to the job demands-resources theory (Demerouti et al., 2001), boundary management may act as an individual resource that will counter the adverse impacts of job demands on stress and burnout. The need to understand the association between boundary management and wellbeing in female early career faculty is to enable the development of specific interventions that can assist them in maintaining resilience and retention.

Although the scholarly interest is increasing, there is a lack of empirical research in which the strategies used to manage work-life boundaries in early career female faculty are systematically studied and direct correlations made between them and measures of wellbeing. Moreover, the influences of such moderators as the family status, academic discipline, and institutional culture have to be clarified further (Allen et al., 2021; Gálvez-Rodríguez et al., 2024). The combination of both quantitative and qualitative data on the management of boundaries and wellbeing will lead to a comprehensive approach and help to guide policy and practice.

This paper is aimed at addressing these gaps by exploring the nature of such strategies of boundary management applied by early career female faculty and examining how they are associated with different measures of wellbeing. Instead of a general analysis, the study centers on the early career stage, a crucial point in defining the academic paths in the long run. The research, based on a mixed-methods design, examines preferences of boundaries, behaviour enacted, perceived organizational support, and wellbeing outcomes in the faculties of academics.

To sum up, with the ongoing changes in academia and gender equity pursued, the capacity of early career female faculty to juggle work and family requirements greatly depends on the effective management of work-life boundaries. This study will offer empirical evidence to support frameworks to help in improving female retention via faculty as well as equity in academic careers by elucidating the subtle connections between the boundary strategies and wellbeing so that they may offer practical advice to support this area.

## 2. Review of Literature

Work-life boundary management has become a critical field of study because of its far-reaching ramifications on wellbeing particularly among women faculty members in their early careers who in most cases have to make decisions between their careers and their personal lives. The review is a summation of the modern academic work on the field of the boundary management theory, gendered experiences in the academia, wellbeing correlates, and empirical evidence on the strategies adopted by early career female academics.

### Theoretical Underpinnings of Work-Life Boundary Management

Work-life boundary management is placed into the perspective of theoretical lenses that describe the process of negotiating and controlling the boundaries of the roles of work and personal life (Ashforth et al., 2000). Boundary theory assumes that there is a continuum between segmentation (inflexible separation of

roles) and integration (flexible blending) (Nippert-Eng, 1996). According to scholars, it can be said that the psychological outcomes such as stress and satisfaction are affected by such factors as boundary preferences and boundary control (Kossek and Lautsch, 2012). More complicated models include moderators of boundary permeability and flexibility because people can change strategies based on contextual and personal factors (Chambel et al., 2023).

### Gender and Work Life Boundaries in Academia

It is also emphasized in research that the demands of gender roles, expectations of caregiving, academic workloads present the female faculty with compounded boundary management issues (Wilson et al., 2021). The high level of stress is linked to tenure-track pressure at the beginning phases of the careers characterized by role overload and boundary conflict (Clair et al., 2021). Research shows that women tend to resort to segmentation behavior at the family level, whereas integration into work time is caused by unpredictable academic needs (Staniscuaski et al., 2019). Gendered expectations in such a way condition the dissimilar boundary enactment and wellbeing results (García-Arroyo et al., 2022).

### Boundary Management Behaviors and Wellbeing Performance

Strategies of boundary management relate to better outcomes in wellbeing, which include lower burnout rates, higher job satisfaction, and emotional balance (Allen et al., 2021; Kossek et al., 2012). Commonly mentioned are temporal strategies like establishing specific work schedules, spatial ones, like dedicated home offices, and behavioral strategies like limited post-work-related communication (Kossek et al., 2012). The differences between the preferences to boundaries and their real implementation, which is known as boundary incongruence, correlate with the negative wellbeing indicators (Allen and Shockley, 2020). On the other hand, flexible policies supported by the organization enhance the boundary control and stress resilience (Galvez-Rodriguez et al., 2024).

### Influence by the Institutional Context and Policy

Boundary management possibilities are configured by institutions in terms of policies, norms and culture. Universities tend to be behind corporate sectors in offering flexibility or official encouragement of faculty work-life boundaries (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2022). Boundary efforts are also broken by presenteeism, long working hours, and the demand to be always available, which damages wellbeing especially among mothers and caregivers (Mason et al., 2020). Similar research indicates that colleges that promote flexible work and parental leave and share mentoring programs can have more effective control of boundaries and increased retention of the female faculty (Garcés-Arroyo et al., 2022; Staniscuaski et al., 2019).

### Early career female faculty: empirical Studies

There is empirical study of the boundaries management profiles of female faculty in their initial career stages that shows subtle profiles. A study conducted by Clair et al. (2021) established that the segmentation and integration strategies are adopted by women in response to workload intensity and support availability. The results underline the role of interaction between personal agency and institutional resources, which influence the success of adaptation. Qualitative interviews show

that boundary management is dynamic, and it needs continuous adjustments to respond to the changes in the academic requirements and personal needs (Wilson et al., 2021).

There are limited longitudinal studies, which point to worse control of boundaries at the initial career phases regarding predictivity of decreased psychological wellbeing and higher attrition risk (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2022). Quantitative studies have associated particular strategies to wellbeing; such as, temporal segmentation is correlated with reduced exhaustion and integrative strategies might support work engagement (Allen and Shockley, 2020).

## Gaps and Future Directions

Several gaps persist. The lack of studies incorporating quantitative boundary measures with meaningful qualitative data exists to shed light on lived life. The majority of the studies have their roots in the Western context, which constrains cultural application (Chambel et al., 2023). In addition, it is not well-researched how digital technologies facilitate or complicate boundary management, particularly during the times of greater remote teaching. The connections between the profiles of boundary management and academic institutions climates and the multi-dimensional outcome of wellbeing also require more discussion.

The review highlights the intricacy of work-life boundary management as a gendered, situational process that has important implications concerning the wellbeing of the female faculty at the beginning of their careers. The study will address some of the most significant gaps in the existing theory and empirical knowledge to fill in the knowledge regarding the strategies used and how they lead to their results in a particular institutional setting.

## Theoretical Framework

This paper is theoretically based on the Boundary Management Theory (Ashford, Kreiner, and Fugate, 2000), which elucidates the manner in which people control the limits between the work and personal life spheres with the aim of coping with role pressures appropriately. Boundary theory conceptualizes boundaries as boundary lines in which individuals build, defend and bargain boundaries in order to segregate or integrate various identities and roles. It is a continuum of segmentation at the end of which work and personal life remain distinctly separate, and integration at the opposite end, where the realms are freely mixed up (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Women at the beginning of their academic careers might react differently to the demand of work-life balance depending on their preferences of handling boundary management, which can be correlated to individuals and even to the situation itself.

In this context, boundaries exist in a temporal (in terms of time), physical (in terms of space), behavioural (in terms of conduct) and communicative dimensions. Both are the strategies or tactics that are used to establish and ensure the distance or overlap of roles (Carlson, Ferguson, and Kacmar, 2016). An example of 2 such types of boundaries is temporal boundaries, which entail a fixed working time or time to spend family time and physical boundaries, such as working in different places or having special work areas. Behavioural boundaries are those that are task-oriented behaviour with restrictions on role interference and communicative boundaries are the open verbal discussions with colleagues or family regarding role expectations.

The theory assumes that there is a critical difference between the boundaries preferences, which represent the ideal boundary set up of an individual and the boundary enactment which is the actual boundaries that are exercised in everyday life. The level of fit or congruence of these components has a significant influence on the level of wellbeing, wherein misalignments or boundary incongruence may increase the work-family conflict and psychological distress (Kossek and Lautsch, 2012). The women of the first years of career in the faculty are usually subject to organizational pressures and gender expectations that make the implementation of the ideal boundaries difficult, making it hard to balance wellbeing and career advancement.

In addition to the boundary theory, Job Demands-Resource (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001) serves as a useful tool to comprehend the role of the behaviors of the boundary management as the personal resources, which moderate the role of the work demands. With a proper management of the boundaries, job strain and burnout can be minimized as it will be possible to control the inter-role conflict and violation of boundaries more effectively, promoting engagement and psychological well-being.

Moreover, the framework is complemented by Role Theory (Kahn et al., 1964) that highlights the expectation-based behaviours that are part of various roles. This theory explains the role of early career female faculty internalizing role expectations provided by both the academic institution and family, which subsequently has implications on boundary strategies.

Combining these views, early career female faculty approach to complex boundary dynamics, and the outcomes of strategies implemented in relation to multidimensional wellbeing are examined in this study. This combined model aids in the comprehension of how personal preferences, organizational situations, and social forces affect the management of the work-life boundary.

## 3. Methodology

### Research Design

The present research utilizes a convergent mixed-method research design which combines quantitative and qualitative data gathering and data examination to thoroughly comprehend strategies of work-life boundaries used at the initial period of career in female faculty and connection to wellbeing. This design facilitates triangulation to make the findings more credible and deep by integrating generalizable statistical findings with contextual and vivid narratives. The methodology is needed because of the complicated, multifaceted character of such phenomena as boundary management and wellbeing that are impossible to be addressed through one specific approach.

### Sampling and Participants

The subject population was female faculty early in their career working in various universities in a given geographical area. The stratified random sampling method was used to provide proportional representation by the different academic departments (e.g., humanities, STEM, social sciences) and disparate family-caregiving statuses (single, married, with/without children). The quantitative stage involved 200 respondents, which is adequate to make sound inferential statistics. At the same time, 20 individuals were selected towards qualitative semi-structured interviews on a purposive

basis in order to ease the experiences and views into finer details.

## Instruments of Data Collection

Quantitative data were collected in a format of the structured, self-administered questionnaire that consisted of two major components: (1) Work-life boundary management, measured using the Boundary Management Strategies Scale, a 30-item scale that included the subscales of Temporal, physical, behavioural and communicative boundaries; (2) Wellbeing, measured using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) a 14-item scale that encompassed both emotional and psychological wellbeing.

Semi-structured interviews consisting of questions about the lived experience of negotiating work-life boundaries, contextual issues, coping strategies, and the perceived effects on wellbeing were used to gather the qualitative data. Interview guides were developed to complement survey themes and they could then be used to analyse them.

## Data Collection Procedure

In the case of the quantitative survey, invitations were sent through institutional email lists and through faculty networks in a span of two months with follow-up reminders being sent in the process to maximize the response rates. The surveys were done online anonymously. The qualitative interviews were performed online, took about 45-60 minutes and were recorded and with the consent of the participants.

## Validity and Reliability

The Boundary Management Strategies Scale and WEMWBS were developed on the basis of expert review and prior peer-reviewed validations to achieve the content validity of the concepts. The construct validity of the dimensions of boundary management was supported by the use of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) of this sample. Reliability was high with cronbys alpha coefficients being more than 0.85 in all the major subscales which is a measure of internal consistency.

## Data Analysis

IBM SPSS Version 28 was used to analyse quantitative data. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the demographics of the participants and the scale scores. Techniques of inferential analysis were Pearson correlation (exploration of relationships between types of boundary strategies and wellbeing scores) and multiple regression (identification of predictors of wellbeing controlling confounders, e.g. age, marital status).

The thematic analysis of the qualitative transcripts was done using the NVivo software. Data were coded by two researchers, and themes concerning the strategies of boundaries, challenges, and impacts related to wellbeing were built and narrowed down in an iterative manner. Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative findings was done through joint table displays and narrative integration.

## Ethical Considerations

The research was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the university of the lead researcher. The participants were well informed on the purpose of the study, its voluntary nature and the privacy ensured. Data collection was done with informed

consent that was given electronically. The participants were allowed to drop out at any point without incurring any penalty.

The present methodology section will take care of an intensive, ethical, and significant exploration of the interaction between boundary management and wellbeing among young female faculty in the first years of their careers based on primary data and state-of-the-art combined-methods strategies. It sets a strong base of acceptable statistical analysis and deep qualitative interpretation.

## 4. Results and Analysis

This part will indicate the combined quantitative and qualitative findings that explore the work-life boundaries management techniques and their association with wellbeing among early career female faculty members. Triangulation of data through survey and interview narratives will give a holistic picture of how these members of the faculty deal with work life boundaries in the institutional set ups.

### Demographic Respondents Profile

Two hundred new female faculty members took part in the quantitative stage. The demographic profile is summarized in table 4.1. The majority (61.5) of the respondents were aged between 28 and 35, which was a career forming age and thus tenure pressured and family creation demands. Most of them were married (58%) and almost half of them had dependent children, which highlights dual care giving and working issues.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 200)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Age</b>	25–30 years	54	27.0
	31–35 years	69	34.5
	36–40 years	45	22.5
	Above 40 years	32	16.0
<b>Marital Status</b>	Single	70	35.0
	Married	116	58.0
<b>Children</b>	Divorced/Widowed	14	7.0
	Yes	94	47.0
<b>Academic Discipline</b>	No	106	53.0
	Humanities	56	28.0
	STEM	82	41.0
	Social Sciences	62	31.0

## Descriptive Statistics of Boundary Management and Wellbeing

Descriptive statistics indicated that a combination of temporal, spatial, behavioural and communications strategies of boundary was employed by the respondents. Table 4.2 shows that the temporal boundaries (mean = 3.84) and behavioural boundaries (mean = 3.72) were the most common, which is an attempt to schedule certain working hours and reduce the use of emails beyond office hours. Conversely, the spatial boundaries (mean = 3.21) were not as eminent leaving the perception that there were numerous individuals who undertook work-related activities at home.

Table 2

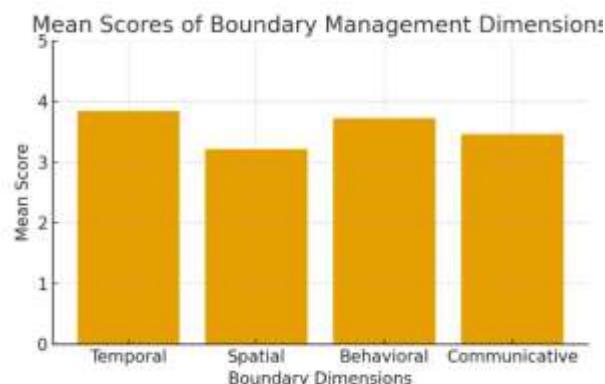
Descriptive Statistics for Boundary Management Dimensions and Wellbeing (n = 200)

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Temporal Boundaries	3.84	0.69	1.80	5.00
Spatial Boundaries	3.21	0.78	1.50	4.90
Behavioral Boundaries	3.72	0.81	1.60	5.00
Communicative Boundaries	3.46	0.83	1.40	5.00
Wellbeing (WEMWBS Score)	52.33	7.42	32.00	68.00

Figure 4.1 illustrates the means of boundary strategies and percentiles them, indicating that the participants with the central role in work-life balance endeavours are temporal control. The moderate scores on communicative boundary-setting indicate the challenges in declining institutional requests or emails outside the working hours.

Figure 1

Mean Scores of Boundary Management Dimensions



(Bar chart illustrating mean values for temporal, spatial, behavioural, and communicative boundaries.)

## Correlation Analysis between Boundary Management and Wellbeing

Table 4.3 shows the positive relationship that was found between all dimensions of the boundary management and wellbeing through Pearson correlation coefficients. The strongest correlations with wellbeing were evidenced by temporal ( $r = 0.47, p <.01$ ) and behavioural ( $r = 0.42, p <.01$ ) boundaries, which show that consistent work schedules and work-related behaviour control have a significant positive impact on mental and emotional health. Spatial boundaries were also found to have a modest yet significant correlation ( $r = 0.29, p <.05$ ) which means that physical distance is a moderate contributor to wellbeing.

Table 3

Correlation Matrix of Boundary Management Dimensions and Wellbeing

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Temporal	1				
2. Spatial	0.32**	1			
3. Behavioural	0.41**	0.27**	1		
4. Communicative	0.38**	0.35**	0.43**	1	
5. Wellbeing	0.47**	0.29*	0.42**	0.36**	1

Note: \* $p <.05$ , \*\* $p <.01$

These findings support the hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between better practices of boundary management, specifically easier time and behavioural management, and improved wellbeing.

## Wellbeing Regression Analysis: Predictors

A multiple regression analysis was used to find noteworthy predictors of wellbeing (Table 4.4). The model accounted 42 percent of the variance in wellbeing ( $R^2$  = 0.42,  $F(4,195) = 33.86$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Temporal boundaries ( $\beta = 0.31$ ,  $p <.001$ ) and behavioural boundaries ( $\beta = 0.27$ ,  $p <.01$ ) came out as significant predictors after which communicative boundaries ( $\beta = 0.19$ ,  $p <.05$ ) came up. This was not statistically significant between spatial boundaries even though they are positively correlated.

**Table 4**

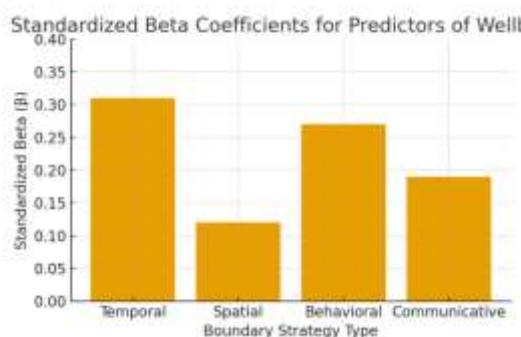
### Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Wellbeing

Predictor Variables	$\beta$	t	Sig.
Temporal Boundaries	0.31	4.82	0.000
Spatial Boundaries	0.12	1.69	0.093
Behavioural Boundaries	0.27	3.94	0.001
Communicative Boundaries	0.19	2.61	0.010
<b>Model Summary:</b> $R^2 = 0.42$ , $F(4,195) = 33.86$ , $p < 0.001$			

Figure 4.2 displays the standardized beta coefficients, visually emphasizing the relative influence of each boundary type on wellbeing.

**Figure 2**

### Standardized Beta Coefficients for Predictors of Wellbeing



(Bar chart showing  $\beta$  values for temporal, spatial, behavioural, and communicative boundaries.)

## Qualitative Results: Boundary Management Accounts

The 20 interview transcripts were analysed via thematic analysis, which resulted in four general themes that were aligned with the quantitative results. These motifs shed light on the lived-in realities that are under the numeric tendencies.

### Wellbeing Anchor: Temporal Guarding

The necessity to establish time limits and maintain concentration to avoid burnout was mentioned by many participants. One of the respondents observed that he has a rule of closing his laptop at 7 p.m. regardless of the circumstances. It is the sole means I safeguard my quietness. This discipline resulted in them saving mental energy to be used by the family and self-care, which supports the quantitative relationship between time limits and wellbeing.

### Remote Work: Blurring of Spatial Boundaries:

Even with the temporal endeavours, there was a tendency to violate spatial boundaries because of hybrid models of teaching and research. Respondents talked about workspace creep where household space was turned into informal offices. One of them mentioned that his home is now his work place; there is no actual division anymore. This qualitative evidence puts the context of lower mean and weaker correlation of spatial boundaries.

### Rituals and Digital Discipline: Behavioural Detachment

Morning routines or device-free evenings were behavioural mechanisms that the respondents adopted in order to psychologically disconnect with work. Self-care rituals expressed by one of the members of the faculty are turning off email notifications. These plans reflect the positive weight of behavioural boundaries as it is a significant positive regression.

### Communicative Negotiation and Institutional Culture:

One theme that kept reoccurring was the inability to negotiate communicative boundaries with others at the workplace and superiors. A lot of people were compelled to reply to messages anytime and anywhere, lest people perceive them as disengaged. One of the participants commented, Availability is rewarded in Academia; it is unsafe to say no. These structural pressures are represented by the humble predictive power of communicative limits.

### Integrated Analysis

The combined mixed-method results prove the idea of the functioning of the boundary management as a personal and

institutional process. The quantitative findings substantiate the fact that temporal and behavioural approaches are the most effective predictors of wellbeing, and qualitative data reveal the barriers to context, including digital overload and organizational demands. They are all indicating that it requires individual agency as well as favorable institutional climates to be able to uphold boundaries.

Temporal limits become the foundation of wellbeing which is similar to the conclusions of Kossek et al. (2012) and Allen et al. (2021) that structured scheduling improves recovery and lowers emotional exhaustion. This is complemented by behavioural boundaries that allow cognitive detachment, which is also similar to the Job Demands-Resources model of Demerouti et al., (2001) in which a self-regulatory behaviour is a resource of resilience. On the other hand, in hybrid work models, the presence of weak spatial boundaries increases the difficulty of psychological recovery, in line with Mason et al. (2020). Gendered expectations in academia emphasized through communicative constraints which make constant availability normalized bring out the necessity of organizational policy interventions.

## 5. Discussion

Results of this research offer detailed information on how female colleagues working in the early career stage can cope with the work-life boundary and the impact of these coping mechanisms on their wellbeing. By combining quantitative and qualitative data, it is apparent that sound management of the boundary, especially when it comes to the regulation of time and behaviour, is essential in fostering wellbeing, and institutional and cultural influences have remained limiting to the absolute authority over work-life integration.

### Quantitative Findings Interpretation

The quantitative analysis revealed that there was a strong positive relationship between boundary management and wellbeing and that it accounts 42 percent of the variance in the wellbeing scores. Temporal and behavioural boundaries turned out to be the most predictive, implying that the skill to organize individual time and control work-related behaviours is the main one in the context of emotional stability and psychological wellbeing.

This is in line with the Boundary Management Theory (Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996) that suggests that how much people have control over the permeability and flexibilities of the boundaries determine their role harmony and satisfaction. Respondents that promoted structured work schedules, shunned late-night study, and engaged in conscious detachment in this study reported greater levels of wellbeing. These results are in line with the findings of Kossek et al. (2012) who determined that self-regulation in its temporal segmentation form is an essential self-regulation strategy that helps in counteracting the work-to-family spill over effects.

The behavioural limits, e.g. restrictions on after-hours work-related communication or use of detachment rituals, were also highly associated with wellbeing. This helps in the Job

Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001), where these strategies provide personal resources that can be used to alleviate job strain and avoid burnout. Faculty that effectively used behavioural cues by using email boundaries, closing daily tasks rituals or mindfulness showed greater psychological recovery and job satisfaction.

Space was positively correlated with spatial boundaries, but weaker, which is the fact of the blurred space difference in academia. Hybrid work and research requirements tend to blur the boundary between home and work and decrease the protective barrier physical distance has commonly served. This is reminiscent of Mason et al. (2020) and Wilson et al. (2021), who found that academic work at home during and after the pandemic undermined spatial differentiation, especially in women who were in charge of housework.

Communicative boundaries also became an intermediate predictor, as it is showing the interpersonal problems of establishing boundaries in collegial and hierarchical relations. The results of regression indicate that although communicative control is important; institutional and cultural norms that support unceasing accessibility- undermine its efficiency.

### Thematic Integration: Lived Realities of Boundary Negotiation

These statistical relationships were enhanced with qualitative narratives that shed light on emotional and contextual aspects of the management of the boundaries. There were four major themes, including temporal guarding, spatial blurring, behavioural detachment, and communicative negotiation, which supported the quantitative results but showed a more in-depth picture.

### Casual Guarding as Affective Conservation

Time structuring was often mentioned by the participants as a defence mechanism against emotional exhaustion. The monotony of work-hour schedules and routines of shutting down their minds at the end of day shielded their minds against the nature of infinite academic work. This theme confirms the quantitative result that temporal limits were the strongest predictors of wellbeing. Nevertheless, a number of the respondents admitted that such routines need assertiveness and self-control that is frequently put to test by institutional demands to work long hours. Time control, therefore, does not seem just a scheduling aid, but a type of assertiveness and power definition.

### Blurring of Space and Digital Colonization of Domestic Space

The erosion of space is an issue that kept being raised by those participants who participated in hybrid teaching and online research collaboration. A lot of them voiced sentiments that they were being digitally colonized where home became

indistinguishable to school environments. This observation supports the reduced average score of spatial boundaries and is consistent with the results of Stanisciusaski et al. (2019) who discovered that erosion of physical boundaries by female academics results in shorter recovery time and role fatigue.

The gendered aspect of spatial blurring as experiences of respondents are also reported to involve the mixing of professional activity of women with unpaid domestic duty and increasing the level of stress. The findings highlight the weaknesses of using personal coping strategies without institutional interventions such as the availability of specific quiet working areas or arrangements of flexible work schedules.

### Behavioural release and Attentive Segmentation

Emotional restoration was commonly mentioned to be especially important on behavioural boundary strategies such as digital detox practices and relaxation rituals. Members of the faculty who performed detachment rituals like switching off notifications, writing or having non-academic hobbies expressed more calmness and focus. This is in line with Allen and Shockley (2020), who highlighted that behavioural segmentation improves psychological detachment, which minimises emotional exhaustion.

Notably, perceived organizational support was frequently related with behavioural control. Institutions with work-life policies or mentoring programs were easier in establishing behavioural boundaries by faculty. The implication of this interaction is personal strategies are not enough, supportive institutional climates enhance boundary effectiveness.

### Negotiation between Hierarchical cultures through Communication

A qualitative contribution that was most eye opening was the continued inability to establish communicative lines. Respondents reported that they were pressured to stay responsive to students, administrators, and other people outside of the office hours, which they felt resulted in professional consequences. It confirms Friedman and Greenhaus (2022), who stated that academic cultures that value unremitting availability negatively impact boundary control and legalize overwork.

To a large number of the respondents particularly those under probationary contracts, decline of after-hours communication would be seen as showing lack of commitment. As a result, communicative boundaries became a location of individual pressure and institutionalized inequality whose gendered work expectations were still perpetuated.

### Comparison against Existing Literature

The results align and build on the past studies on gendered work-life management in the academic field. Like Clair et al. (2021) and García-Arroyo et al. (2022), the given study highlights that early career female faculty experience boundary

tensions that have distinctive characteristics due to career precarity and caregiving norms. Here, as in previous evidence, temporal and behavioural segmentation are protective factors of wellbeing. This research is important as it quantifies their predictive power and puts them into perspective using personal encounters.

The study is an attempt to combine psychological resource theories and sociological interpretations of academic labour by incorporating the JD-R and Boundary Management frameworks. This study is based on multi-dimensional wellbeing including emotional balance, mental resilience, and life satisfaction as the foregrounding of these factors to tangible behavioural solutions in contrast to previous studies in which the primary concern was job satisfaction.

### Gendered and Institutional Depths

A significant contribution of this study is that it brings out the structural aspects of boundary control. Personal preferences to personal boundaries are often incompatible with the institutional norms of productivity, responsiveness by administration and research participation. Consequently, female faculty experience a sense of boundary incongruence (Kossek and Lautsch, 2012) in which the segmentation desired cannot be practiced, because of systemic pressures.

The qualitative data prove that boundary enactment does not solely depend on personal choice but it is rooted in the institutions that are gendered. These issues are aggravated by women having disproportionate domestic roles as well as care expectations in cultural contexts. Such a twofold load limits the implementation of perfect lines and decreases the general wellbeing a trend familiar to Wilson et al. (2021) and Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2022).

The discussion therefore places the management of the boundaries in the broader equity discourses. The way forward is institutional change that incorporates a flexible approach to workloads, women faculty mentoring, and acknowledgment of the caregiving burden in order to alleviate these inequalities.

### Theory and Practice Implications

This paper, theoretically, proves the Boundary Management Theory in a gendered academic setting but stretches it by empirically blending it with the JD-R model. It shows that the use of boundary strategies as personal resources which help to balance work-related stressors, therefore, facilitating resilience. It however raises the question of the conditionality of such strategies which only work in enabling environments.

In practice, higher education institutions will be required to reinterpret work-life policies in ways that are not formal flexibility. Both folk retention and institutional cultures that promote wellbeing can be increased through training schemes that promote self-regulated boundary behaviours. Institutionalization of healthy work norms may be enhanced by leadership development programs that encourage understanding supervision and adherence to time limits.

Also, digital communication guidelines like limited email time and maintaining boundaries expectations might ease the burden of always-on communication expectations. These are best practices in inclusive academic management that are consistent with Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and Goal 8 (Decent Work and Wellbeing).

### Future Research Directions and Limitations

Though the research has got strong observations, it has a weakness of being cross-sectional, which limits causation. Future longitudinal research might focus on the development of the concept of management of boundaries in different stages of career advancement and institutional change. Besides, having both male and non-binary scholars would enable a comparative study of gendered border experiences.

The further cross-cultural samples might help to understand how the elements of cultural norms mediate preferences on boundaries, particularly in collectivist societies, where the culture of family is highly perceived. Also, in future studies, it may be possible to use digital ethnography to examine the impact of technology-mediated boundaries on post-pandemic academic work.

### Summary

In short, the paper highlights that wellbeing in early career female faculty depends on the interaction of the individual agency and institutional environment. The most powerful predictors of wellbeing were temporal and behavioural limits, supported by the accounts of organized self-discipline and detachment rituals. Nevertheless, the erosion of work-life integration is still taking place due to the continued presence of institutional cultures insisting on hyper availability and unclear boundaries between space and place.

Finally, sustainable wellbeing needs the micro level skills of managing boundaries and macro level institutional reforms that acknowledge, respect and facilitate such boundaries. A combination of gender-sensitive policy systems and individual boundary training may help to develop a space of academic success and personal wellbeing in which both do not clash with each other.

### 6. Conclusion

In this study, it is highlighted that work-life boundaries are a determining factor in the wellbeing of early career female faculty. Using a mixed methods strategy comprising quantitative and qualitative ideas, it demonstrates that the most predictive indicators of psychological wellbeing are temporal and behavioural boundaries as they are represented by systematic time allocation, disciplined work disengagement, and conscious self-regulation. Temporal guarding was the source of control and predictability whereas behavioural

detachment was an emotional recovery against the stress factors of academics.

Nevertheless, the results also point to some limitations that are still in place and are institutional and cultural norms, which hamper the autonomy of boundaries of female faculty. The lack of spatial demarcation of workspace in hybrid work environments and the demands of communicativity to be available at all times is a manifestation of structural inequity in the academic setting. These elements add to gendered expectations of care and productivity and result in the incongruence of boundaries and emotional exhaustion.

The paper finds that institutional change and transformation is essential to the realization of sustainable wellbeing although the individual strategies are necessary. Gender-related policies need to be established to support wellbeing, flexibility in workload, and the normalisation of boundary-setting behaviours by universities, creating appropriate cultures. Through the establishment of organisational cultures that match human centred values, educational institutions can foster the conditions in which professional activities and personal wellbeing support, not harm, one another, leading to gender equity as well as long-term academic sustainability.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Allen, T. D., & Shockley, K. M. (2020). Work-family boundary management and wellbeing: Integrating balance, flexibility, and control. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 120, 103–122.
- [2] Allen, T. D., Cho, E., & Meier, L. L. (2021). Work-family boundary dynamics. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behaviour*, 8, 263–288.
- [3] Ashforth, B. E., Kreiner, G. E., & Fugate, M. (2000). All in a day's work: Boundaries and micro role transitions. *Academy of Management Review*, 25(3), 472–491.
- [4] Carlson, D. S., Ferguson, M., & Kacmar, K. M. (2016). Boundary management tactics: An examination of the congruence between work and family domains. *Human Relations*, 69(5), 1045–1072.
- [5] Chambel, M. J., Carvalho, V. S., & Cesário, F. (2023). The role of boundary management strategies in work-life balance and wellbeing. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 32(2), 256–273.
- [6] Clair, R., Gordon, M., Kocarchuk, A., & Vealey, C. (2021). The price of balance: Boundary management and burnout among early career female academics. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 75(4), 635–657.
- [7] Demerouti, E., Bakker, A. B., Nachreiner, F., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2001). The job demands-resources model of burnout. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86(3), 499–512.
- [8] Friedman, S. D., & Greenhaus, J. H. (2022). Work and family—Allies or enemies? New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- [9] Gálvez-Rodríguez, M. D., Caba-Pérez, C., & López-Godoy, M. (2024). Institutional flexibility and gender

equity in academia: The moderating role of boundary control. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 31(1), 145–163.

[10] García-Arroyo, J. A., Osca, A., & Peiró, J. M. (2022). Work-family conflict and job stress among female academics: The moderating role of organizational support. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(3), 1792–1807.

[11] Kahn, R. L., Wolfe, D. M., Quinn, R. P., Snoek, J. D., & Rosenthal, R. A. (1964). *Organizational stress: Studies in role conflict and ambiguity*. New York, NY: Wiley.

[12] Kossek, E. E., & Lautsch, B. A. (2012). Work-family boundary management styles in organizations: A cross-level model. *Organizational Psychology Review*, 2(2), 152–171.

[13] Kossek, E. E., Ruderman, M. N., Braddy, P. W., & Hannum, K. M. (2012). Work–nonwork boundary management profiles: A person-centred approach. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 81(1), 112–128.

[14] Mason, M. A., Wolfinger, N. H., & Goulden, M. (2020). *Do babies matter? Gender and family in the ivory tower*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

[15] Nippert-Eng, C. (1996). *Home and work: Negotiating boundaries through everyday life*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

[16] Ryff, C. D., & Keyes, C. L. M. (1995). The structure of psychological wellbeing revisited. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69(4), 719–727.

[17] Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2022). Teacher wellbeing, job satisfaction, and motivation: The role of work-life balance and job demands. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 109, 103–123.

[18] Staniscuaski, F., et al. (2019). Gender, parenthood, and the academic career: Challenges for female researchers. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 2240.

[19] Wilson, J., White, K., & Nair, N. (2021). Gendered boundaries and academic identities: Work-life integration among women in academia. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 40(7), 1459–1474.