

Reworking boundaries in the home-as-office: boundary traffic during COVID-19 lockdown and the future of working from home

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 crisis has led to an unprecedented acceleration in the number of people working from home (WFH). This article applies a practice theoretical lens to expand the pre-pandemic telework literature which often overlooks how WFH is part of complex socio-material arrangements. Based on 56 household interviews in the UK, the United States, and Norway during lockdown in Spring 2020, we reveal the everyday realities of WFH, exploring their implications for the future of work. Developing the concept of boundary traffic, which refers to the additional interaction and collision of a range of everyday practices normally separated in time and space when working outside the home, we provide some insights into how disruption and de- and re-routinization vary by household type, space, and employer's actions. Much teleworking scholarship highlights technological and spatial flexibility of work, without recognizing the mundane realities of WFH when there is no space for a large computer monitor, preferences to be with children even when a secluded home office is available, or a feeling that important social connections diminish when working on a virtual basis. We discuss the future of work in relation to digitalization, social inequality, and environmental sustainability and conclude by stressing how WFH cannot be understood as merely a technical solution to work-life flexibility. Rather, lockdown-induced WFH has deeply changed the meaning and content of homes as households have resolved the spatial, material, social, and temporal aspects of boundary traffic when embedding work into the domestic practice-bundle.

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Introduction

Working from home (WFH) has long been hailed for its environmental benefits, its potential to increase job satisfaction, and the chances it offers to improve work-life balance (c.f. Hook, Sovacool, and Sorrell 2020). WFH therefore features as an important innovation for the future of work. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of people recruited to WFH practices accelerated in an unprecedented way in many parts of the world. While workers in some professions and sectors continued to carry out their work obligations at their workplaces, others—especially office workers—were confined to their homes as places to work. They were instructed to WFH, irrespective of existing socio-material arrangements and responsibilities in the home. In this article, we explore how WFH, as a fast-growing social practice, interrelates to and has been actively accommodated with other domestic practices when COVID-19 lockdown measures prevented work from occurring within “normal” time-

space contexts and conditions. Based on qualitative interviews with households from the UK, the United States, and Norway, we depict the major changes happening inside these homes. The comparison is interesting because these are three high-income countries, with relatively affluent consumer societies but simultaneously different pandemic regimes, cultural traditions, and urban geographies. As the article will reveal, findings from the three countries evince significant national differences in navigating the additional interaction and collision of everyday practices that resulted from WFH. Although different sources highlight a broad variety of numbers, *before the pandemic* about 4% and 5% of the working population in the UK and Norway, respectively, reported to be engaged in WFH (Eurofund 2020). During the Spring 2020 lockdown, these numbers increased, respectively, to roughly 46% (Reuschke and Felstead 2020; OECD 2021) and almost 50% (Ingelsrud, Ellingsen, and Steen 2020; Ingelsrud and Hoff Bernstrøm 2021). In the United States, around

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50% of the working population reported to be regularly working from home during the first lockdown (Galasso and Foucault 2020), with just over 30% of employees reporting to be working from home *because of the pandemic* (OECD 2021).¹ In creating this account of WFH during Spring 2020, we engage with ongoing debates around COVID-19 disruptions and the future of more flexible work relations (Beck and Hensher 2020; Couch, O’Sullivan, and Malatzky 2021; Reuschke and Felstead 2020).²

A growing body of literature has analyzed the issue of home-officing (or teleworking) prior to COVID-19.³ Within this work from the field of science and technology studies, telework has been one of the main focus areas as new information and communication technologies (ICT) have allowed for less traditional work constellations, both spatially and temporally (Sullivan 2003; Halford 2005; Hilbrecht et al. 2013). Research on the processes of relocating work into the home, and the dislocation of work into virtual spaces, has devoted attention to changing dynamics of interrelations between space, work, and organization (Halford 2005). Many of the teleworking studies have dedicated attention to the technology involved in making such reorganizations possible, depicting the future of work being performed by anyone, anytime, anywhere (Messenger and Gschwind 2016; Hopkins and McKay 2019; Hook, Sovacool, and Sorrell 2020). Other scholars have focused on telework in relation to changing mobilities and potential sustainability gains by avoiding everyday commutes (Hynes 2014; de Vos, van Ham, and Meijers 2019; Hook, Sovacool, and Sorrell 2020). While these literatures place emphasis on the centrality of materiality in work practices, the strong emphasis on technology and (re)organization has arguably diverted attention away from people and their everyday lives, which are also affected by changing work relations (for exceptions see Tietze 2002; Tietze and Musson 2005).

In terms of conceptualizing how relations between work and nonwork are negotiated in the everyday, boundary theory has been particularly influential. This literature focuses on boundary negotiation between different social roles and how WFH influences work-life balance. Unlike the teleworking literature, boundary-theory scholarship is not tethered explicitly to home offices but broadly explores how people distinguish their roles when WFH, working at a workplace, and working outside these spaces (Ashforth, Kreiner, and Fugate 2000; Delanoëije, Verbruggen, and Germeys 2019). The literature builds heavily on the scholarship of sociologist Christina Nippert-Eng (2008, 2010) and her conceptualization of boundary work, defined as “the

never-ending, hands-on, largely visible process through which boundaries are negotiated, placed, maintained, and transformed by individuals over time” (2008, xiii). At the core of the boundary literature then are individuals, their social roles, and mental categories that are involved in the invention, (re)negotiation, and reproduction of (new) boundaries and interrelations between practices of work and nonwork, both within and outside the home. Although boundary work has been conceptualized as being shaped by broader social contexts, this scholarship has been critiqued by human-relation scholars because of its isolated focus on the individual, and individuals’ agency and intentions as (home) workers (Kosłowski, Linehan, and Tietze 2019), overlooking wider social structures in analyses (Piszczyk and Berg 2014).

We employ theories of practice to decenter the human-individual subject and give way to materials, infrastructures, and social organization as co-determinants of everyday social practices. These theories come in many different forms (Welch and Warde 2015). Rather than adhering to one particular “version” of practice theories, we draw inspiration and conceptual tools from a range of different practice scholars in developing our theoretical lens on WFH, as further elaborated below. This approach is adopted to accentuate how the home-as-office leads to the interaction and collision of a range of everyday practices normally separated in time and space. We conceptualize these interactions as forms of *boundary traffic*. Boundaries and boundary traffic refer to changes in the institutional set-up of daily life: what rhythms of time and which particular locations within available domestic spaces are organizing the bundles of domestic and WFH practices. The article thus examines how WFH, as a practice, interrelates with other social practices (e.g., commuting, leisuring, eating, educating), when work is prevented from occurring within “normal” time-space contexts. By investigating the ways in which households do *boundary work*, we analyze the different social, spatial, temporal, and material boundaries that are being (re)drawn between the various sets of social practices that together form domestic practice-arrangement bundles (Schatzki 2002, 2019).

Exploring the practice of WFH

In this section, we review how previous literature on WFH can be applied through a practice theoretical lens to develop an understanding of what WFH as a social practice is about and how it is made to (better) fit into domestic life.

The “boundary traffic” of doing WFH

Practice theoretical approaches are unified by a focus on shared, routinized aspects of everyday life. As a general rule, we know how to get on in our daily lives. The notion of routinization is important to emphasize the fact that most “choices” we make in everyday life are not consciously considered but taken for granted (Reckwitz 2002a; Warde 2005; Gram-Hanssen 2008; Spaargaren, Weenink, and Lamers 2016). Several studies have discussed the extent to which disruptions, such as crises (e.g., COVID-19-related) or fatal moments, may trigger human agents to start reflecting, considering, negotiating, and arguing about the best possible ways forward, and about how to reestablish a (new) normal, routinized, taken-for-granted situation (Spaargaren and van Vliet 2000; Chappells, Medd, and Shove 2011; Kent, Dowling, and Maalsen 2017; Wethal 2020). When applied to WFH social practices, the disruptions of COVID-19 experienced by households have set in motion boundary work in order to reestablish routines in the short term. At the same time, however, de-routinization of old configurations of practices can bring about increased levels of reflexivity with respect to the best possible ways to organize sets of domestic routines right now and in the future (Lamers, Spaargaren, and Weenink 2016; Spaargaren, Weenink, and Lamers 2016; Wilhite 2016).

We argue that “boundary work” is relevant to analyze how domestic human agents confront the changes that resulted from the COVID-19 lockdown regimes. Both the literature on teleworking (Halford 2005) and concepts from boundary theory (Nippert-Eng 2008, 2010) can be used to investigate WFH social practices and their roles in relieving or complicating work-life balances. The shared emphasis of these different perspectives is on the diverse and complex ways in which people engage in creating, dismissing, maintaining, redefining, and changing boundaries in the time-spaces of their domestic lives in order to “go on” with their life (Koslowski, Linehan, and Tietze 2019). However, past scholarship does not adequately attend to the socio-material structures shaping everyday life and the substantial societal changes brought about by the disruption of the pandemic. The COVID-19 lockdown drastically altered both the permeability (the ability to fulfill many roles at the same time within domestic space) and flexibility (juggling responsibilities in ad hoc, unpredictable ways) of work-home boundaries. Given the extreme circumstances of COVID-19, how people actually do boundary work might also be radically altered (Cho 2020). Hence, we introduce the term “boundary traffic” to acknowledge the fact that the lockdown created

more boundary work because different spheres collided, creating additional “traffic” or congestion at the boundaries between different domestic social practices. The distinction we introduce between boundary traffic and doing boundary work seeks to bring the concepts of boundary theory in line with theories of social practices: traffic refers to the processes of re-embedding situated practices and changing interrelations between (groups of) social practices, while “doing the boundary work” refers to the agency of domestic human agents in how they manage these mixtures and forms of overlap.

Practicing boundary work and WFH practice-arrangement bundles

Theories of practice have emerged as powerful tools for exploring the workings of everyday life, focusing on the shared, routinized aspects involved in diverse topics from domestic waste (Evans 2014), food consumption (Halkier 2009; Spaargaren, Oosterveer, and Loeber 2012), cleanliness (Jack 2017), and technology and energy use in the home (Wilhite 2008; Gram-Hanssen and Darby 2018; Hargreaves, Wilson, and Hauxwell-Baldwin 2018; Hansen et al. 2019). Moreover, practice theorists have been instrumental in shedding light on how daily routines are developed and sequenced in relation to infrastructures (Bulkeley and Gregson 2009; Cass et al. 2018; Shove and Trentmann 2019) and systems of provision (Spaargaren 2003; Hansen 2018; Spaargaren, Oosterveer, and Loeber 2012). Practices can be defined as “open and spatially, temporally dispersed sets of doings and sayings organised by common understandings, teleology (ends and tasks) and rules” (Nicolini 2017, 20). Although widely different conceptualizations are in use (see Gram-Hanssen 2011 for an overview), there is agreement that practices involve the integration of a range of “material, embodied, ideational and affective” components or elements, that together shape how people perform their everyday life in particular, routinized, and socially shared ways (Welch and Warde 2015, 85). This involves complex processes of habituation and close interaction with other people, infrastructures, and things. People are considered carriers of practice, with agency distributed across elements of practice (Wilhite 2012; Sahakian and Wilhite 2014). In other words, if someone chooses to WFH, the individual “choice” made to do so represents only the tip of the iceberg of social (e.g., caring responsibilities, getting along with doing online meetings in a shared office space), material (e.g., space for a desk, monitor, segregated office area), and bodily (e.g., disability, age, aches and pains from desk set up) factors that together result in WFH being a

viable, suitable, and more or less likely option. The home-office worker who is performing WFH is part of a larger set of social and material arrangements in which the “rules of the game” are also set by others and in which there is limited room for maneuvering. Against this background, creating a (new) work-life balance can be understood as a matter of “negotiation and arrangement within and across households” that involves different “modes of provision,” whether state, market, household, social networks, or other (Southerton 2020, 44).

At the core of practice theory is how social life occurs and develops through configurations of practices and arrangements. Practice arrangements “hang together, determine one another via their connections, and as combined both exert effects on the other configurations and are transformed through the actions of these other configurations” (Schatzki 2002, xiii). The idea of configuration points to how people, objects, infrastructures, and elements of nature, are related to one another, and how they are united into the same practice-arrangement bundles (Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012; Lamers, van der Duim, and Spaargaren 2017; Schatzki 2019). Practice-arrangement bundles of a specific (e.g., domestic) kind stand out as “regions of particularly dense relations among particular practices and arrangements” (Schatzki 2019, 47). In other words, bundles develop as practices become associated with one another, for example, when practices are organized toward similar interests or goals, when they depend on the same material arrangement (e.g., available space), or when they have intentionally been coordinated in relation to one another (Nicolini 2017). In order to conceptualize variation in the strength of such connections, Shove, Pantzar, and Watson (2012) distinguish between bundles and complexes. While bundles are more loosely knit patterns based on co-location or co-existence, complexes refer to stickier and more integrated configurations, such as when bundles are anchored to specific places (Lamers, van der Duim, and Spaargaren 2017). Offices, as well as homes, arguably represent such complexes, where the specific sets of practices performed and material arrangements involved are relatively set and anchored to specific sites.

We develop the concept of WFH boundary traffic to analyze household experiences connected to colliding social practices within the home-space, or the additional boundary traffic, during the first COVID-19 lockdown. We build on the concept of boundaries within practice theory, which is employed to delineate between what is considered the “correct” way of performing a practice and what is not. These boundaries are not fixed, but are “always contestable

and contested” (Nicolini 2017, 22). Boundary traffic is employed to capture this contestation during disruption, seeking to explain how relations between practices and arrangements have to be renegotiated, compromised, relearned, and re-bundled within the home. This resonates with Koslowski, Linehan, and Tietze’s (2019, 59) conceptualization of WFH as “constantly contested, negotiated and fluid in its boundaries because it challenges established meanings and cultural spheres, values, and roles around how the domains of home and work are structured.”

Within the context of the first COVID-19 lockdown and in a very short time, households had to rearrange practices to take place within the same time-space, involving a direct competition over material arrangements as well as conflicting objectives (e.g., between practices of care and WFH). This process of forced rearrangement both refers to how social practices are being performed in new, different ways, as well as the ways in which practices in and around the home “hang together” in practice-arrangement bundles. Moreover, as the rhythm of everyday life is partly sequenced by institutions and organizations, such as timetables in schools, offices, and shops (Spurling et al. 2013; Southerton 2020), the bundles under study, although “domestic” in nature, were directly affected by outside factors and dynamics, including COVID-19 measures implemented by governments. The introduction of WFH resulted in the emergence of new social practices at the expense of others, depending on different forms of coordination, leading to new social relations of power and inequality.

We seek to explain how households actively manage boundary traffic and establish WFH by finding ways to “move on” with the everyday. By focusing on agency in boundary traffic, we analyze how households were doing *boundary work*, referring to how domestic actors managed and worked upon the new interrelations between social practices. Applying a practice lens to the sociology of boundary work allows us to accentuate the material, temporal, and spatial elements of WFH practices and move away from more individualistic explanations in the organization of everyday life. Specific WFH social practices are considered and analyzed as being part of and related to wider sets of social practices which together form the practice-arrangement bundles or configurations constituting “domestic life.”

Methods

Our study is based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews during the first COVID-19 lockdown (Spring 2020) with 17 UK households (London,

Manchester, and Cardiff), 11 United States households (Seattle and surrounding King County in Washington State), and 28 Norwegian households (Oslo) based in urban settings.⁴ We recruited respondents through online social media posts and snowballing from personal and professional networks with the aim of sampling a diversity of participants in terms of professions and work obligations during the pandemic (e.g., health professional, accountant, teacher, university student, and so forth), caring responsibilities, and household arrangements (e.g., singles, couples, families with young children) (see Table A1). In total, 37 out of 56 interviews were with women, 14 with men, and in five cases couples were interviewed together. The sample included 16 single people (4 living with housemates), 23 couples, and 17 families with children. Out of all the participants at the time of interview, 32 were able to WFH (including one student), nine were partially WFH (including one student), 11 were still going into their place of work, two were retired (one semi-retired), two were furloughed, two were not working, and one was unemployed due to COVID-19 impacts on their place of work (Figure 1).⁵ The age of our interviewees ranged between 20 and 70 years old.

Our interview guides were informed by a practice theoretical lens and respondents were asked about their everyday routines during the first COVID-19 lockdown and interconnections between WFH, mobility, food, and leisure activities. We transcribed the interviews verbatim in the language in which they were conducted (selected quotes were later translated to English) and evaluated using thematic analysis for all three countries. The thematic coding developed around WFH topics covered in interviews was used as a starting point to identify recurring themes. Later insights were drawn from each country's empirical data around practice theory, boundary traffic, and WFH. The main differences and similarities across the countries were then summarized by including illustrative quotes for each of the identified themes and subthemes. In the following

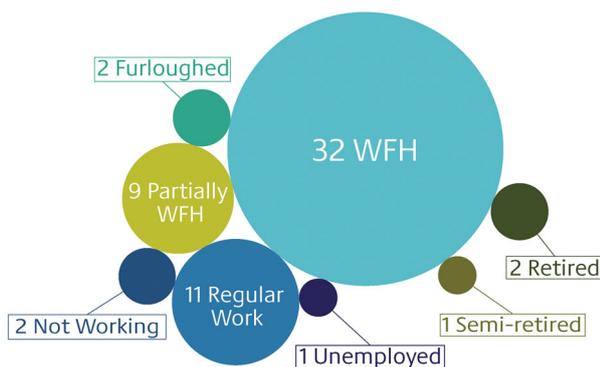


Figure 1. Participants' employment at the time of interview.

analysis, all participants are identified by pseudonyms (age, household size, and respondent code).

As with all research, there were limitations to our approach. First, we focused on relatively privileged households that, for the most part, did not lose their jobs as a result of the pandemic and could WFH. While our participants may reflect the experience of many people living in urban areas of Europe and North America, access to reliable equipment and Internet connectivity is certainly not homogenous around the globe. The selection of countries was partially a result of the research teams' country of origin or residence as well as a desire to reflect on how experiences and meanings of the home evolved during the pandemic in different settings. Given our interest in boundary traffic, limited space and additional care responsibilities became important factors in our analysis. As Norwegian and British households were more exemplary of this criterion, our analysis below is more focused on the European cases. The American participants, often with fewer care obligations, larger homes, and segregated home offices, are brought into the discussion as a point of comparison.

Boundary traffic in the home-as-office

In the following subsections, we first describe how WFH and its related boundary traffic emerged, developed so rapidly, and was experienced by our participating households. We then go on to analyze in more detail the boundary work required from householders to establish and stabilize WFH as a new and important part of the domestic bundle of practices in everyday life.

Working from home during COVID-19 lockdown

The lockdown of societies during Spring 2020 led to the normalization of WFH in a very short span of time. WFH was no longer a voluntary option, a stealth act, or a one-day exception to pre-existing norms as it was often described in pre-COVID-19 literature on the issue (Koslowski, Linehan, and Tietze 2019). The explosion of WFH practices



Figure 2. WFH practices contributing to boundary traffic.

during lockdown brought a host of new practices into the home, visualized in Figure 2, and demanded re-routinization of domestic life in the wake of the pandemic. Learning how to do WFH together with new performances of practices previously carried out elsewhere turned out to be a significant challenge for many householders. Leisuring under new conditions, home-based education for children, combining work with care for the young, and still getting daily meals on the dining table were all reported as newly emerging challenges to be confronted. For parents, the closing of kindergartens and schools added caring for, playing with, and home-schooling children to the home-as-office. The closure of restaurants, and COVID-19 related “stay-at-home” advice (except for essential trips), led to more home cooking and consequently also more dishwashing. Cleaning, tidying, and laundering clothes became part of the workday as these practices could be woven in between meetings and other work activities.

Although some of our participants could lean on previous experience with WFH, for the majority this had mainly consisted of occasional evening work and did not necessarily represent an established part of the domestic practice-complex (Shove, Panzar, and Watson 2010; Lamers, van der Duim, and Spaargaren 2017). Hence, the lockdown introduced WFH as a more or less new home-based practice that involved novel competencies (e.g., digital meetings), and the handling of new social and material configurations (e.g., setting up a home office or working from the living room), as well as new meanings regarding home, work, and WFH (e.g., work attire or the meanings associated with different rooms in the house).

The lockdown led to the dissolution of previous structures and rhythms of everyday life and it is this competition, overlap, or even collision of social practices that we conceptualize as boundary traffic. Boundary traffic was clearly influenced by spatial elements. Participants with relatively confining living arrangements reported more on the frustration of background noise and disruptions from sharing the home with others, and required more negotiation and coordination between household members.

Our data reveal a more complex experience of WFH than what is accounted for in much of the existing literature, where WFH tends to be depicted as either beneficial or harmful to work-home relations (for a review see Koslowski, Linehan, and Tietze 2019). We seek to unpack the complexity by looking in more detail into how WFH practices are re-bundled with a number of other domestic social practices, in particular the practices of, first, home-

based education and care and, second, practices of leisuring, cleaning, and staying fit. This detailed analysis is important because future institutionalization of WFH by businesses and governments depends on understanding the everyday realities of how WFH bundles with meanings and activities associated with the home, such as caring and relaxing (Mallett 2004; Ellsworth-Krebs, Reid, and Hunter 2019).

Re-bundling WFH with social practices of education and family care

The home has a long history of meanings tied to relationships and family (Blunt and Dowling 2006; Flanders 2015). In our study, family and caring practices were a focal point of discussion and the WFH boundary traffic for parents stood out in all countries. This is consistent with findings by others (e.g., Eurofund 2020), as practices related to WFH have been “competing for the same space and resources while also having to provide childcare and homeschooling” (Reuschke and Felstead 2020). Scholars have pointed out the intensification of maternal guilt and tension created between caring practices and household responsibilities while simultaneously striving to maintain the identity of an “ideal worker” during lockdown (Couch, O’Sullivan, and Malatzky 2021, 4). For our participants, the gendered aspect is less pronounced, but practices of parenting required detailed coordination, communicating work schedules, and setting expectations with other household members that was not necessary prior to lockdown. For example, Marianne explained how having to WFH, while also homeschooling two children, required extensive organization.

Then we had homeschooling, which I had to deal with, and we shared it. We quickly realized that we had to be super structured so that it would not become like one of us feeling like the other was doing more or that it affected each other’s work (43 years old, family with children, NO26).

Moreover, parents were the most likely to have fewer work hours or to shift outside a 9-to-5 rhythm to make room for additional caring demands. Some families reported on organizing the responsibilities for childcare depending on which parent had to attend digital meetings at work, while others described how children’s homeschooling would set the temporal limits; parents squeezed in work when children were sleeping for instance. Some researchers have suggested that COVID-19, and resulting increases in homeschooling and child-caring responsibilities, could be a step back for gender equality in terms of labor in and outside the home (Fabrizio, Malta, and Tavares 2020). Indeed, Sevilla and Smith (2020) found that women have taken on a larger responsibility of domestic care

during the pandemic. However, experiences from COVID-19 WFH practices might also contribute to dissolving current boundaries that “shutter family and work into separate boxes,” and increase flexibility which in turn can make employment markets more accessible for those currently struggling to participate in the traditional time-space of office work (Couch, O’Sullivan, and Malatzky 2021, 8). While our research revealed some examples of gender unequal aspects of COVID-19 and WFH, our participants’ descriptions are simultaneously in line with suggested benefits of parents valuing the flexibility to spend time with their families. Arntz, Yahmed, and Berlingieri (2020) suggest that the social acceptability and expansion of flexible and remote working suit many women and parents, who opt for WFH-friendly occupations and organizations. For instance, there were examples of households that had the space to work in privacy with an ergonomic office set up, but chose to work in the same space as their children. This challenges some of the teleworking literature overlooking how use of ICT technology does not always mean that the “worker” role is solely adopted but also allows for simultaneously combining work with other domestic practices.

My husband has been very much in the writing room, which is his office space for everyday life, so he has not had as much change as what I have had. I would very much like to hear that the children are well...it doesn’t matter that there is a little noise. [So even though I have a desk in the bedroom] I sat down at the kitchen table with all three children (Lisa, 35 years old, family with children, NO5).

Lisa further described how she would participate muted in Zoom calls from the kitchen table together with her three children which exemplifies how technology might leverage a desired integration of work and home (Kreiner 2009), although arguably creating additional boundary traffic. The friction between caring practices and WFH also arose in relation to the practice of eating together as households sought to “replicate the traditional work space” (Wapshott and Mallett 2012, 66). Marthe explained how getting materials from work would crowd out desirable space for socializing and eating.

No, we have not brought home PCs and such from work, we have had laptops...we would have liked to have had a bigger screen, but I have not bothered to go down to work and take that screen home because then I have also thought that then it will be even harder to clear it away, right, before the evening (57 years old, family with children, NO19).

It was indeed more common in the two European countries to choose not to bring certain

materials, such as desks and screens, into the home because it clashed with other home-based activities. While not downplaying the obvious spatial constraints weighing on how the relation between eating and WFH practices was negotiated, this boundary work was clearly embedded in existing social relations and expectations from other household members. As such, while the spatial aspects condition the temporal and social boundary work, it does so only partially, as some households would resist material changes that could inhibit other social practices. Boundary-theory literature further suggests that households with fewer people would have an easier time creating and maintaining boundaries (Allen et al. 2021). This is consistent with how boundary traffic seemed more pronounced and intense in our larger households, particularly for those with young children. As highlighted by Loyd and Vasta (2017, 5), recent changes in the labor market have contributed to making the domestic space a site of both consumption and production, “a return to the pre-industrial formation as a place of work.” The speed and scope of such processes were undeniably affected by the COVID-19 lockdown. However, while the negotiation between WFH, childcare, and homeschooling is expected to be less pronounced in the future, as we saw from the accounts of Lisa and Marthe, their roles as caretakers and mothers also influenced their acceptance of where and how WFH became embedded.

Re-bundling WFH and social practices of leisuring, cleaning, and staying fit

Although critical geographies of home have long contested the idea of home as a “haven” or a private place of rest (Blunt and Varley 2004; Brickell 2012), the home is centrally connected to ideas of relaxation and comfort (AQ5Crowley 2001; Flanders 2015; Ellsworth-Krebs, Reid, and Hunter 2019). Certainly, in discussing their everyday routines, our participants drew attention to leisure activities being re-bundled and negotiated with WFH and mobility restrictions as a result of COVID-19 lockdown measures. Leisure practices such as knitting, gaming, or socializing that would normally take place after finishing the workday became more closely bundled to WFH during the lockdown. As moving around to attend meetings or to speak to colleagues was removed from the rhythm of working, many respondents created time for walking and exercising to break up the workday. Overall, there was mention of utilizing and valuing spaces outside the home such as parks, forests, and gardens more than before. Although this also relates to the closure of previously frequented indoor venues, it furthermore allowed for a needed escape from boundary traffic

at home. In particular, those living in shared apartments mentioned the need to get “time alone” and to create breaks both from the spatial monotony of home and the social coordination required by WFH practices. Geir (33 years old, couple, NO6) described how he and his partner “agreed that we should go out and walk or run at different times ... So that we could get some time alone as well.”

Similar re-bundling occurred through the weaving in of cleaning and tidying practices with WFH. While tidying may not be a clear leisure activity, some participants commented on the stress or discomfort of having to work in a disorganized space. For example, Olivia talked about doing more laundry and dishes “as something to do really and because I’m here all day ..., I want it to be tidy” (29 years old, couple, UK5). This allowed for a break from work that felt “productive” (it had to be done either way), but WFH also created more mess in itself and made people more aware of necessary housework. Others saw housework more as a direct distraction. For example, Siri explained how WFH would allow her to do both work and housework simultaneously, adding to the experience of not really being present anywhere: “I notice in particular, I do not know if it is a female thing, but you kind of do several different things at the same time, so if you just listen in on a meeting, right, then I check something else or do that and wash clothes. And that is probably not so wise in the long run” (Siri, 38 years old, family with children, NO21).

The experiences in the first lockdown hint at some loosely bundled practices and competencies making up boundary traffic and boundary work that are likely to fall away when lockdown measures ease up, while other practices may become more fixed and embedded into future WFH complexes. Lockdown also forced households to reconstruct and handle social, spatial, temporal, and material boundaries between various practices in the home in order to make space for WFH. We explore these forms of boundary work in the next section.

Boundary work and competing practices in the home-as-office

In the above section, we have discussed shared experiences of WFH during the disruptions caused by COVID-19, involving the dissolving of established practice-bundles inside and outside the home, which caused additional boundary traffic. As it became clear that WFH was turning into a more long-term arrangement, households engaged in doing the boundary work needed to give the practice of WFH a more permanent footing in the bundle of home-based practices. In this section, we discuss how the

embedding of WFH in the configuration of domestic practices was enhanced with the help of digital competencies and with specific socio-material arrangements for creating home offices and entwined with new meanings of home (e.g., bedrooms or living rooms associated with relaxation increasingly became associated with work productivity; exhaustion associated with a lack of physical movement and social connection typical between in-person meetings).

Digitalizing work

During the first period of lockdown, the home office was for many respondents dominated by a reorganization of work onto digital platforms. While these platforms were familiar to some, the use of Microsoft Teams and Zoom became much more extensive, and for some participants the improvement of digital competencies captured much of the time spent working: “So it’s just a question of learning a whole new range of skills, I had not heard about Zoom before, never mind about using it” (Claire, 59 years old, couple, UK6). These platforms facilitated communication, coordination, and collaboration with colleagues (and friends and family), and many institutions started using them extensively for meetings. Indeed, several of our respondents reported a sense of “digital fatigue” as they spent entire days in front of the screen. This fatigue was also linked to how digital communication would allow for tighter planning of work schedules, as physical movement was not required. Indeed, back-to-back digital meetings were for many people a central part of WFH, which exemplifies how they had not developed a sense of how to replace breaks in the workday and what these would look like when at home. Moreover, these digitalization processes intrinsically altered the content and quality of work-related communication. As Marthe, a public sector middle manager, put it

There will not be good discussions, it will be very fragmented. There will be like rounds of information ... There is a lot of one-way communication, instead of good conversations ... And then you lose all that small talk by the coffee machine ... You don’t pick up the phone to talk about everyday things, the threshold for making contact is much higher when you have to call someone or schedule a Teams meeting. So, it has become very clear to me how important the social parts are at work, and how much I like my colleagues (57 years old, family with children, NO19).

Like Marthe, our participants commonly reflected on how the social interaction between colleagues had become more orchestrated and planned through these new means, and many felt they were losing

out on the social sides of their work that they appreciated, and that previously had been a central part of the office-work bundle. Others would point to how they missed the function (not the time spent) of their daily commute in separating between work and private life. They reflected on how the physical movement between place of work and home had previously been instrumental to establishing a boundary between work and nonwork, which was lost as work became embedded into the home-bundle.

So I tried to use it as quality time – that is, when I sit in the car on the way home from work, I listen to podcasts to get into a different mode than work mode, and sort of put those thoughts and all that you have in your head around work behind you, while here... it is maybe one of the reasons why things got a bit stressful, because you could not physically or mentally put – there was no boundary between it (Lisa, 35 years old, family with children, NO5).

The blurring of boundaries between work and private life is central to our understanding of boundary traffic. A significant share of the households experienced this phenomenon, particularly in the initial chaos invoked by the disruption and the dissolving of existing complexes of both home and office work. For some, WFH meant they worked a lot more, both because of a sense of (initial) boundarylessness and because WFH required digital adaptation.

There are no distractions, you're not like getting up to meet colleagues or going for a coffee break or something like that. So, in a sense, I would say in the last three months, we would have probably completed four months of work (Mohammed, 39 years old, family with children, UK1).

However, the blurring of boundaries as part of WFH could also result in a feeling of working less, either because of care work or because of difficulties with integrating and structuring WFH into established home-based practices.

Things really slipped, and you can tell like, you end up with guilty conscience because you feel like you haven't worked, because you cannot look back at that specific time I worked, for example, because you sit at the same table having breakfast, lunch, and work, and having dinner. Then it's hard to state like, "this was my working period" (Nora, 30 years old, couple, NO25).

These quotes illustrate how WFH led to spatial ambiguity as it became possible to be simultaneously present and absent at home and at work (Halford 2005). Tietze and Musson's (2005, 1344) study on telework conceptualized well the experience of chaos and lack of organization in their depiction of

teleworkers "finding themselves in an ontological limbo of being neither here nor there; of being eternally in-between tasks or people." However, while Wapshott and Mallett (2012, 66) state that "some form of boundary will almost certainly exist, some relationship between space and time, between being 'at work' and 'at home,'" we argue that this is the result of an active doing of boundary work. As discussed above, institutional rhythms of schools and offices (particularly digital meetings) contributed to establishing certain temporal boundaries for WFH, but they simultaneously created friction when competing over the same space, or time slots previously considered time off from work. While the digitalizing of work resulted in a loss of practices (e.g., commuting, socializing), many respondents fell into this ontological limbo and additional boundary traffic and boundary work arose in order to institute new practices and ways of delineating work-space and work-time from the home. One of the most obvious distinctions was through the practice of office-making, which we discuss next.

Office-making

Central to establishing the home-as-office was a spatial reorganization of homes, which can be captured as a practice of office-making. This activity rested on relatively shared ideas of what an office space contains and means, clearly illustrated by how people sought to rearrange their existing home-spaces to replicate an office in their homes (Holmes, Lord, and Ellsworth-Krebs 2021), and thus simultaneously changing the meaning of home spaces. The "material world" plays a defining role in social practices (Reckwitz 2002b; Sahakian and Wilhite 2014; Schatzki 2019), and the use of physical and material boundaries is found to be instrumental in enabling separation between work and nonwork, and creating a sense of "being at the office" (Allen et al. 2021, 66). How households sought to do so, however, deeply depended on existing spatial and social arrangements, which varied more markedly by country than other factors (Figure 3). Obviously, for those who embedded work into the home prior to the lockdown, this transition required less boundary work. Setting up a dedicated workplace within the home is a common way of dealing with work-nonwork boundaries, and quite frequent among those planning to WFH (Allen et al. 2021). For example, Mohammed noted how his household had already made the transition to WFH: "There are no obstacles as such. So, I think, you know, we've been able to work pretty seamlessly right from day one" (39 years old, family with children, UK1).

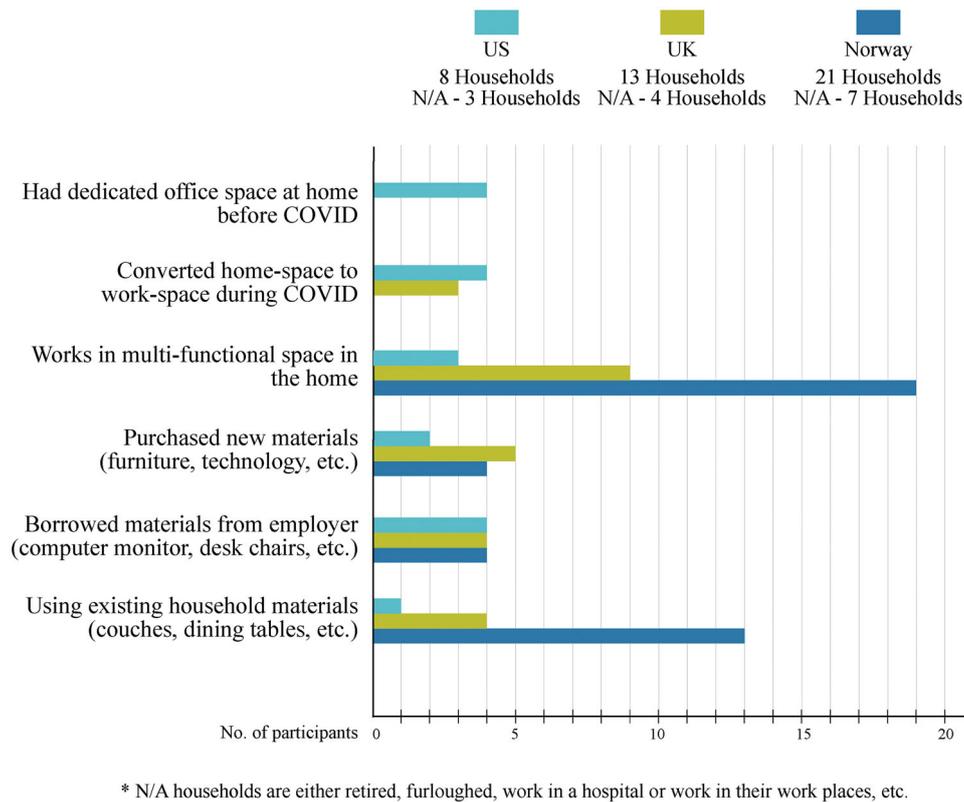


Figure 3. Material arrangement for WFH, comparison between countries.

Spatial and material arrangements of WFH varied between the different households, often depending on housing type. Many of the participants from the United States, who tended to live in larger houses (relative to the UK and Norway contexts, see [Appendix Table A1](#)), noted that they already had a home office set up or made a smooth WFH transition into a spare room or den ([Figure 3](#)). Hence, it was not uncommon to be positive about their home offices, “I’m set up really well at home with two large screens and everything... I’m set up better at home now than I am in my actual office” (Ashley, 41 years old, family with children, US7). In comparison, among our participants in Norway and the UK, WFH occurred more often at kitchen tables and in non-spare bedrooms ([Figure 3](#)). This way of flexible office-making required more boundary work, as these spaces were considered parts of the common domestic area and thus had to be adapted to other social practices when not working. Furthermore, the lack of space for a designated “office” was more pronounced for those under the age of 35 or living in shared accommodation (i.e., not a family or couple). This observation diverges from the majority of teleworking literature which propagates the idea that ICT advances make it possible to do office jobs anywhere. As our participants’ accounts highlighted, virtuality is still embedded in particular socio-material contexts (Koslowski, Linehan, and Tietze 2019) and materiality tethers the possibilities of anytime, anywhere working (e.g., homeworking while

children are home-schooled constrains attendance or focus even if the technology *enables* attendance). Certainly, as Reuschke and Felstead (2020) have also argued, spatial constraints were a major inequality marker for workers during the pandemic.

Without the physical separation between work and nonwork at home, the use of various materials that could imitate and facilitate WFH was an important part of setting up the home office (see also Kreiner 2009; Ng 2010). Households from all countries mentioned acquiring desks, monitors, headphones, ergonomic chairs, and webcams either from their employer or paid out of their own pocket. For example, Michael talked about how he and his partner got multiple monitors and bigger desks, accentuating the need to make the home office as functional as the work office.

Working from home full time meant I need a bigger screen, I need like a bigger desk, I need more than one screen. Hashtag first-world problems, but I mean my work I can’t just do it in on one tiny laptop screen (Michael, 31 years old, couple, US9).

Employers were in some cases also instrumental in this form of boundary work, providing financial support or allowing employees to borrow office materials (e.g., desks, screens, chairs) to WFH.

Beyond physical changes in home-spaces, boundary work also requires “associated mental, emotional and social intrusions” (Wapshott and Mallett 2012, 68). While the households in our study highlighted

the importance of separated office-spaces or being well-equipped technologically, practice theories accentuate how such material arrangements are deeply entangled with “the social, material, political and emotional meanings of home” (Liu 2021, 3). Hence, the practice of office-making at home will also change the home itself (Wapshott and Mallett 2012) by altering the relations between established and emerging home-based social practices, through both physically separated and more improvised workspaces at home. While “office-making” might re-bundle with leisure activities, such as running, walking, cleaning, or knitting, it could also crowd out or rearrange previous home-based leisure activities. Olivia (29 years old, couple, UK5) talks about moving the dining table in and out of the spare room, alternating between work, yoga, and other activities, while Claire (59 years old, couple, UK6) lost her sewing room in favor of the new home-office set-up. This underscores that *how* WFH is performed and is embedded in existing social and material structures, while simultaneously contributing to their re-arrangements.

The future of WFH

As WFH is becoming more settled into the home bundle of practices, active boundary work is more likely to become less intense as home-spaces are reorganized to facilitate work. Presumably, children will return to in-person learning, removing the entanglement of homeschooling, childcare, and eating together, and the re-embedding in institutional rhythms could help temporally structure WFH (see Greene et al. 2022). The reopening of cafeterias, restaurants, and cafes will reduce the necessity of extensive home cooking, although many participants commented on wanting to retain some of their new culinary routines and skills in the future. With the ability to move around more (e.g., taking children to school or going to a library to work), some of the necessity of, for example, constructing sufficient working space for two or more people in the home will be removed. Thus, the practice of office-making is likely to be less pronounced when households have either dedicated office spaces and/or office-making rituals. Furthermore, with competencies for virtual working more established, the time dedicated to acquiring these skills has likely already declined as part of the WFH complex.

With the performance of WFH through active boundary work, work practices have moved from the periphery to the center of homes and rearranged relations between social practices. As noted, disruption and de-routinization of practices may force people to reflect on and reorganize previously

taken-for-granted structures of everyday life (Spaargaren and van Vliet 2000; Kent, Dowling, and Maalsen 2017). For our participants, this option became most evident when discussing the future of work in relation to commutes and space for designated workplaces at home. Clearly, the mass reskilling in new technologies and the acquisition of materials required for homeworking during the initial phases of lockdown seem to have made many people consider this as a long-term arrangement (see also Baert et al. 2020; Holmes, Lord, and Ellsworth-Krebs 2021). In extension, the spatial qualities of homes are re-evaluated, and participating households were already debating whether their existing home would fulfill WFH needs in the future. Some households talked about moving out of cities because they do not have to worry about long commutes when WFH, which would mean more affordable housing that could facilitate WFH and give better access to nature or support from extended family. Others discussed how the experience with WFH had made them want to live more centrally in the future as the experience of not having to commute had been so valuable.⁶ Indeed, despite the deep disruption and reconfiguration of domestic practices initiated by the COVID-19 pandemic, a majority of the households in this study reported that they would want to maintain hybrid work practices in the future (although as a voluntary option), in order to keep newfound flexibility at home.

Digitalization

For the households in our study, ICT and the learning of new digital competences were crucial elements in dealing with the complexity of everyday life during lockdown. They turned out to be both part of the problem of WFH but also the solution, as reported by our interviewees. Because of improved ICT skills, people were enabled to continue working during the pandemic, adapting work to the new spatial and temporal contexts of the home. Employers quickly established online-communication platforms to make up for the lack of shared office space and the opportunities for socializing with colleagues. However, it is clear that online alternatives could not compensate for the absence of socializing with colleagues completely, and neither did they offer ready-made solutions that neatly fitted with existing domestic temporal and spatial arrangements. As we have discussed above, WFH in lockdown periods required boundary work to temporally reorder practices and to create new patterns to break up the day or to establish new rituals for combining work with other domestic practices.

But, the development of WFH practices does not depend only on domestic actors and factors, but is codetermined by dynamics outside the home. As noted in the above sections, employers have already been instrumental in facilitating households' boundary work by subsidizing or lending equipment to their employees, and by actively transposing and translating day-to-day interactions onto digital platforms (see also Halford 2005). If, as desired by many of our participating households, a more frequent use of WFH will be the norm in the future, employers face new challenges related to having some of their office workers present and some absent at all times. This would require different ways of organizing the workplace and facilitating collegial socialization to meet the needs of those who want to work from home and those who wish to return to the office. Employers are currently debating how they can facilitate more extensive WFH practices (Green, Tappin, and Bentley 2020), and can support WFH through funding home-office furniture and Internet facilities, or disincentivize office-work by shifting to hot desking.⁷ While digitalized practices and hybrid work practices are likely to become more integrated into future work practices, new digital work forms might not necessarily be compatible with existing workplace arrangements (e.g., extensive use of digital meetings in open-office landscapes). Moreover, to facilitate communication between office-workers and home-workers, digital tools and online platforms will continue as the dominant means of organization. Hence, although lockdown represents an extraordinary situation, it could have long-lasting effects on the organization of work.

Through studying practices rather than individuals, our data also illustrate how digitalization of work changes the social dynamics of work itself, as communication between colleagues becomes more formal, static, and arranged, an aspect that is seemingly underplayed in the telework literature. By emphasizing the complex social and material interlinkages that make up normality (see e.g., Shove 2003), a social practice approach is well positioned to also make sense of the longer term and broader impacts of digitalization on the relation between work and home.

Social differentiation and inequalities

WFH has obvious implications for social sustainability, as it reinforces inequalities in terms of what kinds of jobs can be done from home or how suitable dwellings are for the set-up of home offices. It is clear from our material that boundary traffic was more pronounced in smaller dwellings and in cases

of shared housing, when there was not enough space for everyone to have a personal desk in a separate, segregated room. This highlights how economic inequalities, that often directly translate to spatial inequalities, could have become even more pronounced during the pandemic (Reuschke and Felstead 2020). Moreover, both boundary traffic and boundary work were more pronounced in families with younger children and were particularly pressing for parents struggling with the often-impossible task of juggling care work and homeschooling within the same time-space as work. Finding ways of dealing with these issues seemed to be left to the responsibility of individual households that found ways "to make it work" with the resources at hand (e.g., hold meetings from the bedside to avoid disturbing roommates, working during the night when kids were sleeping), although in some cases this was facilitated by employers lending out equipment and various supplies. As and when lockdowns are required again, employers and governments should be more attentive to how the imposed measures have different effects across households and how to remedy some of these impacts. For example, materially supporting the establishment of WFH (Fukumura et al. 2021), facilitating a place to work for employees who lack suitable spaces at home (e.g., libraries) (Jaeger et al. 2014), or by creating accessible care-leave schemes for parents and caretakers to make up for irregular services provided by caring facilities. Moreover, a common issue that persisted in all the countries and across age groups, was the loss of socializing, social connections, and mentoring with work colleagues that was challenging to facilitate in virtual interactions. These difficulties could become a source of inequality for (new and) younger employees who may not have the same support or be part of cohesive teams created at in-person workplaces.

Still, the main issues of inequality (income, race, gender) that emerge from an increasing shift to WFH did not stand out in our sample. Other research on COVID-19 has shown how women have felt under pressure and are more likely to be entangled in domestic labor (e.g., childcare, homeschooling, cleaning, and cooking) and as a result there are "risks of detaching women from professional work, precarizing their labor, and consolidating their roles as traditional housewives" (Çoban 2022). Furthermore, we did not include interview data from workers who were not WFH (Espinoza and Reznikova 2020; Lott and Abendroth 2020) and in so doing we missed out on the importance considering that not all industries and types of work can be moved into homes (e.g., laborers, delivery workers, medical professionals). Technological skills

are often connected to higher wages and access to the Internet which can be dependent on socio-economic and racial factors (Goldman et al. 2021; Katsabian 2020). In this way, a move to increasing WFH can exclude large parts of the population and reinforce income disparities. Indeed, in the early phases of the pandemic in 2020 it was relatively lower income and lower skilled workers who were more likely to lose their jobs or to reduce their working hours.

Questioning environmental benefits

More permanent WFH practices and arrangements might result in increased energy and food consumption, as well as waste accumulation, moving from shared offices into private homes. This could bring forth new inequality dynamics, separating those who have the socio-economic means to comfortably perform WFH (e.g., keep homes comfortably heated during the workday and prepare and eat healthy meals) and those who do not (Reuschke and Felstead 2020; Bonacini, Gallo, and Scicchitano 2021). Moreover, these shifts may radically alter the role of households in broader sustainability discussions. While reduction of commutes through WFH could positively affect both the environment and urban traffic congestion (Siha and Monroe 2006; Mello 2007; Hencher and Bech 2020), our findings also shed light on potential rebound effects (Winther and Wilhite 2015), raising questions about the extent to which WFH leads to lower levels of consumption. For instance, most of the households in our study valued the reduction of work-related travel and new digital modes for organizing meetings, workshops, and conferences have illustrated the potential redundancy of many previously taken-for-granted traveling practices. One could expect that reflexivity brought about by these experiences, in combination with increased digital competencies during the lockdown, will make people and businesses more reluctant to bounce back to previous routines. However, while most households seem to have appreciated the reduction of commuting practices, which in turn might reduce *daily* commutes, the *distance* of commute could increase if people end up moving out of cities to be able to afford more spacious housing arrangements to facilitate WFH. Indeed, studies have suggested that WFH could make people accept longer commutes (de Vos, Meijers, and van Ham 2018), and change where people live (Alizadeh 2013), which could become a central issue for spatial planners and housing developers in the future. Furthermore, our findings also illustrate that hybrid workplaces could entail a doubling up of electronic equipment, as the

portable laptop no longer suffices for more extensive WFH practices (Hook, Sovacool, and Sorrell 2020; Holmes, Lord, and Ellsworth-Krebs 2021). Finally, while WFH practices might contribute to reducing the massive energy-peak loads shaped by previous synchronization of practices (Spurling et al. 2013)—washing machines and dishwashers can run during the day—hybrid workplaces and office-rotation schemes might also shift operational costs from offices to homes (Green, Tappin, and Bentley 2020) and potentially create a rebound effect when *both* office and homes are heated and cooled (and for a larger portion of the day).

Conclusion

COVID-19 has brought deep changes to the working life of many people around the world. By offering an account of WFH during lockdown in the UK, the United States, and Norway, our findings demonstrate the complex work involved in establishing WFH, which cannot be performed “in isolation” from a range of other domestic practices, thereby creating the need to consider boundary traffic and boundary work. Drawing on scholarship on teleworking and boundary work, we have emphasized the utility of a practice theoretical lens to attend to some of the complexity of WFH social practices in times of accelerated and enforced changes in time-spaces for doing “work.” These complexities are often missed in technology-focused or individual agent-focused literatures (Sullivan 2003; Halford 2005; Hilbrecht et al. 2013). A practice approach allows us to understand WFH through the socio-material structures that shape everyday life, and in turn unveil how these structures were altered by COVID-19 lockdown. The starting point that everyday life is organized through bundles of practices revealed how the fabric of normality in participants’ homes was broken down and how they reassembled it in negotiation with the social (other people) and material arrangements in the residence (e.g., changing the use of different rooms, setting up a home office) and the workplace (e.g., access to equipment, moving meetings to the digital realm). Specifically, the focus on practices allowed us to disclose and analyze how different spheres of our participants’ home and work arrangements collided, creating congestion at the boundaries between the different components that together make up everyday life. We call this boundary traffic. This concept effectively brings boundary theory and theories of practice into conversation: traffic refers to the mixing of practices and practice-bundles and the relations between them, while people do boundary work to manage the overlaps and collisions produced in

this mixing. We observe how disruption as well as de- and re-routinization, generate specific challenges, while at the same time present opportunities to reflect on alternative futures for work and home-work balancing. As shown in the analysis, boundary traffic did not occur evenly across households, but largely depended on household structure and the spatial and material resources available. Boundary work was particularly challenging for families and multi-person households with limited space in the home to set up a separate office space. This is the main manifestation of social inequality in our study: that those living in smaller dwellings and shared housing did not have enough space for everyone to have a personal desk in a separate, segregated room. This highlights how economic inequalities, often directly translating to spatial inequalities, could become more pronounced if WFH becomes more normal. Moreover, based on our samples, the difference in access to space varied nationally, with the ability to create a separate work space in the home being less common for participants living in European cities (Oslo, London, Cardiff, Manchester) than our small sample in the United States (Seattle and surrounding region).

Although more research is needed to understand how WFH practices intersect with issues of inequality and environmental sustainability in the future, we argue that the COVID-19-lockdown provides an important context for learning about how spatial, material, temporal, and social reorganization of homes to make space for WFH can contribute to more permanent alteration of the boundaries between home and work, both within the home-space and beyond. Hence, WFH cannot be understood as a technical solution to work-life flexibility, because it has deeply changed the meaning and content of home as households have resolved aspects of boundary traffic when embedding WFH more permanently into the domestic practice-bundle.

Notes

1. The data presented for the UK and the United States are based on OECD surveys. Galasso and Foucault (2020) base their estimates on real-time online surveys administered by IPSOS and CSA between March 20 and 30, 2020, and mid-April 2020 for the working population. OECD (2021) bases its numbers for the UK on one survey on business impacts of COVID-19 covering enterprise's workforce and one Labour Force Survey targeting persons in employment. The numbers for the United States are from a Current Population Survey targeting employed persons. The Norwegian numbers are from an annual labor-market survey of the working population in Norway, administered during March and April 2020 and 2021 by AFI, the Institute of Labor Research (see

Ingelsrud, Ellingsen, and Steen 2020; Ingelsrud and Hoff Bernstrøm 2021).

2. The extent to which the pandemic has led to an increase in WFH is also discussed extensively in popular media. See, for instance, coverage of the issue by the BBC (<https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20201023-coronavirus-how-will-the-pandemic-change-the-way-we-work>), the *Harvard Business Review* (<https://hbr-org.ezproxy.uio.no/2020/04/what-will-work-life-balance-look-like-after-the-pandemic>), and the *Los Angeles Times* <https://www.latimes.com/business/technology/story/2020-03-27/coronavirus-work-from-home-privacy>.
3. Within research on home—or out of the office-based—working, a number of different terms are used. “Teleworking,” “telecommuting,” “remote working,” and “flexible working” are all popular in this literature. For the purposes of this study, working from home (WFH) is used because in many countries it became a new reality and household phrase, which also acknowledges the restrictions to home due to COVID-19 regimes and stay-at-home orders, while the other terms have more flexibility to refer to working in other locations outside the home (e.g., libraries, cafés) and are emblematic of a pre-pandemic discourse.
4. Sampling strategy varied slightly depending on the national context and research-team capacity in each country. In the UK, the researchers were divided between multiple cities and recruited from London, Manchester, and Cardiff to capture the diversity of urban experiences. In the United States, recruitment targeted participants living or working in Seattle, with some in the city center commuting out for work and many commuting from suburban and rural homes to work. In Norway, there was a larger team resulting in more interviews and an ability to recruit a diverse sample from different parts of Oslo.
5. Participant numbers are higher than the 56 interviews as four couples were interviewed together.
6. Movements and changing preferences in housing markets are ongoing debates particularly in the UK and the United States. See, for instance, recent reports in *The Guardian* (<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/nov/06/uk-house-prices-jump-as-average-home-tops-250000-for-first-time-covid>), the BBC (<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-52977890>), and *Forbes* (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/petertaylor/2020/10/11/covid-19-has-changed-the-housing-market-forever-heres-where-americans-are-moving-and-why/?sh=1398f13161fe>).
7. Hot desking refers to the use of flexible or shared desking where employees do not have a dedicated place to work in the office. For a discussion, see Mohezar Jaafar, and Akbar (2021).

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Ethical approval

The study reported in this article received a general ethical clearance from the Geneva School of Social Sciences, University of Geneva (CER-SDS-25-2020), as well as ethical clearance for data-collection processes in the UK and the United States from the University Faculty of Social Science Ethical Committee, Lancaster University (reference number FL19177) and in Norway from the Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD) (reference number 548536).

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Appendix

Table A1. Background information on respondents.

Informant code	Age	Gender	Household composition	Living situation (during lockdown)	Employment situation (during lockdown)	Occupation
NO1	20s	m	Couple	Suburban, semi-detached house with garden	Furloughed	Actor and receptionist
NO2	20s	f	Living alone	Detached house, city center	WFH	Student
NO3	30s	m	Couple	Suburban apartment	Partially WFH	Teacher
NO4	30s	f	Family with two children (0, 3)	Suburban apartment	WFH	Office manager
NO5	30s	f	Family with three children (4, 6, 8)	Suburban, detached house, private garden	WFH	Project manager
NO6	30s	m	Couple	Semi-urban apartment	WFH	Social worker
NO7	60s	f	Living alone	Semi-urban apartment, private garden	Partially WFH	Senior advisor
NO8	40s	f	Family with two children (4, 7)	Semi-urban apartment	Partially WFH	Senior advisor
NO9	30s	f	Family with two children (1, 10)	Apartment in city center	Regular work (working outside home)	Nurse
NO10	60s	f	Living alone	Apartment in city center	Partially WFH	Social worker
NO13	60s	f	Shared living	Apartment in city center	Regular work (working outside home)	Therapist
NO14	60s	f	Living alone	Semi-urban apartment, private garden	Partially WFH	Family therapist
NO15	20s	f	Shared living	Apartment in city center	WFH	Student
NO16	20s	f	Shared living	Semi-urban apartment	WFH	Student, substitute teacher
NO17	30s	f	Couple	Apartment in city center	Partially WFH	Film festival producer
NO18	30s	f	Living alone	Suburban apartment	WFH	Research project coordinator
NO19	50s	f	Family with teenage child (16)	Apartment in city center	WFH	Middle manager
NO21	30s	f	Family with three children (1, 4, 5)	Semi-urban apartment	WFH	Senior advisor
NO22	50s	m	Living alone	Sub-urban apartment	WFH	Senior engineer
NO23	40s	f	Family with two children (7, 9)	Sub-urban townhouse, private garden	Regular work (working outside home)	Child welfare consultant
NO25	30s	f	Couple	Sub-urban apartment	WFH	PhD candidate
NO26	40s	f/m			WFH	

(continued)

Table A1. Continued.

Informant code	Age	Gender	Household composition	Living situation (during lockdown)	Employment situation (during lockdown)	Occupation
NO27	20s	f	Family with two children (7, 10)	Suburban, detached house, private garden	Partially WFH	Senior researcher/project manager
NO28	30s	f	Shared living	Apartment in city center	Partially WFH	Journalist
NO30	30s	m	Living alone	Apartment in city center	Regular work (working outside home)	Actor
NO35	30s	m	Family with one child (5)	Apartment in city center	Regular work (working outside home)	Electrician
NO36	20s	m	Couple	Apartment in city center	WFH	Digital marketer
NO38	30s	m	Couple	Apartment in city center	Regular work (working outside home)	Elevator fitter
US1	30s	m	Family with two children (6, one older in school)	Semi-urban apartment	WFH	Middle manager
US2	30s	f	Living alone	Houseboat in city center	Partially WFH	Student, yoga instructor
US3	50s	f	Living alone	Detached house, city center, private garden	Retired	Retired
US4	40s	f	Family with three children (13, 18, 21)	Suburban, detached house, private garden	WFH	Marketing
US5	20s	f	Couple	Suburban, detached house, private garden	Regular work (working outside home)	Nurse
US6	60s	f/m	Couple	Suburban, detached house, private garden	Regular work (working outside home)	Nurse/security guard
US7	60s	f/m	Couple	Suburban, detached house, private garden	WFH	Real estate
US8	40s	f	Family with two children (12, 16)	Suburban, detached house, private garden	WFH	Accountant manager
US9	30s	f	Couple	Suburban, detached house, private garden	WFH	Accountant
US10	30s	m	Couple	Apartment in city center	WFH	Recruiter
US11	20s	m	Shared living	Suburban, detached house, private garden	WFH	Software developer
UK1	70s	f	Couple	Suburban, detached house, private garden	Retired	Retired
UK2	30s	m	Family with one child (10)	Suburban apartment	WFH	Marketing manager
UK3	30s	f	Single, shared living	Terraced house in city center, private garden	Furloughed	Server
UK4	30s	f	Family	Terraced house in city center	WFH	N/a
UK5	50s	f	Single	Suburban apartment	WFH	Works at community care center
UK6	20s	f	Couple	Suburban terraced house	WFH	Teacher
UK7	60s	f/m	Couple	Suburban terraced house	WFH, semi-retired	Teacher
UK8	20s	m	Single, shared living	Suburban terraced house, private garden	Regular work (working outside the home)	Furniture maker
UK9	30s	f	Family with two children (10, 13)	Suburban terraced house, private garden	Unemployed	Lash technician
UK10	50s	f	Couple	Temporary rented apartment	WFH	Student support services
UK11	30s	m	Single	Apartment in city center	WFH	Accountant
UK12	30s	f	Couple	Apartment	WFH	Therapist
UK13	40s	m	Family with three children (2, 6, 15)	Suburban house, private garden	WFH	Gym owner
UK14	30s	m	Single	Suburban, apartment	Not working	Personal trainer
UK15	30s	f	Couple	Apartment in city center	Not working	N/a
UK16	30s	f	Couple	Detached house, private garden	Regular work (working outside the home)	Healthcare professional
UK17	30s	m	Couple	Apartment in city center	Regular work (working outside the home)	Military recruiter
UK18	40s	f	Family with two children (16, 16)	Suburban terraced house	WFH	N/a