# PARENTING AND REMOTE WORK IN THE PANDEMIC: PARENTS' WORK-LIFE BOUNDARIES AND BOUNDARY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN THE NEW NORMAL

by

Ashleigh Nicole Dickson

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Organizational Science

Charlotte

2023

Approved by:

_____
Dr. Jill Yavorsky (chair)

_____
Dr. Anne-Kathrin Kronberg

_____
Dr. Alyssa McGonagle

_____
Dr. Linda Shanock

©2023
Ashleigh Nicole Dickson
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

# ABSTRACT

ASHLEIGH NICOLE DICKSON. Parenting and Remote Work in the Pandemic: Parents' Work-Life Boundaries and Boundary Management Strategies in the New Normal. (Under the direction of DR. JILL YAVORSKY)

A significant change that employees in the United States have experienced because of the COVID-19 pandemic is the rise of remote work. There are many benefits of remote work. However, many remote workers struggle to keep work and life separate. This study aimed to better understand how parents' work-life boundaries have changed from before the pandemic into the new normal. Based on interviews with 16 mothers and 16 fathers, this study examined how parents' preferences for keeping work and life separate have adjusted and what factors affect their work and life. This research also explored how mothers and fathers differ in their strategies to navigate between work and life when working remotely. Participants were asked about their work-life boundary preferences and the effects of working remotely before the pandemic, during lockdown, and now. This research uncovered six themes on how parents managed their work-life boundaries: two mindset shifts and four boundary management strategies. Parents adapted their mindsets by redefining their priorities and setting realistic work and family expectations. The four boundary management strategies were turning off technology, sticking to a schedule, designating a home office space, and using a door-closed policy. These themes expand our knowledge of boundary theory by exploring how parents' work-life boundaries changed while working remotely during and after the pandemic and gender differences in boundary management strategies.

# DEDICATION

To Ryan, my soon-to-be husband. Thank you for always supporting me, from the big wins to the hard days. And to my parents. Mom and Dad, I would not be who and where I am without you both.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I first want to thank my advisor, Dr. Jill Yavorsky. This endeavor would not have been possible without your guidance and support. Thank you for your encouragement, feedback, many coffee working sessions, and for reminding me to prioritize my well-being throughout the long process. Many thanks also go to my wonderful committee members, Dr. Alyssa McGonagle, Dr. Anne-Kathrin Kronberg, and Dr. Linda Shanock. I appreciate your guidance and encouragement, including reining me in when I initially proposed two studies instead of just this one. Thank you for helping shape this project into what it is today. I additionally want to thank the Organizational Science community and all the fantastic individuals who make up the OS family. This community is extraordinary and has helped make these years some of the best.

Finally, I want to thank my family and friends, who have cheered me on since I began applying to graduate schools. I am deeply indebted to Dad, Mom, and Carl for their years raising me and encouraging me to be my best. Thank you to my siblings, Aaron, Hannah, Keturah, and Graham, for putting up with me and loving me. Thank you to all of my friends who have become family. And last but not least, thank you to my little family, Ryan and Luna. Ryan, you are my rock, biggest cheerleader, and favorite shoulder to cry on. And Luna, thank you for spending the last few months sleeping on my feet while I finished my dissertation. I am blessed to be surrounded by so much love.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic changed almost every aspect of daily life for Americans. Both work and home life have shifted since America began to feel the effects of COVID in March 2020. According to the Pew Research Center, Americans have reported changes in everything from finances and employment to relationships and routines (Van Kessel et al., 2021). One of the most prominent changes has been how employees view working remotely. In a nationally representative survey of 5,889 US adults employed part- or full-time, 59% of workers said their job could mainly be done from home work from home most or all of the time (Parker et al., 2022). Only 23% of the sample reported working from home frequently before the pandemic (Parker et al., 2022).

The rise in remote work has had several benefits for both employers and employees. In a study of 3,937 business executives and HR leaders, 57% of respondents reported increased workforce performance and productivity (Miller, 2021). According to employees, the top benefits of working remotely are money and time saved from not having a commute, increased work efficiency and task performance, and increased ability to find “work-life balance” (Daud et al., 2021; Oleniuch, 2021). However, there are also downsides to working remotely that have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Employees have reported higher rates of loneliness (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020), difficulty disconnecting from work (Chawla et al., 2020), and blurred boundaries between work and nonwork life (Fukumura et al., 2021; Kerman et al., 2021; Schieman & Glavin, 2016). Employees have also reported additional stress from increased work hours due to the lack of commute, increased workload from virtual meetings, and additional work-life conflict, including the stress of navigating workspace in the home (Franken et al., 2021).

Most of the research from pandemic times suggests that many employees have faced increased work-life boundary violations (Allen et al., 2021; Chung & van der Horst, 2018; Como et al., 2021; Waddell et al., 2021; Wright et al., 2021). Having fewer family members at home and having a dedicated office space have been found to alleviate some of these boundary violations (Allen et al., 2021). One study, in particular, suggests that those without children experienced decreased work-life conflict thanks to remote work during the pandemic (Schieman et al., 2021). Conversely, parents of young children and mothers in particular reported increased stress and frustration and decreased well-being (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021; Martucci, 2021; Waddell et al., 2021). In a study of 10,332 U.S. adults in October 2020, 33% of parents with children under the age of 18 – 39% of mothers and 28% of fathers – reported that it was harder for them to balance work and family during COVID-19, compared to 22% of those without children under the age of 18 (Parker et al., 2020).

Parents have also reported increased family demands post-pandemic, especially for those with children under the age of 17 (Rudolph & Zacher, 2021). During the early days of the pandemic, parents struggled with finding childcare for both younger and older children, with schools and daycares closed for quarantine (Petts et al., 2020). Even as many schools and daycares have reopened, childcare remains an issue for parents, who must navigate evolving testing and isolation regulations, limited social support, and guilt while juggling work and parenthood (Dawes et al., 2021).

Research supports that parents have struggled to balance work and life during the pandemic and are dealing with more work-life boundary violations. Employees who may have preferred integration strategies – which allow work and life to blur or blend, such as checking work emails while at home or bringing children to work if childcare falls through – while

working in the office may find themselves using segmentation strategies – which keep work and life separate, including limiting work emails to a set 9 to 5 schedule or not taking personal calls during work time – while working from home. This study explored how boundary management has changed from pre-pandemic through the pandemic lockdown and continuing now into the "new normal." Researchers have used the "new normal" term to capture how significantly COVID changed our day-to-day lives (Manuti et al., 2022).

Using data from interviews with thirty-two parents working remotely, this study explored how parents' work-life boundary management – or how they navigate between work and life – changed from before the pandemic to now. The interviews assessed how parents made sense of their work-life boundaries before and during the pandemic and in the new normal.

For this study, I focused on heterosexual married parents who were employed full-time and worked remotely for at least half of the workweek. I focused on heterosexual married couples because research supports that gay and lesbian parents are more likely to have egalitarian divisions of labor and rely less on traditional gender norms (Farr & Patterson, 2013). Cohabitating couples are also more likely than married couples to report having egalitarian divisions of labor (Baxter et al., 2010). Only parents with children under 18 living in their homes were included in the study because couples without children at home experience less work-life conflict. Selecting heterosexual married parents allowed greater variability in gendered experiences of work and nonwork life. Working full-time and spending at least half of the work week working remotely assured that parents were spending a significant amount of time working remotely to get a clear picture of how working remotely affected work-life boundaries.

This study makes three significant contributions to the field of work-life and gender research. First, this study will expand boundary theory by examining how parents' work-life

boundary preferences and management have changed over time during a global pandemic. These findings may help inform and direct future research on how boundary alignment and management are affected in times of crisis. Although the pandemic has provided a unique global crisis, these findings may give insight into how boundary navigation may be affected by other crises, such as how parents adapt their boundary navigation after a natural disaster or the loss of a family member. Second, this study continued building on our knowledge of boundary theory in a time when working from home is more widely accepted and expected than ever before. This expanded knowledge can help inform parents of the potential implications of the choice to work from home on their boundary navigation based on their boundary preferences. Finally, the findings from this study further our understanding of the gender differences in work-life boundary management strategies. While previous research supports that women prefer stronger boundaries between work and life and that men can better enact stronger boundaries when working remotely, little research explores how men and women, particularly mothers and fathers, use boundary management strategies to achieve their desired separation. This study expands our understanding of what strategies mothers and fathers use to keep work and life separate when working remotely and how gender affects the use of these strategies.

# CHAPTER 2: EMPIRICAL AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The United States' labor force demographics have changed dramatically since the 1960s. Since 1960, women's participation in the labor force increased from 38% (1960) to 71% (2019; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Between 1970 and 2018, the percentage of women in the labor force employed full-time rose from 68% to 75% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). As of 2018, 53% of parents are dual-income earners, and 55% of women were employed in 2019 (most recent data available, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021).

This shift in labor force demographics has spurred a number of challenges for families, particularly parents, as they navigate these changes. In the 1960s, 70% of men (married with children under 18) were the sole earners of the household (Pew Research Center, 2015). As of 2018, only 18% of families had the father as the sole earner for the family (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021) due to the rise in single-mother families and increased employment and importance of wages for married women. Despite the increased presence of women in the labor force, husbands in married heterosexual couples still, on average, outearn their wives (Angelov et al., 2016; Kunze, 2017). Families have had to learn to navigate women spending more time at work and less time taking care of the house and children. Research on work-life interactions became a distinct area of focus for scholars as families navigated these challenges.

## 2.1 Work-Life Research

Research on navigating between work and life domains began with a focus on work and family rather than work and life. Though the work sphere has evolved with the rise of new technologies, it continues to encapsulate tasks, behaviors, and thoughts related to paid labor. In work-family research, the second sphere focuses on the "family," typically including childcare, household labor, and other tasks related to the home and nuclear family. In work-life research,

the non-work sphere expands to include more aspects of life than just family, in part to include those who may not identify with the term "family," such as those who are unmarried or childless (Joseph & Sebastian, 2019). The "life" sphere encompasses not only family but also other aspects of a person's life outside of paid labor that may be important to the individual, such as friends, hobbies, and volunteering (Brough et al., 2014; Fisher et al., 2009; Joseph & Sebastian, 2019).

### 2.1.1 Work-Life Concepts

There are many terms, concepts, and metaphors for work-life research. These concepts have developed over time as research in the area has continued to evolve (Bochantin, 2016). Often, new conceptualizations of work-life interactions are proposed to compensate for issues with previous conceptualizations. The following sections explore two of the most popular concepts associated with work-life research, work-life conflict and work-life balance, and one of the more recent conceptualizations of work-life, work-life boundaries.

Work-life conflict is one of the most prominent and widely recognized concepts in work-life research. This view of work-life interactions places the two spheres – work and life – at odds with each other (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Resources spent in one sphere – such as behaviors, time, and effort – take away resources from the other sphere. There is a constant tension between the two spheres, with both spheres competing for resources.

Work-life conflict can be further separated by directionality (Netemeyer et al., 1996). Work-to-life conflict looks at how work behaviors and tasks interfere with life behaviors and tasks. For example, checking emails or taking calls outside work hours can be viewed as taking time away from life. In the other direction, life-to-work conflict focuses on how life behaviors

and tasks interfere with work. An example of life interfering with work is a parent leaving work early to pick up a sick child from school.

A key limitation of the work-life conflict concept is that the idea of conflict assumes negative interactions between the two spheres. For there to be a consistent conflict, there is also an assumption that the two spheres will always be at odds with one another (Fisher et al., 2009; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Wayne et al., 2017). However, there is empirical evidence that the opposite can also be true. Research in areas such as work-life enhancement and work-life balance support these positive interactions between the two spheres (Fisher et al., 2009; Wayne et al., 2017). These concepts address the limitation of work-life conflict by positing that there does not have to be constant tension between the two.

As mentioned above, work-life balance focuses less on the tension between the two spheres and looks more at how individuals and groups try to make work and life work together. It is another widely recognized concept in work-life research, both in research and the popular press (e.g., Jaffee, 2022; Lupu & Ruiz-Castro, 2021; Thomas, 2021). Work-life balance is "the extent to which an individual is equally engaged in – and equally satisfied with – his or her work role and family role" (Greenhaus et al., 2003, p. 513). Research on work-life balance focuses on employees finding balance between satisfaction with their work sphere and satisfaction with their life sphere (Kirby et al., 2003; Wayne et al., 2017). This does not necessarily mean that equal time or resources should be spent on the two spheres; instead, the idea of "balance" focuses on individuals' perceptions and satisfaction.

Another distinction between work-life conflict and work-life balance is the emphasis on individual values central to the work-life balance concept. While work-life conflict is viewed as a more universal experience, work-life balance depends on individuals' experiences and

priorities (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). Many work-life balance measures are worded to assess satisfaction with work-life balance rather than an objective idea of "balance" (Wayne et al., 2019, 2020). Also, unlike work-life conflict, those who research work-life balance typically do not look at directionality. Researchers interested in work-life balance do not make the same distinction as those interested in work-life conflict at the differences between work-to-life and life-to-work. Instead, "work-life balance" looks at the concept as a whole (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). While there are other concepts of work-life that frame the work-life interaction in a positive light and assess directionality, such as work-life enhancement (Fisher, 2001; Fisher et al., 2009; Wiese et al., 2010) and work-life enrichment (Carlson et al., 2000; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), they tend to be grouped under the work-life balance umbrella (Fisher et al., 2009; Greenhaus & Allen, 2011).

Many studies that are interested in both work-life and directionality include measures of both work-life balance and work-life conflict (e.g., Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Senarathne Tennakoon, 2021; Wayne et al., 2017, 2019, 2020). For example, Wayne et al. (2020), who were interested in studying work-family balance satisfaction and work and family resources, used the work-family balance measure by Valcour (2007) along with Carlson, Kacmar, and Williams' (2000) measure of work-to-family and family-to-work conflict and Carlson et al.'s (2006) measure of work-to-family and family-to-work enrichment. This need for multiple concepts of work-life highlights the need for a more parsimonious theory that addresses not only directionality but also combines positive and negative interactions between work and life.

Another limitation of both work-life conflict and work-life balance is that the two spheres are assumed to be separate (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). With these work-life concepts, the spheres are on opposite ends, either conflicting or trying to find balance. However, research in

the past two decades supports the ability of the two spheres to interact and even blur (Bulger et al., 2007; Clark, 2000). To address this, along with calls for a more parsimonious theory of work-life interactions, researchers began to focus on the boundaries between the two spheres rather than assuming the two remain separate at all times (Clark, 2000).

As research on work-life interactions continued to evolve, researchers began to look at how the work and life spheres interact and flex (Clark, 2000). Researchers started to look at how employees create and maintain the boundaries, or borders, between the work and life spheres (Hall & Richter, 1988). This research led to two theories based on this area of focus: border theory and boundary theory.

## 2.2 Border Theory and Boundary Theory

Border theory and boundary theory are often used interchangeably, though there are distinctions between the two. Boundary theory was first developed to address the idea that employees create, maintain, and navigate the boundaries around their work and personal lives (Nippert-Eng, 1996a, 1996b). Border theory was then developed with work-family balance as an outcome, examining how employees minimize role conflict and maximize satisfaction in both spheres (Clark, 2000; Desrochers & Sargent, 2004). This theory was proposed with work and family in mind rather than work and life.

The two theories share many concepts and key terms. Employees are identified as border or boundary crossers, navigating between the two spheres (Clark, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996a). These boundaries fall along a continuum from “strong,” inflexible and impermeable, to “weak,” flexible and permeable. The strength of the boundaries may differ; for example, an employee may allow his family to call during work hours but will not take work calls during family time. The boundaries may vary even further based on the context. For example, an employee may keep

work outside the home but make an exception for a weekend call with an important client. Boundaries may also differ depending on the tasks or behaviors; an employee may be firm about not taking work calls on weekends but will check her work emails. The strategies employees use to maintain these strong or weak borders are typically identified as segmentation and integration strategies.

### 2.2.1 Segmentation and Integration

Though the blurring and flexing of boundaries may differ across contexts, most employees tend to fall somewhere on the segmentation and integration continuum. Someone who wants to keep work and life completely separate is identified as preferring segmentation. On the other hand, someone who allows work and life to blur together would be identified as an integrator (Bochantin & Cowan, 2016; Clark, 2000). Most employees, however, do not fall on the ends of the continuum but rather fall somewhere along the middle (Ammons, 2013; Bulger et al., 2007; Desrochers & Sargent, 2004; Kossek et al., 2012; Matthews & Barnes-Farrell, 2010).

The ideal use of segmentation or integration for an individual is called their boundary preference (Ammons, 2013; Kreiner, 2006). The actual use of these strategies is their boundary enactment. Together, these concepts make up an individual's boundary alignment: how well their boundary enactment matches their boundary preference (Ammons, 2013; Kossek, 2016). An employee who prefers to keep work and life completely separate would experience high alignment in a job that requires work only to be completed in the office and does not allow for personal life during work hours. However, the same employee would have low alignment in a job requiring them to work remotely and be on call 24/7. High boundary alignment has been linked to several benefits for both individuals and organizations, including lower stress (Bogaerts et al., 2018; Kreiner, 2006), lower work-life conflict (Bogaerts et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2009),

increased job satisfaction (Kreiner, 2006; Rothbard et al., 2005), and increased job commitment (Rothbard et al., 2005).

### 2.2.2 Remote Work

Access to flexible work arrangements also plays a vital role in the composition and navigation of work-life boundaries for employees, particularly parents. Before 2020, organizations did not widely offer flexible work arrangements (FWA; Thébaud & Halcomb, 2019). Flexible work arrangements include working flexible hours (flextime) and working at locations outside of the typical office (flexplace). Professional workers and those in higher-wage positions had the most access to FWA (Glass & Noonan, 2016). However, even when organizations offered FWA, these arrangements were not widely used (Munsch, 2016; Thébaud & Halcomb, 2019).

Those who use flextime and flexplace say that it is important for individuals using FWA to construct their own boundaries (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018; Pedersen & Jeppesen, 2012). The importance of individuals constructing their own boundaries may explain the mixed results studies have found between FWA and work-life concepts. Employees who use FWA report increased perceived boundary control (Eddleston & Mulki, 2017). However, using FWA has been linked to increased boundary violations of work interfering with family (Glass & Noonan, 2016; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010; Schieman & Young, 2010).

Most research on flexplace focuses on remote work, especially for employees working from home. Technological advances over the past few decades, such as the rise of smartphones and tablets and widespread wireless internet connections, have made it easier than ever to work remotely and still be connected to work (Kossek, 2016; Messenger & Gschwind, 2016). Remote work has many benefits for both employees and employers. Employees who work remotely

report higher autonomy (Harpaz, 2002), increased organizational commitment (Felstead & Henseke, 2017), increased job satisfaction (Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007), and higher performance (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007), productivity (Felstead & Henseke, 2017), and job-related well-being (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). Remote workers also report lower intentions to quit and less role stress (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). However, working remotely also has some adverse effects on employees. Employees working remotely report increased work hours and workloads (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). They also report increased work-life boundary violations, such as blurred boundaries between work and life (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Harpaz, 2002) and difficulty switching off at the end of a work shift (Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Peters & Blomme, 2019; van Zoonen et al., 2020).

### 2.3 Gender and Boundary Theory

Gender is an important individual-level difference to consider when looking at work-life concepts because women and men experience both the work and non-work spheres in different ways. Looking first at the work sphere, both men and women face gendered workplace practices and policies (Acker, 1990, 2006; Pedulla & Thébaud, 2015). Many workplace practices and policies center on the idea of the "ideal worker" (Acker, 1990, 2006). The ideal worker norm epitomizes an employee who can focus their attention entirely on work. Traditionally, the ideal worker would be the primary breadwinner for their household and would have a partner who takes care of the unpaid labor at home (Acker, 2006; Blair-Loy, 2009). The ideal worker norm pressures men to prioritize work over life and causes guilt when home life interferes with work (Kelly et al., 2010). However, as of 2016, 66% of families in the USA were dual-income (Livingston & Parker, 2019), meaning that most families with an employed father also have an employed mother. Therefore, parents are likely to share the unpaid labor at home. Women also

face pressure to fulfill this norm and focus entirely on work, even though only 5% of families in the USA have breadwinning mothers and homemaking fathers (Livingston & Parker, 2019).

Gendered expectations also extend to home and family institutions. Intensive parenting norms place pressure on parents, especially mothers, to prioritize their family over their work (Forbes et al., 2020; Hays, 1996; Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Liss et al., 2013). Women are expected to meet the intensive mothering standard, where mothers are expected to focus all their attention on household and childcare tasks (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011; Pedulla & Thébaud, 2015; Thébaud & Halcomb, 2019). This places additional strain on employed mothers, who face pressure from both the intensive mothering standard and ideal worker norms, which are at odds with each other. On the other hand, fathers often feel that to be a good father, they need to provide financial support (Chesley, 2011; Shows & Gerstel, 2009; Townsend & Townsend, 2002). This and the traditional breadwinning model may allow them to feel less pressure from the intensive parenting standard (Forbes et al., 2022; Liss et al., 2013).

Research on the relationship between gender and work-life interactions has yielded mixed results. A review of 190 work-family studies from 1980 to 2002 (Eby et al., 2005) found mixed evidence of gender differences in work-life conflict. They concluded that "gender differences in WFC [work-family conflict] have been repeatedly found… However, there is no clear pattern in terms of the relative importance of work or family domain predictors for men and women's WFC" (Eby et al., 2005, p. 181). The same year, a meta-analysis was published that examined 61 studies published by 2002 that included both work interference with family (WIF) and family interference with work (FIW) and antecedents of both variables (Byron, 2005). The study found that men tended to report slightly more WIF while women reported slightly more

FIW but concluded that gender alone predicts little variance in work-family conflict (Byron, 2005).

A more recent meta-analysis by Shockley and colleagues (N > 250,000 workers, 354 independent samples) examined work-family conflict and gender interactions in 582 published studies, conference papers, and dissertations up to December 2015 (Shockley et al., 2017). They found that women reported more WIF and FIW (Shockley et al., 2017). However, several moderators significantly affected this relationship. When looking only at full-time employees, there was no significant difference between men's and women's reported work-family conflict (Shockley et al., 2017). For parents, mothers reported higher FIW, but there was no significant difference in WIF (Shockley et al., 2017). Finally, when looking only at dual-earning couples, men reported slightly higher WIF, while women reported greater FIW (Shockley et al., 2017). This study highlights the importance of looking not only at the relationship between gender and work-life but also at how other individual variables, such as parental status, affect men's and women's experiences.

One explanation for the mixed results may relate to changes over the lifetime, particularly in the transition to parenthood and as children get older. Before becoming parents, men and women report spending similar amounts of time on paid and unpaid labor (Yavorsky et al., 2015). After having a child, however, significant gender differences in paid and unpaid labor arise. Fathers are more likely to report increased work hours after the birth of a child (Gjerdingen & Center, 2005; Yavorsky et al., 2015). Mothers, particularly those with young children, report fewer hours spent in paid labor (Gjerdingen & Center, 2005; Yavorsky et al., 2015). However, mothers spend more time in total labor than fathers due to significant increases in the time mothers spend on childcare and household labor (Gjerdingen & Center, 2005; Yavorsky et al.,

2015). Fathers of young children also report being less likely to cut back on work demands (Young & Schieman, 2018), likely because of the pressure on fathers to be the financial providers for their families (Acker, 1990; Blair-Loy, 2009; Chesley, 2011; Shows & Gerstel, 2009; Townsend & Townsend, 2002). However, as children get older, fathers are more likely to report feeling less pressure and more flexibility to reduce work hours (Young & Schieman, 2018). If parental status and age of children are not considered when looking at work-life differences between mothers and fathers, these differences in work-life interactions across the transition to and through parenthood may wash out.

Another explanation for the mixed results found in these studies is a selection effect, where women who experience the highest levels of work-family interference may drop out of the labor market to focus on family (Kossek et al., 2017; Weeden et al., 2016). This self-selection out of the labor force may also wash out meaningful differences in gender experiences of work-life interactions.

Though the relationship between gender and broader work-life variables is mixed, there is empirical support for gender differences in segmentation and integration strategies. Research has found that both men and women report preferring segmentation strategies, but women are more likely to prefer stronger boundaries between the two spheres (Bulger et al., 2007; Kreiner, 2006; Nsair & Piszczek, 2021). In other words, while both men and women fall on the segmentation side of the segmentation-integration continuum, women have a stronger preference for segmentation. Shockley and colleagues' study looked at how boundary strength affects the relationship between gender and work-family conflict (2017). They found that women were more likely to create strong boundaries around family, which was associated with less WIF

(Shockley et al., 2017). Women were also more likely to create strong boundaries around work, which was associated with less FIW (Shockley et al., 2017).

Parents are also more likely than those without children to prefer segmentation strategies (Bulger et al., 2007). While mothers are more likely to report preferring segmentation strategies that create stronger boundaries, research has shown that mothers are also more likely to report needing to have flexible boundaries between work and life and having more spillover between the two spheres (Mennino et al., 2005; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010; Tone Innstrand et al., 2009). This disconnect between mothers' boundary preferences and boundary enactment likely ties to the gendered norms discussed earlier, where women face pressure from both the work and the life spheres. Mothers who report higher segmentation enactment report lower work-life conflict (Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). While mothers may prefer to keep strong boundaries between the two, the expectations on mothers to perform in both the work and life sphere may force them to integrate more than they would like. Mothers who are able to maintain a stronger boundary, however, experience less negative spillover.

Men are less likely to report a disconnect or lack of alignment between their segmentation preferences and enactment regardless of parental status (Mennino et al., 2005; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010; Tone Innstrand et al., 2009). Fathers report feeling in control of their schedules and their ability to flex their boundaries between work and life as needed (Carreri, 2020; Nsair & Piszczek, 2021). For fathers, the ideal worker norm and intensive parenting align so they can focus on their paid labor without the same penalties that mothers face.

### 2.3.1 Gender, Work-Life Boundaries, and Remote Work

Women are more likely to deal with the struggles of working remotely and blurred boundaries, considering their preferences for segmentation strategies (Bulger et al., 2007; Fonner

& Stache, 2012; Noonan & Glass, 2012). Higher work-life integration has been connected to higher work-family conflict, both in work-to-family and family-to-work conflict (Delanoeije et al., 2019; Eddleston & Mulki, 2017). Women working remotely are also more likely to report having trouble disengaging from work at the end of the workday (Eddleston & Mulki, 2017). The mismatch between segmentation preferences and enactment may cause increased work-family conflict and more boundary violations (Ammons, 2013). Integrating work and life may also increase the pressure of both the intensive mothering expectations and the ideal worker norm by making it more challenging to separate the two roles (Eddleston & Mulki, 2017; Fonner & Stache, 2012). Despite the potential for boundary misalignment, many women still work remotely and enjoy the benefits of working from home. In fact, women who are able to work remotely are less likely than women who cannot work remotely to reduce their work hours after having children (Lyttelton et al., 2020).

Both mothers and fathers with young children at home are less likely to report a preference for integrating the work and family spheres when working remotely (Fonner & Stache, 2012). Fathers are often able to create stronger boundaries between work and life, however, when working from home (Eddleston & Mulki, 2017; Noonan et al., 2007). Men face less judgment when keeping work and life separate while working remotely because prioritizing work fulfills the ideal worker norm (Acker, 1990; Kelly et al., 2010), and providing financial support fulfills gendered parenting norms (Chesley, 2011; Shows & Gerstel, 2009; Townsend & Townsend, 2002). Mothers who work remotely report spending more time in childcare when working from home (Noonan et al., 2007). Fathers spend the time saved from not having a commute to clock extra hours of paid labor, while mothers spend the time saved on childcare and routine household tasks (Noonan & Glass, 2012). However, fathers who work from home spend

more time performing childcare than men who do not work remotely (Lyttelton et al., 2020). This has helped shrink the gender gap in time spent on childcare, especially for couples that are dual-earners (Lyttelton et al., 2020). The gender gap in time spent on housework, however, is higher for parents who work remotely (Lyttelton et al., 2020), likely, at least in part, due to the feminization and reoccurrence of routine household tasks that mothers are more likely to complete (Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Perry-Jenkins & Gerstel, 2020; Yavorsky et al., 2015).

### 2.3.2 Division of Labor

As mentioned earlier, the work life-boundaries of couples, especially parents, are often affected by their division of labor. Most men and women prefer egalitarian labor divisions both in the home and at work (Gerson, 2009; Pedulla & Thébaud, 2015; Scarborough et al., 2019). Before having children, men and women report similar time spent in paid and unpaid labor (Yavorsky et al., 2015). After becoming parents, both mothers and fathers increase their time spent on household labor; however, the increase is greater and more significant for mothers (Killewald & García-Manglano, 2016; Yavorsky et al., 2015).

Although women have significantly increased their participation in the paid labor market, men have not increased their household work to the same degree (Bianchi et al., 2012; Perry-Jenkins & Gerstel, 2020). This gap in unpaid labor is especially significant for fathers (Gjerdingen & Center, 2005; Yavorsky et al., 2015). Women, and especially mothers, are usually responsible for more of the routine, “feminine” tasks such as cooking, washing dishes, and laundry (Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Perry-Jenkins & Gerstel, 2020; Yavorsky et al., 2015). These tasks tend to be the ones that are more time-consuming and require a regular schedule (Blair-Loy, 2009; Kolpashnikova & Kan, 2021; Perry-Jenkins & Gerstel, 2020). Mothers not only take on more of the routine work but also are more likely to be in charge of the planning

and management of household tasks, meaning they are responsible for deciding who does what task, even if they are not necessarily the ones to do the task (Bianchi et al., 2000; Blair-Loy, 2009). Men tend to be responsible for non-routine household tasks, such as cutting the grass and doing house repairs, which can be done when convenient rather than on a schedule (Kolpashnikova & Kan, 2021; Perry-Jenkins & Gerstel, 2020).

However, fathers are beginning to close the gap with childcare (Perry-Jenkins & Gerstel, 2020), and those with access to flexible work arrangements are especially likely to take on more childcare and housework (Besen-Cassino, 2019; Sherman, 2017). Wives in egalitarian marriages spend less time on housework than women in non-egalitarian marriages (both when their husband does more paid labor and when the wife does more paid labor) (Kolpashnikova & Kan, 2021). A more egalitarian division of labor, or at least the perception of fairness in the relationship, between couples can help alleviate work-family conflict (Perry-Jenkins & Gerstel, 2020). Having a partner who shares in the workload may allow parents to better maintain their preferred boundaries between work and life, especially when parents share the demands of routine childcare (Bulger et al., 2007; Collins et al., 2021; Shockley et al., 2017).

### 2.4 Effects of COVID-19

Most previous research on work-life boundaries, divisions of labor, and flexible work arrangements were conducted during the time now identified as “pre-COVID.” On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that COVID-19 was a pandemic (CDC, 2022). That week, the United States entered a lockdown period to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. By May 2020, 20.5 million people were out of work, and the US surpassed 100,000 COVID-19 deaths (CDC, 2022). While many initially hoped that the pandemic would pass quickly, it became clear that as more months passed and COVID-19 cases continued to rise, life would not

return to normal. Instead, the US population began to wonder what a “new normal” would look like in a COVID-19 world (Corpuz, 2021).

### 2.4.1 COVID-19 Lockdown (2020)

The months following the initial lockdown in March 2020 changed almost every aspect of daily life for those in the US and worldwide. Businesses were forced to either shut down or switch to virtual work. At the peak of the pandemic and quarantine regulations, 71% of employed adults reported working from home (Parker et al., 2020). Schools and daycares were shut down as part of the lockdown, and many employed parents had to adapt to having children at home while working from home (Collins et al., 2021; Landivar et al., 2020). This provided a unique context for examining remote workers' remote work and boundary management strategies since lockdown forced many to work from home regardless of the employees’ preferences.

Mothers were especially likely to take on the additional labor of childcare and were more likely to reduce work hours or step away from work entirely (Landivar et al., 2020). By April 2020, mothers of young and elementary-aged children decreased their work hours by an average of almost two hours (Collins et al., 2021). Fathers, in particular those of young children and elementary-aged children, did not experience the same decrease over this period; their predicted work hours per week did not drop below 40 hours (Collins et al., 2021). Fathers did increase their time spent in childcare, though, with a 64% increase in time spent in active childcare compared to pre-pandemic (2.21 hours per day pre-COVID, 3.64 hours per day during lockdown; Craig & Churchill, 2020).

Parents of young children (under 12) experienced the highest levels of work-life conflict during lockdown (Schieman et al., 2021). Parents with high work-life integration had the most significant increase in work-life conflict (Schieman et al., 2021). Employed mothers were more

likely than employed fathers to report struggling with work-life balance during this time (Igielnik, 2021).

Remote workers who preferred segmentation strategies reported having better work-nonwork boundaries during the lockdown period when remote work was the only option for many (Allen et al., 2021). Although initial hypotheses expected the opposite to be true – for integrators to have better balance during the lockdown – this study found that those who prefer segmenting tended to have strategies for keeping work and life separate that were especially beneficial when remote work was not optional (Allen et al., 2021). Segmentation strategies that remote workers used during lockdown included behavioral tactics (e.g., leveraging technology and emulating office routine), temporal tactics (e.g., controlling work time and purposefully disconnecting), physical tactics (e.g., manipulating physical space and adapting physical and psychological boundaries), and communicative tactics (e.g., setting expectations and confronting violators). A key gap for this study is that these strategies were used specifically in the context of lockdown, with all data collected between May and August of 2020. The study included both parents and non-parents and did not explore how gender affects the use of these strategies. These limitations leave room for further research on what strategies are being used now for parents working remotely and how gender affects what strategies they use.

### 2.4.2 Transitioning to the "New Normal" (2021-Present)

The transition out of the lockdown period and into the "new normal" was gradual. In mid-December 2020, the FDA authorized emergency use of the first COVID-19 vaccine; by March 13, 2021, over 100 million vaccine doses had been administered in the US (CDC, 2022). Though lockdowns had slowly lifted throughout the country in late 2020, the rise of vaccines marked a shift in the pandemic. As of June 2022, the US has had over 87,092,000 confirmed

cases of COVID-19 and 1,016,208 deaths from the virus (*United States Tracking: Overview*, 2022).

The term "new normal," which was most recently used during the 2008 financial crisis, has been repurposed to signify the change in day-to-day lives when comparing pre-COVID and post-COVID life (Manuti et al., 2022). The idea of a "new normal" implicates that the old sense of "normal" will not return (Karjalainen et al., 2022). For this study, I define March 2020 and throughout the rest of 2020 as the "lockdown period," given the significant disruptions that lockdown measures caused in everyday life and work. "Pre-pandemic" was used for anything before March 2020. Although there is no agreed-upon date when we switched from lockdown to the new normal, I used 2021 as the beginning of the new normal because of the availability of vaccines and the end of many lockdown restrictions. "New normal" was used instead of "post-pandemic" because many feel that the pandemic and its implications have not ended despite the lack of lockdown measures and quarantine requirements (Cohen, 2023; Coon, 2023; McBride, 2023).

One of the significant shifts from pre-pandemic to now is the rise of remote work. Working from home became the norm during lockdown when offices were shut down. This was a drastic change from the stigma surrounding working from home before the pandemic (Munsch, 2016; Munsch et al., 2014). As of January 2022, 61% of adults (from a nationally representative survey of 5,889 US adults employed part- or full-time) who can work outside of the office choose to work remotely (Parker et al., 2022). Although working from home initially led to blurred boundaries for parents, especially mothers, parents continue to choose to work remotely and enjoy the benefits of remote work (Baert et al., 2020; Fana et al., 2020; Ipsen et al., 2021).

While research during the lockdown period looked at how parents' work-life boundaries were affected by the switch to remote work (Allen et al., 2021; Cho, 2020; Vaziri et al., 2020), it is unclear how these boundaries continue to be affected. Employees have been working remotely for several years. During lockdown, many employees were forced to work remotely; now, many choose to work remotely (Parker et al., 2022). Parents had to adapt to remote childcare and schooling during lockdown, which caused many interruptions during the workday; now, most children are back to in-person school and daycare (Landivar et al., 2023). The strategies that remote workers, and especially parents, relied on during lockdown may no longer be as prevalent for those continuing to work from home.

# CHAPTER 3: CURRENT STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

## 3.1 Boundary Theory and COVID-19

Even before the pandemic, both mothers and fathers preferred segmentation strategies over integration strategies (Bulger et al., 2007; Kreiner, 2006; Nsair & Piszczek, 2021). Those with stronger boundaries between work and life report decreased work-family conflict and fewer work-life boundary violations. However, given the extended co-location of work and life, increased childcare responsibilities during school and daycare closures, and increased workloads, parents may have even stronger preferences for segmentation strategies to compensate for the blurred boundaries they experienced during lockdown.

While boundary theory suggests that parents will prefer segmentation, the experiences of remote-working parents have not been fully explored. Many parents now choose to work from home, which almost fully integrates work and life. This would suggest that parents who choose to work from home may prefer more integrated boundaries or that parents working remotely rely more heavily on segmentation strategies.

Previous research can inform some predictions for how the pandemic has affected work-life boundaries. However, given the nascent nature of the lasting effects of the pandemic and lockdown in the new normal and the ever-evolving world we now live in, it is crucial to consider the context and sensemaking of parents during the pandemic. Exploring these experiences through interviews allowed for a grounded approach to the experiences of parents living and working during the pandemic (Johnson et al., 2010; Lingard et al., 2008).

This study aimed to address the gap in our understanding of the lasting impact of the COVID pandemic and lockdown on parents' work-life boundaries. A qualitative approach can help shed light on individuals' experiences and provide an opportunity to learn how they chose

the strategies they used while navigating the pandemic and how their preferences and alignment have shifted from before the pandemic to now. This leads to the following research question:

Research Question 1: How has the pandemic affected parents' work-life boundaries and how they navigate between work and life?

### 3.2 Boundary Management Strategies and Gender

Understanding the lasting impact of the pandemic and lockdown on parents' work-life boundaries and boundary management into the new normal is an important step in expanding boundary theory. Another essential step is understanding gender differences in managing work-life boundaries for parents. Research has shown mixed results in gender differences in work-life concepts (Eby et al., 2005; Byron, 2005; Shockley et al., 2017). There is more support for gender differences in boundary navigation and segmentation preferences (Bulger et al., 2007; Kreiner, 2006; Nsair & Piszczek, 2021; Shockley et al., 2017). Women report stronger segmentation preferences and are more likely to report a lack of alignment between their segmentation preferences and enactment (Mennino et al., 2005; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010; Shockley et al., 2017; Tone Innstrand et al., 2009). Despite this, women and men often report similar levels of work-life conflict (Shockley et al., 2017).

While segmentation preferences likely became stronger due to the pandemic and lockdowns, boundary enactment may not have changed to the same degree. Many parents were forced to integrate their work and lives when work went remote. Though more employees can return to the workplace, many still choose to work remotely, at least part-time (Parker et al., 2022). Mothers may especially see a lack of alignment between boundary preferences and enactment. While mothers may have even stronger preferences for segmentation, they may still have to allow work and life to blur. Though they may have the opportunity to return to the

workplace, many mothers may still deal with the combined strain of childcare disruptions and pressure from the intensive mothering norm. They may even feel additional pressure from the intensive mothering norm compared to pre-pandemic since working from home has become more accepted.

Mothers with a more egalitarian division of labor spend less time on housework than those in non-egalitarian marriages (Kolpashnikova & Kan, 2021). Mothers with a husband who shares the workload with them may find it easier to maintain their preferred boundaries (Bulger et al., 2007; Collins et al., 2021; Shockley et al., 2017). Men were significantly more involved in active childcare during lockdown, which may continue into the new normal. If so, this may help mothers even more as they navigate their paid and unpaid labor. Couples that report a more egalitarian division of labor may have better alignment between their boundary preferences and enactment. However, parents' division of labor and gender have not been explored in the context of work-life boundary management tactics. This leads to the second research question:

> Research Question 2: How do mothers and fathers differ in their strategies to navigate between work and life?

# CHAPTER 4: METHOD

To answer the research questions, I interviewed sixteen mothers and sixteen fathers. I used Prolific to gather potential participants to ensure a diverse sample. Prolific participants completed a short Qualtrics survey that checked for the inclusion criteria and collected contact information for those interested in participating in an interview. I randomly sampled by gender from those who met the inclusion criteria and were willing to be interviewed and contacted those who gave consent to schedule interviews. I interviewed thirty-two parents from the eligible pool of participants.

Potential participants were gathered through Prolific and directed to the Qualtrics survey. In the Qualtrics survey, participants answered a series of questions to ensure that the inclusion criteria were met, determine if they were interested in participating in a follow-up interview, and gather demographic information.

## 4.1 Participants

To ensure a high-quality and diverse sample, I gathered participants through Prolific. There were four key inclusion criteria used to gather participants: (1) employed full-time, (2) working from home at least 50% of the workweek, (3) being married and in a different-gender partnership, and (4) having a child. An additional inclusion criterion was used for Prolific recruitment; only those currently in the USA were recruited. To assess work-life boundaries in the context of remote work, participants needed to work full-time and work at least half of the time from home. Only married couples were included, as previous research supports that unmarried but cohabitating couples tend to have a more egalitarian division of labor (Batalova & Cohen, 2002; Baxter, 2005; Berger & McLanahan, 2015). Parents with at least one child under

18 living at home were another criterion because childcare is an essential aspect of unpaid labor for this study (Graham et al., 2021; Schieman et al., 2021).

Filters were included in the Prolific search to reach only those who matched the inclusion criteria. However, the filters used in Prolific were limited, so the Qualtrics survey had questions that addressed the inclusion criteria. In Prolific, participants were only recruited if they reported (1) being employed full-time, (2) sometimes or regularly working remotely or having a changing place of work, (3) being married, and (4) having children. The Qualtrics survey then had four questions that confirmed the more specific inclusion criteria detailed above (Appendix C, Questions 1-4).

There were two rounds of participant recruitment. In the first round of recruitment, 145 participants responded to the Qualtrics survey. Five responses were removed because of incomplete responses, leaving the final number of responses for the first round at 140 participants. Fifty respondents indicated interest in the interview and provided contact information (36%). All fifty respondents were contacted to schedule an interview. A total of twenty participants were interviewed from this round of recruitment: seven mothers and thirteen fathers. One of the thirty respondents who were not interviewed withdrew from participating, and the remaining twenty-nine did not respond.

A second round of recruitment was used to gather more participants, particularly mothers. I wanted to interview an equal number of men and women. The same inclusion criteria were used from the first round. One-hundred and forty-six participants responded to the Qualtrics survey. After removing incomplete responses, 141 participants remained. Fifty-six respondents were interested in an interview and provided contact information (40%). All 56 were contacted, and 12 completed interviews (nine mothers and three fathers). The remaining forty-three

respondents did not respond. I intended to interview 20 mothers and 20 fathers. However, after coding the interviews from the second round of recruitment, I determined that enough data had been collected to assess the research questions (this is discussed further in 4.3 Data Analysis).

Thirty-two interviews were completed, with sixteen mothers and sixteen fathers (demographics in Appendix A). Participants ranged in age from 27 to 59 (mean 40.7). A majority of the participants were white (78%), 9% were Black, 6% Latino/a, 3% Asian, and 3% two or more races. Forty-four percent of participants had a Master's degree or higher, 41% had an Associate's or Bachelor's degree, and 16% had no college degree. The participants' higher education aligns with the fact that remote workers tend to be more highly educated and work in higher-status white-collar jobs (Bartik et al., 2020). The average number of hours per week worked was 40.4, ranging from 30 to 48. Twenty-six participants had been in their current role for at least one year, with the average tenure being 61.6 months and ranging from 2 months to over 25 years. Participants had between one and five children, with the average number of children being 2.3. The average age of their children was 7, with children ranging in age from newborn to 23. While all participants had been in a heterosexual marriage during the pandemic, one is now divorced and has a same-sex partner. Another participant was separated at the time of the interview. Most participants did not work remotely before the pandemic (66%, "never" or "rarely"). Participants who reported working remotely before the pandemic fell into two categories: remote work before the pandemic (16%) and remote before the pandemic (19%, most or all the time).

## 4.2 Procedure

Individuals who fit the inclusion criteria on Prolific and were interested in participating were directed to the Qualtrics survey. In the Qualtrics survey, participants reviewed the consent

form and answered the four questions to ensure the inclusion criteria were met (Questions 1 through 4). They were then asked if they were interested in participating in a follow-up interview and given information on the length of the interview, the purpose of the interview, and compensation. If they said they were interested in an interview, they were asked to provide an email address to contact them to schedule the interview. They moved to the demographic questions if they indicated they were not interested in the interview.

The final questions (8 through 13) asked for basic demographic information. Participants were asked to provide their gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, age, highest level of education completed, how many hours they worked per week, and tenure in their current role. Those who completed the survey were compensated $1 each through Prolific.

Respondents who indicated they were interested in an interview and provided their email addresses were contacted with an individual email, giving them more information on the study and scheduling the interviews. They also received the consent document for the interview to complete before the interview. All interviews were conducted and recorded using Zoom. All participants confirmed their consent to the recordings before the recordings began. Zoom provided an automated transcript, audio recording, and video recording for every interview. I deleted the video recording immediately after the interview. The transcript was then reviewed using the audio recording. Once the transcript was checked, the audio recording was deleted. The transcripts were then used for data analysis. All individuals who participated in an interview were compensated $25 with a digital Amazon gift card.

Interviews ranged from 23 to 93 minutes (average length = 52 minutes and 49 seconds). The combined transcript length for all interviews was 1,245 pages of text. All transcripts were reviewed for identifying information immediately after the interviews, and all identifying

information, such as names, locations, and organizations, was changed to maintain confidentiality. Participants were assigned a random pseudonym based on their gender. All names that are used in the following sections are pseudonyms.

### 4.2.1 Interview Questions

The interview guide (Appendix D) comprised five sections: information about the participant, work/life pre-pandemic, effects of COVID-19, managing work and life in the new normal, and wrapping up. The first section included prompts such as “First, can you introduce yourself?” “Tell me about your family.” and “What do you do for work?” This section was intended to create rapport with the participant and establish context specific to the participant.

The following section, "Work/life pre-pandemic,” asked questions that encouraged participants to consider their lives before COVID-19. This section aimed to discover what work and home life looked like for the participant in the time most of us think of as “normal.” Participants were first asked what a typical work week looked like for them before the pandemic, then asked how often they worked remotely, how often they brought work home and how often they had family/home tasks interfere with work, and finally, preferences and strategies for work-life boundary segmentation/integration.

This section was followed by “Effects of COVID-19,” which asked about the early days of the pandemic with questions including “How did COVID-19 affect your work?” “How were your children affected by the pandemic?” and “How did the pandemic affect how you handled both your work and life responsibilities?” This section aimed to learn how work and life changed over time due to the pandemic, especially immediately after quarantine began and in the following months. The section concluded with a question on how their work-life integration/segmentation enactment and preferences changed.

The next section, “Managing work and life in the new normal,” had questions that sought to understand how the participant has adapted to the “new normal.” These questions asked about how they were working and navigating both work and life at the time of the interview. Examples of questions from this section include “What does a typical work week or workday look like for you now?” and “How would you describe your work and life spheres now? How does that compare to before the pandemic?” Similar to the pre-pandemic section, this section began by asking what a typical work week or workday looked like for the participant now, what their current childcare or children’s schooling looks like now, how they split household tasks with their spouse, and concluded by asking how their work-life boundary enactment and preferences have changed and if it is now harder or easier to manage their work and life.

The final section was about “Wrapping up” the interview. The only question in this section was, “Are there any final things that came to your mind that we did not talk about?” This question allowed the participants to add anything they thought of or wanted to expand upon. The goal of this question was to help us ensure we addressed everything relevant to the participant for this interview.

### 4.3 Data Analysis

A constant comparative method was used to analyze the interview data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Although the constant comparative method is most often used in grounded theory, it can also be used with other theoretical frameworks (e.g., Fram, 2013). The first step when using the constant comparative method is to conduct open coding of each interview, comparing data within each interview to create the codes (Boeije, 2002). The second step, axial coding, involves comparing codes to other codes to organize, categorize, and simplify codes (J. M. Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The final step, selective coding, then looks for

connections between the categories of codes and identifies the core codes, or themes (J. M. Corbin & Strauss, 1990). All coding was done in NVivo. A separate codebook was created in Excel to capture each round of coding.

The first step in the analysis was a round of open coding to capture themes from the participants' own words. This first round of coding yielded 544 individual codes grouped into four categories. The first category was for additional demographics that were not asked in the initial survey, including codes such as "Youngest child 5 or less," "Oldest child teenager," and "Job changed during pandemic." The three remaining categories captured codes for the three time periods, "Before Pandemic," "Lockdown Transition," and "New Normal." All three categories were organized by "Life," "Work," and "Work-Life Boundaries." Life sub-categories included "Division of Labor" and "Effects on Children." Work sub-categories included "Employer Support," "Remote Work," and "Biggest Challenge Working Remotely." Finally, work-life boundaries sub-categories included "Strategies," "Constraints," and "Work-Life Interruptions."

The first round of coding was completed on each transcript as the interviews were completed. As mentioned earlier, there were two rounds of data collection. The second round of data collection was necessary to collect additional data from further interviews. After the second round of data collection, I found that I was not adding new codes and instead seeing the same themes and messages emerge. Based on this, I determined that I reached data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Guest et al., 2006; Saunders et al., 2018) and did not need to pursue additional interviews.

The second round of coding was used to organize the codes further. Codes from the first round were combined and clarified for the second round of coding. This round of coding yielded

523 individual codes, grouped into the same four categories plus an additional category for key quotes. There were several goals for this second round of coding. For the first round of coding, codes came from participants' words. While this was an essential step for data analysis, some codes were only relevant to the individual the code came from (e.g., "Daughter helped set schedule" and "Child still homeschooled – found a new co-op"). The second round of coding allowed for more consistent coding across the transcripts. Codes were also re-worded to better align across the three time periods. For example, sub-categories for "Work-Life Boundaries" became organized by "Preference/Ideal," "Actual," "Strategies," "Work crossing into life," and "Life crossing into work." This consistency across the three times allowed for a better understanding of the changes across time. The second round of coding also allowed all interviews to be coded with set codes, so nothing was missed in the transcripts that were coded first.

The final round of coding was used to connect the research questions with themes that arose from the data. I found six themes based on previous research on boundary management strategies and themes from reviewing the second round of coding. The first two themes, "Set Realistic Expectations" and "Know Your Priorities," capture the overarching mindsets that parents developed during the pandemic and continue using in the new normal. The remaining four themes, "Turn Off Technology," "Stick to a Schedule," "Designate Home Office Space," and "Door Closed Policy," focus on the strategies parents use to manage their work-life boundaries working remotely. I initially thought of all six themes as boundary management strategies. After reviewing the codes for the first two themes, however, I realized there was a critical difference between parents' strategies to keep work and life separate and how parents conceptualized and communicated their work-life boundaries. The distinction between these led

me to rethink the first two themes as mindset shifts, or how parents shifted their thinking during and after lockdown to adjust their work-life boundaries. These themes are explored in detail in the following chapter.

# CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

Six themes arose from the participants' interviews; two focused on mindset shifts that occurred during the pandemic, and the remaining four were strategies that parents use when navigating between work and life. A summary of the six themes is available in Appendix B. The mindset shifts parents experienced addressed the first part of Research Question 1, how the pandemic affected parents' work-life boundaries. The two mindset shifts parents reported carrying into the new normal after the pandemic were knowing their priorities and setting realistic expectations. While these two arose as strategies that parents used when navigating between work and life, they are distinct from the other four strategies because they focused more on how parents conceptualize and communicate the boundaries between the two spheres rather than how they keep them separate.

The remaining four strategies, turning off technology, sticking to a schedule, designating home office space, and having a door-closed policy, are specific ways parents separate the two spheres. These strategies answer the second part of Research Question 1, how parents now navigate between work and life. Most parents reported using at least one of the four strategies (29 participants, 91%), and eighteen of the 29 used two or more strategies (62%).

## 5.1 Mindset Shifts

Participants described two mindset shifts they experienced during the pandemic that continue to influence how they think about their work and life spheres and the boundaries between them. The pandemic and rise of remote work demanded that parents acknowledge the importance of knowing their priorities and setting realistic expectations. These mindset shifts involved not only a personal change in thinking for the participants but also communication and support from their families and their work.

There was considerable overlap between those who described these mindset shifts and those who said it is now easier to manage work and life. All participants who reported using one or both mindset shifts said it is now easier to manage work and life than before the pandemic. Participants who said it is now more difficult to manage work and life did not describe either mindset shift.

### 5.1.1 Know Your Priorities

The first mindset shift that arose from the data was for parents to know their priorities and use those to focus on what is important. Compared to before the pandemic, parents now feel empowered to make it clear that family and life come first. Haley (40, white mother, 2 children) framed this as a paradigm shift:

> Life is far more important than work… You work to live, not live to work, you know, and that you know, because that there's been some things that have happened, and you know the last three years that have dramatically changed the paradigm, and what's important.

Before the pandemic, some parents felt pressure to prioritize work and their careers. An example of this came from Victoria (27, white mother, 2 children). Before the pandemic, she said:

> I was very focused on work like that was my number one, because I felt like it was where a lot of my value was, and how I provided for my family. So that was like my number one, and I really wanted to move up in my career, too. So, I feel like life kind of took the back burner at the time.

When asked about work and life in the new normal, Victoria demonstrated her shifted mindset, saying, "…I'm not totally feeling like all my worth is aligned with my work. Family comes first now, even which it didn't before."

Parents also reported feeling like their supervisors are more understanding of parental demands and responsibilities compared to before the pandemic. This support from their bosses gives additional confidence to parents who want to prioritize their family and life. Victoria reported that her manager was “really supportive.” She continued, “I feel like because she's a mother herself. She can empathize with my situation, and we kind of see eye to eye on that.” Madison (34, white mother, 4 children) also emphasized the importance of organizations supporting parents: “I think that they've taken more of a family approach and kind of like we don't really care if you work your set schedule as long as you work the forty hours a week… It's a lot better.” Although COVID was a difficult time, it seems to have helped put life into perspective for many employers: “you know it was all this, just, we understand these times are hard, so do what you gotta do take care of it. It became family first, work second” (Kevin, 50, white father, 2 children).

### 5.1.2 Set Realistic Expectations

Another mindset shift during and after the pandemic was recognizing the importance of setting realistic expectations when working remotely. The need for this communication was present even before the pandemic; however, the rise in remote work made it even more important to set clear expectations with coworkers and family. Before the pandemic, most work was done in the presence of coworkers and outside of time with family. During lockdown and continuing into the new normal, remote workers found that they had to adapt to the opposite – working away from coworkers and in the presence of family. Remote workers had to relearn how to set boundaries with work and family.

For many participants, the beginning of lockdown was a time of adapting to working away from the office, replacing commute time with additional work and more calls and

meetings, even outside work hours. “Toward the beginning, it was, everybody was scheduling meetings, and that was frustrating because it's like dude, it’s a five-minute conversation. You don't need thirty minutes of my time, you know,” (Joseph, 34, white father, 2 children). As the pandemic continued, workers had to learn how to reestablish equilibrium. This meant learning how to set clear boundaries with coworkers and supervisors. Jason (32, white father, 2 children) provided an example of how his work now sets boundaries to signal the start and end of the workday:

> We have a kind of vernacular on the teams' channel, where we every morning we log on. We say good morning, and we kind of say what we're working on during the day. So, you know that that person's online and then at the end of the day. You just type, ‘Night,’ not even like, ‘Good night,’ not even like, ‘I’m finished,’ It's just like I'm logging off like, no longer talk to me.

Another example of a digital boundary came from Christina (33, Black mother, 2 children):

> I have a block on my calendars. I do pick up and drop off Monday through Wednesday. It's known. Everybody knows Christina is getting up and leaving. She has to run to get to the pick-up line. It's just known. The team has accepted it, and they know don't book meetings around that time.

Christina and Jason demonstrate how their teams adapted and set expectations around work in a virtual environment.

While remote workers had to learn to work away from their coworkers, they also had to learn to work alongside their families. During lockdown especially, parents had to learn to work while also caring for their children, whether by helping them with school or entertaining them. Madison remembered the difficulty of having children home during lockdown, saying:

> It was hard to complete, like the tasks that I had at work. because, like I said, I'd have to stop and help with whatever was going on with the kids, but it's like. I couldn't stop my shift, either.

For many, having schools and daycares open back up has helped relieve most of the stress of having children home during work hours. However, some parents continue to have childcare responsibilities while working, even in the new normal. Madison and Victoria have chosen not to send their youngest children to daycare due to concerns about their children getting sick and do not plan to send them to other childcare until they begin school.

Remote-working parents also had to learn to adapt to working alongside their spouses. Kyle (59, white father, 2 children) and his wife set ground rules for working from home at the same time:

> Each room had a walk-in closet, so we kind of each had our own office, so we wouldn't hear each other on the phone because we both tend to speak loud. And we both knew during the day to minimize distractions, you know. Leave the phone low or off. No television.

Emily (51, white mother, 3 children) and her husband have learned to communicate plans for the week:

> 'Oh, I gotta do this.' 'Well, I gotta do that.' You know it's, we kind of have a plan. We're good at planning together for the next day, or whatever, or the next within the next week usually so no surprises, and there's no anger you know about scheduling.

Christina and her husband also regularly meet to plan out the week:

> My husband and I have Sunday night meetings where we, quote-unquote meetings, where we talk about the week… Yeah, clear communication. So family meetings, having those

> chats, even with the day like, what does your meetings look like? That helps. Because today my husband and I and tomorrow are working from home. So, what does that look like?

Setting clear boundaries and realistic expectations with their spouses has helped Kyle, Emily, Christina, and other remote workers improve working from home.

Knowing their priorities and setting realistic expectations has helped parents working remotely have a better mindset when navigating work and life in the same space. Participants found that the mindset shifts during the pandemic have impacted how they think about their work and life spheres. These mindset shifts paired with boundary management strategies helped parents achieve their desired level of separation between the two spheres.

### 5.2 Work-Life Boundary Management Strategies

Parents in this study described four main strategies to strengthen the boundaries between their work and life spheres. Most parents in the study (29 of the 32) prefer to keep work and life somewhat or mostly separated. Although some parents expressed that they like being able to blur or blend the two spheres, the strategies they described focused on distinguishing and keeping the two spheres separate. While parents wanted the flexibility to blur or blend the spheres as needed, they did not want them blurred together at all times.

Sticking to a schedule was the most common strategy, with 24 participants using this strategy to keep work and life separate (75%). It was also the strategy most often used by parents who worked some or entirely remotely before the pandemic. Five of the six participants who worked remotely before the pandemic (83%) and three of the five who worked some remotely (60%) reported sticking to a schedule as a key strategy.

Designating a home office space was the second most used strategy, with 11 participants reporting having a separate workspace at home (34%). None of the parents who worked remotely fully before the pandemic reported using this strategy, though they may have already had a designated office space even before the pandemic. Two of the five participants who worked some remotely before the pandemic used this strategy (40%).

The third most used strategy was turning off technology, which 10 participants used (31%). One of the participants who worked fully remotely before the pandemic used this strategy (17%). None of the participants working remotely before the pandemic mentioned utilizing this strategy.

Finally, eight participants described using the door-closed policy to separate work and life (25%). Three of the six participants who worked fully remotely before the pandemic used their door being closed as a signal that they were busy (50%). None of the participants who worked only some remotely before the pandemic used this tactic.

### 5.2.1 Turn Off Technology

The first strategy that parents in the study used to separate their work and life spheres was to turn off work technology at the end of the workday. For some, this meant completely separating themselves from their work computer and work phone. For example, Benjamin (35, white father, 3 children) said, “most days I can leave my work laptop [and] my work phone down in the basement, you know. I don't think about it.” Kelsey (47, Latina mother, 3 children) similarly described fully disconnecting from work technology: “I'm definitely back to putting my phone away. putting it on silent, ignoring it. Announce, like on instant messaging, announcing, I'm not available, and really being not available.” Being able to disconnect from work technology fully allows parents to transition out of work time and focus on their life and family.

For other parents, the goal is not to fully disconnect but to have some separation. Robert (41, white father, 2 children) had a set time to turn off his computer at the end of the day but liked to have flexibility with his phone:

> If there was phone calls, I would usually let it go to voicemail uh check back later, if that voicemail was pertinent or not, or they'd text me um, then I would decide if I need to Respond to that or not… if uh my phone would ring, I'd probably answer it. But I usually keep the conversations very brief and to the point.

Although not fully disconnected from work technology, Robert still controls whether he responds to the work communication. Haley stopped checking her emails unless someone let her know ahead of time to keep an eye on her inbox after hours: "Hey, if I'm, if my day is done, I'm not checking email unless there somebody had sent an email said, Hey, I need you to look at this tonight." Even then, she could decide whether to respond to the email that night or wait until the following day.

For those who do not have a separate work phone, turning off notifications at a specific time is another way to disconnect from work after hours. Anthony (45, white father, 1 child), for example, has a set time when he no longer gets work notifications: "I have the notifications on my phone. So, when I get an email, it'll [makes notification sound] throughout the day. I do turn the notifications off. At four o'clock, I'll turn them off." Others keep email notifications entirely off their phone. For example, Victoria said, "Don't get email notifications. Things like that. Don't check my email after hours." Mary (42, white mother, 2 children) also keeps email notifications off her phone: "Not have things on my phone that are like ding-ing at me like just making sure that you know, work only is done during work hours."

Despite not having a separate work phone, these parents have found ways to keep from engaging in work after work hours.

### 5.2.2 Stick to a Schedule

Another common strategy for parents to keep their work and life separate was to stick to a schedule. This strategy often overlapped with turning off technology; in many examples above, parents mentioned having a specific time they disconnected from work technology. Blocking off time in the calendar and setting firm end times for work were common methods that parents used to separate work and life when working from home.

For many parents in the study, sticking to a schedule focused on having strict start and end times for work. Several parents mentioned using the eight-hour workday to stick to this work schedule. For example, Brandon (31, white father, 5 children) said, “Keeping my work out of my regular life is still pretty much the same. I, you know, when my eight hours are up, I'm done. If it needs to get done tomorrow, it can get done tomorrow.” Kevin also used the eight-hour workday to restrict work time: “I've done my eight hours, you know. Do I need to do another half hour? Nope.” Nicholas (38, white father, 3 children) has a similar set work schedule:

> I guess what I didn't want like work to become an all-day everyday sort of thing, you know. I still wanted there to be that separation. So, maintaining that, yeah, 7:30 to 4:30, all right. I'm done with work. It’s home time. It's kids’ time. It's wife time, whatever.

Limiting work hours to follow a more traditional work schedule helps these parents keep work time separate from life and family time.

Some parents adjusted the traditional work schedule to fit their family demands better. Tiffany (52, white mother, 1 child), for example, modified her work schedule around her daughter’s wake schedule:

> What I would do is one of the strategies was getting up early to do work before she woke up. and then staying late, not staying late. But you know, turning on the computer as soon as she went to bed at 7 o'clock. Boom! My computer was on.

Brandon also sometimes adjusts his work schedule to work while his children are sleeping: “I do find myself like sometimes waking up extra early to get started on work before my kids will wake up before my family's awake… and then just leave, just leave early.” James (57, white father, 2 children) sometimes arranges his work schedule so he finishes work before his children get home: “Like this afternoon, the kids are going to get home around three o'clock, 3:30, and I know that pretty much my work stuff needs to be wrapped up by then.” Working remotely allows parents the flexibility to work around their family’s schedules.

For other parents, sticking to a schedule is less about limiting work and more about having designated time for family. Heather (27, Latina mother, 2 children) tries to set aside time on Sundays to focus on family:

> I’m trying my best like on Sunday I go to church. I try not to do any work, or maybe just work like 2 hours on Sunday. I take that time to be with our family, and I just try my best to always keep it separate.

Madison also reserved Sundays for her family. “We've tried to make like Sundays be family days where we would just do like arts and crafts and things like that.” Blocking out time for family was especially important for those with less control over their work schedules. Setting and sticking to a schedule helped parents create stronger boundaries between work and life. These temporal boundaries are vital for remote workers who do not have the physical separation to create a typical schedule. Having control over when they begin and end their day or when to

focus on family allows parents to enjoy flexibility while maintaining separate work and life spheres.

### 5.2.3 Designated Home Office Space

Spatial boundaries are another way remote workers can separate their work and life spheres. For many remote-working parents, having a designated workspace they could walk away from at the end of the day was important. Having a sense of a commute even with work at home helps parents disconnect at the end of the workday.

Joshua (50, Latino father, 2 children) uses his walk from the downstairs family area to his upstairs office in place of a commute, saying, “My office, the man cave, I try to pretend that this was away from work, and then my commute was all, it was a walk.” Justin (38, white father, 2 children) also uses a room upstairs as a separate workspace: “… the general idea is by physically being separated in the upstairs of the house in a separate room. That was sort of a good way to just enforce that boundary.” Others have the opposite commute; their workspace is downstairs, and their family area is upstairs. Anthony, for example, works from his basement:

> I have an office with the door in the basement that's isolated with, you know, with my very own system, and I wouldn't. But you know I, you know every I have the filing cabinets and a good office chair, and I'm not sitting on my kitchen, you know, on the kitchen chairs.

Benjamin also works in the basement and said:

> We have an unfinished basement. So, typically, we weren't down there very much. Um. So, I would try and keep my work down there to have that as like my work area as separate from my home area, which would be upstairs… But for the most part, I tried to keep everything work downstairs, family upstairs.

Even those without a stairway commute appreciate having a designated workspace. Kyle and his wife had their separate walk-in closet offices. Lauren (31, white mother, 2 children) uses her bedroom as her home office and said, “I do have my computer in my room. I feel like just separating that from the rest of the house helps.” Even when the designated workspace is in a family space, having a separate area helps. Nicholas’ home office is in the living room, but in a corner that he can ignore:

> The kind of the space that we created, it's tucked away in the corner of the uh the living room. So, you know it's not kind of front and center, you know if you will, and can kind of just ignore that the fact that it's sitting over there.

Having a distinct area to work, whether a separate office or a designated corner, allows parents to walk away and disconnect at the end of the workday.

#### 5.2.4 A Door-Closed Policy

A strategy often used alongside a designated home office was having a door-closed policy. For some parents, having a separate workspace is not enough separation between home and work. When parents needed time to work without interruption, they described having a closed-door policy with their family: when the door is closed, the parent is not to be disrupted.

Many interviewed parents described using the door-closed policy to signal to their family that they were “at work.” Justin, for example, said:

> There's a door to this room. I can come into this room, close the door, and be sort of partitioned off from everything else in the house… if I’m up here and the door is closed. That generally means like I'm working.

Alyssa (47, white mother, 2 children) also uses the closed door to signal she is working: “Sometimes I would keep the door shut to the office, and you know I would tell my kids like, if you really need to come in to like, get something off the printer, or something like that's fine.”

For other parents, the door-closed policy is stricter, signaling that they are working and focused and should not be interrupted. For example, Jason said, “If the door is closed, it means I'm probably in a meeting or working hard. Otherwise, I usually keep it open.” Olivia (34, Black mother, 2 children) uses the door to signal if she is available, saying, “It's that door. I keep the door closed… if I’m in my studio and my door is open, I’m more than available. But if it's closed then it's, I’m in the middle of something that I can't be disturbed.” Jordan (33, white father, 3 children) takes it further by locking the door: “The biggest thing is I lock my door. Ain’t no one coming in here. This is Dad's work time.”

A door-closed policy can help signal to family whether the parent is deep in work or if they can be interrupted. This helps parents have a sense of control over when someone can enter their workspace. A closed door takes the physical boundary of a home office further by adding an additional barrier.

### 5.3 Gender Dynamics and Boundary Management

The second research question for this study asked if there were gender differences in the strategies used to navigate between work and life. Before looking at gender differences in strategies, it is necessary to consider participants’ division of labor and the gender dynamics behind how they divide household and childcare tasks. Parents with more equal labor divisions found maintaining their boundaries between work and life easier. Changes in participants’ division of labor throughout the pandemic and continuing into the new normal play a part in their strategies to navigate between work and life.

### 5.3.1 Division of Labor

Before the pandemic, mothers in the study were much less likely than fathers to say the division of labor was evenly split, with housework (13% for mothers, 50% for fathers) and childcare (6% for mothers, 25% for fathers). Fathers in the study were especially likely to say that household tasks were split equally before the pandemic, splitting tasks based on strengths and preferences. For example, James mentioned, “We sort of gravitated to what our strengths were. She's very meticulous and organized. So, she would do like all the bill paying all the that sort of thing. I was doing more of the vacuuming, the cleaning.” Nicholas and his wife similarly split tasks based on preferences: “I do most of the cleaning in our house. So, for example, she cooks dinner. She likes that, and then I wash the dishes and wipe down the cabinets and all that good stuff.”

Other participants described more traditional divisions of labor, where the wife took on most of the inside household tasks while her husband did the outside household tasks. Alyssa, for example, said:

> He would do the majority of the outside work, sometimes with some assistance from the kids, but they were a little younger then…. And then I did most of the cooking… I did a lot of the other indoor cleaning.

Victoria also did most of the inside tasks while her husband took care of outdoor tasks:

> On the weekends, if there were things like yard work, or like detailing the car like bigger projects like that, he would tackle those on the weekend, but for the most part I did the more basic in the house tasks and stayed on top of those.

Jason and his wife were another example of this division of household labor: “I did a lot of the outside chores I feel like. Maybe that's traditional, the mowing the lawn, that stuff… she

probably did, especially before the pandemic, she did a little bit more of this stuff around the house."

Mothers in the study also tended to take on more responsibility for organizing and keeping track of household tasks. When asked about how he and his wife split household tasks before the pandemic, Justin said:

> Depends on like how we define what housework represents. There's like the physical aspect of it, and then just sort of coordination of things in this and that, and at that point in time… it would probably fall a little bit more on her.

Even when couples felt that the split of household tasks was equal, the responsibility for that split typically was on the mother. Kevin provided an example when asked about their division of household tasks before the pandemic, saying, "It was still fifty-fifty. She made sure of that because she's busy homeschooling and cooking and stuff like that. So, it has always been my job to vacuum and sweep the floors and clean the bathrooms." Sarah's husband would take care of household tasks if he were asked: "If he was home and had some gaps in his day, I would just ask him to unload the dishwasher, or throw the kids clothes the laundry, or do things that I couldn't do." Brandon also had assigned chores from his wife that he was responsible for: "My wife definitely did the majority of everything. A lot of the housework is done by her. I would do, I mean, I try and do some chores like I've always done the dishes. That's always been my job." Although fathers were helping with household tasks, their wives ensured the tasks were completed.

Childcare was also often the mother's responsibility. When asked how she and her husband split childcare before the pandemic, Madison said, "It's me." Alyssa also took on most of the childcare:

> If they were sick, or needed certain things when they got off the bus from school, or just sort of attending to their needs or taking them to appointments, things like that, I would say that I did the majority of that. But he was certainly there for them, too. But I would say I did the majority.

Several fathers in the study confirmed that they relied on their wives for childcare before the pandemic. Anthony said, “My wife would do most of the childcare. I'd say ninety-five percent.” Brandon noted that most of the childcare was “definitely” done by his wife. Joseph also confirmed, “Once you delve into like management of our child, that's where she's, that's her department, you know. I tell her that all the time, like, I can't. I, that's not something that I necessarily have the mental bandwidth to handle.” Before the pandemic, mothers took on more household and childcare labor.

In the new normal, however, both mothers and fathers were more likely to report an even split in household tasks and childcare. Forty-four percent of mothers and 56% of fathers reported having an even split in household tasks. Kyle said, “I think we share each other's responsibilities, or tasks, chores, whatever you want to call it much more now than we did before COVID.” Madison found that her husband is helping more now with both household and childcare tasks:

> It's become more fifty-fifty like. When he gets off work, he actually helps more with the kids. If I don't do the dishes, like on my lunch break, he actually goes and does some things like that. So, it's a lot better.

Even when the participant reported doing more than their spouse, there was recognition that the division of labor has improved compared to before the pandemic. Emily, for example, said:

> Since the pandemic, he actually does more than he did before. And he's kind of, I think he's starting to, not because I nagged him or anything. I think he's starting to realize how much more I was doing than he was.

Mary also felt that the division of labor is more balanced now: “I still do a lot more of like the cleaning, and cooking sometimes, but he picks up whenever I just can’t, or I don't feel like it. So, it’s balanced pretty well.” Jordan reported feeling like he does more now than before: “I've actually picked up a lot more, so it's still probably 60/40. But compared to where I was earlier, and in the past couple of years it's been a drastic improvement.” Although several women still do most (5) or all (3) of the household work, most participants felt that their household division of labor improved after the pandemic.

When looking at childcare, women were more likely than fathers to report an even division of childcare tasks, with 44% of mothers and 38% of fathers feeling that there is an even split. Madison and Megan said they and their husbands now have a fifty-fifty split in childcare tasks, a change from before the pandemic. Christina said, “We do the childcare almost split down the middle.” Even those who felt they were splitting the work mostly equal before the pandemic felt a more even split now. Anthony said, “I would say it's as equal, I think. I think maybe some of the things shifted a little bit more. I'm doing a little bit more of taking care of my daughter.”

Availability was often considered a deciding factor in who takes on childcare after the pandemic. Victoria, for example, said that although she watches her daughter all day since she is working from home, “in the evenings, I think we split it up pretty well. Usually, like he gives my son a lot of attention, gets him ready for bed and everything where I’ll focus on her.” David also takes on more childcare since he works from home: “It's probably still just more on me. Just due to our work schedules.” Tyler and his wife vary in who takes on more childcare depending on

other household tasks: “In the evenings, we basically share time with them. Maybe one of us will get a little more time than the other. Whoever's cooking. We don't really go out to eat, so one of us will generally be cooking, and if we just have leftovers from the previous night, then we split the time pretty equally.”

Having more equal labor divisions helps parents, especially mothers, maintain the boundaries between work and life by taking some of the pressure of household tasks and childcare out of the workday. During the pandemic, fathers became more aware of the burden on mothers to take care of household and childcare labor. Many fathers have begun to address this by taking on additional responsibilities that previously fell on their wives. More equal divisions of labor combined with the boundary management strategies that participants discussed may help women, in particular, better maintain and navigate their work-life boundaries.

### 5.3.2 Gender Differences in Boundary Management Strategies

Parents with more equal divisions of labor are better able to manage their work-life boundaries. Participants in this study found that their division of labor became more equal during and after the pandemic as fathers took on more household and childcare responsibilities. Mothers and fathers in the study were equally likely to report egalitarian labor divisions in the new normal. Mothers and fathers were equally likely to discuss setting realistic expectations and knowing their priorities. They were also equally likely to use scheduling and implementing a door-closed policy as strategies to keep work and life separate. However, turning off technology and having a designated home office space were more likely to be brought up by fathers.

Men were only slightly more likely to bring up turning off technology as a strategy, with 38% of fathers and 25% of mothers using this strategy. Many participants who reported using turning off technology as a strategy also used scheduling. Nine of the ten participants who

reported turning off technology as a strategy also stuck to a schedule. However, women who used turning off technology and sticking to a schedule were more likely to only turn off technology for a few hours – especially at night when family tasks were happening. Three of the four women who used this strategy described exceptions to turning off technology after work hours. Kelsey, for example, turns off her work technology every day from 5 to 6 p.m. for dinner: "I will tell the staff, from 5 to 6, don't contact me." Kelsey then logs back in at 6:01 p.m., usually to missed calls from her boss: "My boss will invariably still call during that time, and you know what, I just don't answer the call. And I call her back at like 6:01."

While Kelsey was a more extreme example, other mothers in the study reported flexibility around turning off technology. Mary would turn her work technology off for a few hours in the evening until her children went to sleep: "If I needed to pick up any extra, I really tried to make an effort to do it when the kids were asleep." Haley mentioned that she turned technology off at night "unless somebody had sent an email and said, 'Hey, I need you to look at this tonight.'"

Fathers who used turning off technology as a strategy were more disciplined about turning off the technology and keeping it off at the end of the workday. Four of the six fathers who used this strategy turned off technology and did not check-in for the remainder of the day. Kevin, for example, said, "I've done my eight hours, you know. Do I need to do another half hour? Nope. Okay, Shut the laptop. We're done." Nicholas expressed a similar sentiment: "Once I put in my time, everything's shut off, doesn't come back on, you know, and don't open my computer."

The two fathers who did mention having exceptions to turning off technology at the end of the workday specified that they have a set time to turn off their work computers but have more

flexibility with their work phones. Robert, for example, shuts his computer off at 4 p.m. every day, but “if my phone would ring, I'd probably answer it. But I usually keep the conversations very brief and to the point.” Benjamin also leaves his computer in his workspace after 4 p.m. but checks his phone for emails and messages after:

> I can take my work phone upstairs with me and just leave it on the counter and then just check it every couple of hours if I walk past that, I look at it quick and see. Oh, did I get any emails? Did I get any messages? Because a lot of people will work till five o'clock. Whereas I get done, 3:30, four, o'clock, so a lot of times I'll check it until five or six o'clock, just to make sure no one else messaged me while they were still working.

Based on these participants’ experiences, fathers who turned off technology at the end of the workday could disconnect from most or all work technology until the following workday. Mothers, however, were more likely to need to turn work technology back on to continue working rather than disconnecting entirely for the day. While both mothers and fathers used turning off technology as a strategy, they used it differently.

The most considerable gender difference in the four strategies was in designating a home office space; 56% of fathers cited this as an essential work-life strategy, compared to only 13% of mothers. In the interviews, mothers were just as likely to bring up using a door-closed policy to signify when they are at work and should not be disturbed. Only two mothers specified that they use a separate home office space to maintain their work-life boundaries. In both cases, having a separate workspace was mentioned as part of their other strategies. Lauren, for example, brought up that while she separates her workspace from the rest of the house, the primary strategy is keeping the door closed. Rachel mentioned having a separate workspace, but her primary strategy was using a schedule to separate work and life.

On the other hand, fathers brought up their separate home office space as a distinct strategy, providing details on the separate space and how it benefits their work-life boundaries. Anthony, Benjamin, Justin, and Joshua described their commute up and back down the stairs at the beginning and end of their workdays as signals they use to cross between work and life. Anthony further described how the setup of his home office helps him mentally transition into the workday: “I have an office with the door in the basement that's isolated with my very own system, and I… have the filing cabinets and a good office chair, and I'm not sitting on my kitchen, on the kitchen chairs.” Kevin and Kyle described walking away from their separate office space at the end of the workday. Kevin said, “When I’m done. I just get out of my office.” Even Nicholas, whose workspace is in the living room, detailed how he separates his work corner from the rest of the house: “It's tucked away in the corner of the living room. So, it's not kind of front and center, if you will, and can kind of just ignore that the fact that it's sitting over there.”

Although designating a home office space may be necessary for both mothers and fathers, fathers in the study were much more likely to name it as an essential strategy for navigating between work and life. Mothers, when they did mention it, emphasized the importance of other strategies they combine with the separate home office space. They were more likely to report interruptions from their family despite having a separate office space, likely partly because they tend to be the default parent. A separate space alone is insufficient for mothers to separate work and life. They need multiple barriers beyond having a designated workspace. Fathers, on the other hand, used this as its own strategy to distinguish between work and life. Having a separate workspace is enough for fathers to keep the boundary intact.

Although an equal number of mothers and fathers reported having more equal divisions of labor in the new normal, two of the boundary management strategies were used more often by fathers. These may reflect that although the division of labor is more equal, there is still more pressure on mothers to integrate work and life. For fathers, turning off technology and having a separate workspace helps them transition between work and life at the end of the day. For mothers, though, turning off technology did not signal the end of the workday, and having a separate office was not enough to stop family interruptions. Mothers used turning off technology to take a break from work to take care of household and childcare tasks. Mothers also had to go beyond using a separate home office to maintain the boundary between work and life. This reflects that although the divisions of labor are more equal, there is still more responsibility put on the mother, which requires different boundary management strategies to separate work and life.

### 5.4 Is Navigating Work-Life Boundaries Easier or Harder Now?

The final question that participants were asked in the interviews was, “Is it easier or harder now to manage both work and life?” Twenty-two interviewed said it is now easier (69%). Many parents who said it is now easier to manage work and life said they have more time and flexibility. Brandon felt like he had more time without his commute:

> I feel like I do have more time to do kind of those things that I want to do… My commute was only like five minutes before, but I don't have any commute now, so I mean it's. I wake up, throw on my gym shorts, and go to work. I don't have to get dressed like you know. It's just so much easier. There's a lot more time in my life now.

Tyler (39, white father, 1 child) also felt he has more time without a commute: “I have flexibility. I'm not twenty to thirty minutes away from home.” Parents who work remotely felt that the time saved from not commuting made a difference in their work-life boundaries.

Along with flexibility, working remotely allowed parents to feel more in control of their time. For example, Justin said, “Just the flexibility to like work remotely means I can change when I do all sorts of things, so whether that's work or personal, they can take place more under my control.” Although most parents focused on strategies they used to keep work and life separate, a key benefit of remote work was the flexibility and ability to control when to integrate and when to separate the two spheres. For example, Anthony said:

> I think the flexibility of being able to pick and choose the times that I work. When I work on how I work on it. Integrates really well into my life the way I like to work so that this is ideal for me.

For these parents working remotely, having flexibility and control over their schedule allows them to flex their work-life boundaries to fit their ideal separation. Although most parents in the study felt that managing work and life is now easier, seven parents (22%) thought it more difficult to manage now than before the pandemic. Mothers and fathers were equally likely to say that it is now easier. However, mothers in the study were more likely than fathers to feel it is harder to manage work and life now, with 31% of mothers feeling it is now harder compared to 13% of fathers. Six of the seven who said it is now harder have at least one child under 5. Madison said it is harder to manage work and life now because of childcare disruptions, particularly “not having daycare” for her 2-year-old. Megan (41, white mother, 3 children) similarly felt that lack of childcare made working remotely more difficult than working before the pandemic. Megan’s youngest (1) has special needs that make it even more challenging: “But

it's because of my personal circumstances. I think if he didn't have special needs, it would have been the same."

Other parents found it more challenging to enforce work-life boundaries while working from home. Kelsey said, "Just mentally knowing I'm not done with work until, like 2 a.m. A lot of times, it's just mentally… I just feel like I'm always working." While saving time without a commute was a benefit for many, it also made shifting from life to work more difficult. For example, Joseph said:

> Now it's much much harder, I need to be more firm with work. Like I have to, whereas cause I had the physical thing where I was moving myself into the office where it was. That was my, you know it's work time, right? … It's much more mental now.

Divisions of labor were also related to whether parents reported it easier or harder to manage work and life than before the pandemic. Participants with a more egalitarian division of labor were more likely to report that managing work and life is easier now than before the pandemic. Nine of the thirteen parents who reported an even split in childcare labor found it easier to manage work and life now (69%) compared to two who found it more difficult now (15%). Ten of the sixteen parents with an even split in household labor reported it is easier now (63%), compared to four who find it more difficult now (25%). Eleven participants had an even split in both household and childcare divisions of labor; seven reported that it is now easier to manage work and life (64%) compared to two participants feeling it is now more difficult (18%). Overall, those with a more equal division of labor found it easier to manage work and life now.

Whether they found it easier or more difficult, all participants in the study confirmed that working remotely is now their choice. Whether that choice is due to it being easier to work remotely or out of necessity, there are benefits to working remotely part- or full-time instead of

going into the office full-time. Participants enjoy their flexibility and control while working remotely and have strategies to adjust their work-life boundaries to meet their preferences.

# CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The prevalence of remote work at the beginning of the COVID pandemic led many researchers to examine how work and life boundaries have shifted. During the initial lockdown, parents of young children and employed mothers especially reported higher levels of work-life conflict and struggled to maintain work-life balance (Igielnik, 2021; Schieman et al., 2021). However, many parents continue to choose remote work even in the new normal and appreciate the benefits of remote work (Baert et al., 2020; Fana et al., 2020; Ipsen et al., 2021).

Many remote workers learned to adapt to working from home during lockdown when remote work was the only option. Segmentors tended to have better work-nonwork balance during lockdown, using segmentation strategies including behavioral, temporal, physical, and communicative tactics (Allen et al., 2021). As the working world transitioned back into physical offices, it was unclear whether these strategies would continue to be used or if segmentors would self-select from remote working and return to the office full-time.

As expected, parents in this study struggled with keeping work and life separate during the initial lockdown period of COVID. Even those who prefer integrating work and life reported using segmentation strategies to strengthen the boundaries between work and life while working remotely. Although working from home is considered ideal for someone who prefers fully integrating work and life, most parents fall along the middle of the continuum of integration or segmentation preferences rather than fully integrating or fully segmenting (Chen et al., 2009; Kreiner, 2006). Even those who prefer integrating work and life may have found the forced integration from the COVID pandemic to be more integrated than they want (Shockley & Clark, 2020). This helps explain why even parents in the present study who reported preferring to integrate work and life used segmentation strategies to maintain their preferred boundaries.

Continuing into the new normal, many parents in the current study reported wanting flexibility and control over how much they integrate or segment their work and life spheres. Whether they preferred integrating or segmenting, the strategies they described focused on keeping work and life separate, particularly by keeping work out of the life sphere. While participants confirmed that working remotely is now their choice, they still rely on separation strategies to maintain the desired strength of boundary between work and life.

Like Allen et al.'s (2021) study, parents reported using temporal, physical, and communicative strategies to separate work and life while working remotely. Setting expectations was a way that parents used communication to set boundaries with family and work. However, this was framed as a mindset instead of a strategy because parents used it not only for segmentation but also for communicating expectations for integration. Similarly, the other mindset shift that arose from the data was knowing their priorities. This theme was distinct from attitudes before the pandemic. While many felt pressure before the pandemic to put work first or at least make it seem like work was a priority, the pandemic helped employees and employers realize the importance of prioritizing family. Many parents in the study felt that they could be better workers when they were allowed to make choices prioritizing family. For some, this meant allowing life to blend into work rather than keeping the two completely separate.

The remaining four themes focused on strategies used specifically to distinguish the two spheres and strengthen the boundaries between them. Turning off work technology was used as both a temporal and physical tactic. For some, turning off technology happened at a specific time every day (temporal). For others, having work and personal technology separate helped strengthen the boundary between work and life (physical). Fathers in this study were slightly more likely to report using turning off technology as a strategy. Sticking to a schedule was

another temporal tactic that parents reported using. Having a routine to distinguish work hours from family hours when both are in the same place was important for parents to replace the physical commute many had before the pandemic.

The final strategies were physical tactics parents used to create a spatial boundary between work and life. Parents, especially fathers, emphasized the importance of having a designated home office space separate from the family living space. Several parents mentioned using the walk to and from the space to replace their previous commute, giving them time to shift out of the work sphere and into the life sphere or vice-versa. Some took the physical boundary further with the fourth strategy, having a door-closed policy. Parents working remotely expressed the importance of having a way to signal to their family that even though they are home, if the door is closed, they are focused and should be considered "at work."

While presented as distinct themes, the four strategies and two mindset shifts have clear overlaps in both use and benefits for parents. Many parents used multiple strategies to separate work and life, such as turning off work technology at the same time every day and leaving the technology behind in the designated home office space. Parents also used the closed-door policy to set expectations and clarify boundaries with their families. All six themes underlie the importance of having control and flexibility over their work and life boundaries when working remotely.

## 6.1 Theoretical Implications

This study aimed to understand better how parents manage and navigate the boundaries between work and life. The results have several theoretical implications for work-life research. First, the results explore boundary theory by examining parents' work-life boundary management strategies during the pandemic and continuing into the new normal. Boundary theory researchers

have called for further studies on remote workers' boundary management strategies after the pandemic (Allen et al., 2021; Cho, 2020). Previous research found that remote workers used behavioral, temporal, physical, and communicative tactics during the pandemic to establish separation between work and life (Allen et al., 2021). However, the study by Allen et al. (2021) focused only on the lockdown period of COVID, with responses gathered between May and August 2020. The previous study was primarily quantitative, with one open-ended question on work-life boundary management (Allen et al., 2021). The current study helps identify which strategies are still being used now that remote work is a desired option rather than a necessity. All participants in this study choose to work remotely at least half the time. Participants have had several years to adapt to remote work and learn the most effective strategies. Using qualitative interviews for this study also allowed for deeper exploration into the context of these strategies and sensemaking parents experienced during and after the pandemic. The context and sensemaking parents experienced while adapting to working remotely before and after the pandemic and the subsequent strategies they continue to use may help future research on boundary management.

The results from this study also support previous findings that segmentation strategies benefit the work-life balance of remote workers regardless of segmentation preferences (Allen et al., 2014, 2021). Studies before the pandemic suggested that working from home may be ideal for integrators and less attractive for segmentors (Chen et al., 2009; Kreiner, 2006; Rothbard et al., 2005). Research during the pandemic, however, found that even integrators may need more separation than working from home entailed (Allen et al., 2021; Shockley & Clark, 2020). Participants in this study were more likely to prefer having some separation between work and life despite having them happen in the same house. Even participants who prefer integration over

segmentation used segmentation strategies to maintain boundaries between work and life. While integrators may allow weaker borders between work and life, this study suggests they still desire borders between the two rather than full integration. The results also confirm that parents working remotely do not need to integrate work and life fully. Instead, they can use separation strategies to strengthen the borders between work and life to their desired segmentation.

The results of this study also demonstrate both similarities and differences between mothers and fathers when working remotely. This was the first study to look at division of labor in the context of parents' work-life boundary management strategies. Parents largely reported having more equal divisions of labor and similar mindset shifts after the pandemic. Mothers and fathers were equally likely to report having more equal divisions of labor in the new normal compared to before the pandemic. Although divisions of labor were more equal, there was still more responsibility placed on the mother to manage household and childcare tasks. This was also reflected in how parents used boundary management strategies. The previous study on work-life boundary management strategies during lockdown did not look at gender differences in how the strategies were used and did not distinguish between parents and non-parents (Allen et al., 2021). In this current study, turning off technology and having a separate home office were not enough on their own for mothers to separate work and life. While fathers could use these as strategies to signal their transition into and out of work, mothers needed additional barriers to keep work and life from blending. This finding aligns with previous research that fathers may find it easier to separate work and life even when working from home (Eddleston & Mulki, 2017; Noonan et al., 2007). Mothers were more likely to report that managing work and life now is more difficult than before the pandemic. They were still responsible more often for routine household tasks and for delegating both household and childcare tasks, in line with previous research (Blair-Loy,

2009; Kolpashnikova & Kan, 2021; Lyttelton et al., 2020; Perry-Jenkins & Gerstel, 2020). Parents with more egalitarian labor divisions did find it easier to manage work and life in the new normal. These results help further our understanding of gender dynamics in the division of labor and work-life boundary navigation.

## 6.2 Practical Implications

This study also has practical implications to help parents who want to or need to work remotely better understand how to manage and navigate between work and life. Whether they prefer to keep the two spheres separate or integrate them, these strategies can help alleviate work-life conflict and create a better sense of balance. These strategies may also inform parents struggling with blurred boundaries of tactics that have helped other parents in similar circumstances.

These strategies may also help guide organizations that want to support their remote workers better, particularly employed parents. It is still crucial for organizations to listen to what their workers say they need, but these strategies suggest what may work for those working from home. For example, if an organization hears from their remote workers that it is helpful to disconnect from technology at the end of the workday, supervisors and teams may find it helpful to implement policies limiting work demands outside of work hours. This may help parents more successfully disconnect from work at the end of the day.

While the COVID pandemic was a unique crisis in terms of global impact and impact on daily life, the findings of this study may be more broadly applied to how parents navigate work-life boundaries in other crises. Now that more employees are working remotely, it is crucial to understand what strategies are most helpful in maintaining boundaries between work and life.

These strategies can be used for those who work remotely regularly and those who have to work remotely temporarily for crises, such as sickness and natural disasters.

### 6.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

A key limitation of this study is the limited generalizability of the results. The inclusion criteria by design exclude those not in a heterosexual marriage, remote workers with adult children in the home, and part-time workers. The experiences of these demographics are also important to consider when exploring the work-life boundaries of remote workers; however, this was outside this project's scope, which focused on married parents working remotely. Additionally, research has found that remote workers tend to be better educated and better paid (Bartik et al., 2020). While there was some diversity in participants' jobs and education, most participants were highly educated and likely in more privileged jobs. The experiences of less privileged remote workers were not as well captured, given the limited number of participants. Those in less privileged jobs may not have the same opportunities to work remotely and may rely on different strategies for managing work and life, particularly if they work a job that requires them to be onsite full-time. The next step for this research is to expand the selection criteria to include a wider variety of experiences, including single parents, parents in same-sex relationships, and parents who chose to go back to work full-time.

The gender differences found in the study also may not be generalizable outside of these participants. This study had a relatively small sample size, so significant conclusions cannot be drawn from the data. Although this data builds our understanding of gender differences in boundary management strategies, additional research is needed to confirm the findings.

Another potential limitation of the results arises from the interview guide and data analyses. The interview guide was designed to assess a range of experiences relating to work-life

boundaries. The focus on strategies for navigating between boundaries arose from the data analysis. While this is an integral part of inductive research, it may have limited the findings. For example, men brought up having a separate office space as a strategy more often. However, mothers may use this same strategy as often as men but do not identify it as the most critical strategy. Although these parents identified these strategies as important for managing work and life, there may be other strategies that were not included that are also beneficial for remote workers to manage work and life. Future research could further examine parents' strategies when working remotely and explore if these gender differences remain when parents are asked explicitly about all possible tactics. This next step in the research is critical to understand better how parents' work-life boundary management tactics compare to before the pandemic and during lockdown and what gender differences persist when parents are asked explicitly about these tactics.

Another critical area for future research is further exploring how employees, particularly those working from home, may have leveraged the pandemic and lockdown period to improve their boundary management. Given the dramatic shift in work from February 2020 to April 2020, we know that this was a unique time period. While parents in the current study mentioned how their organization supported them during the transition to remote work, I did not ask participants about other potential levers from the pandemic for improving their work-life boundaries. The role of gender in this context should also be further explored, as the results from this study suggest that women are more satisfied with their work-life boundaries now compared to before the pandemic. Future research can investigate if the pandemic empowered women to negotiate their work-life boundaries better and, if so, how that continues today.

Future research could also further explore the role of organizations in helping remote workers set boundaries between work and life. Previous studies have looked at ways organizations can encourage better work-life boundaries, such as limiting technology use after hours (Derks et al., 2016). Parents in this study often mentioned the role of supportive organizations and supervisors or the difficulties they face when their organization or manager is not supportive. Future studies can examine the role of supportive supervisors and supportive organizations in remote workers' work-life and how this affects their ability to maintain their desired work-life boundary strength.

## 6.4 Conclusion

Many parents continue to choose remote work in this "new normal." Remote work, which was rare before the pandemic and unavoidable during lockdown, has become a desirable option for many. This study explores parents' strategies to navigate between their work and life spheres when both are happening in the same house. The findings support the idea that even those who want to integrate work and life use strategies that encourage separation. What is most important is having the flexibility and control to adjust boundaries as they want and need instead of having strict or blurred boundaries forced on them. Parents are more likely to declare the life sphere as the priority, set expectations with family, and work to enforce boundaries. They can then use the four strategies, separately or in combination, to strengthen the boundary between work and life to the desired degree.

# REFERENCES

Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. *Gender & Society*, *4*(2), 139–158. https://doi.org/10.1177/089124390004002002

Acker, J. (2006). Inequality regimes: Gender, class, and race in organizations. *Gender & Society*, *20*(4), 441–464. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243206289499

Allen, T. D., Cho, E., & Meier, L. L. (2014). Work–family boundary dynamics. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, *1*(1), 99–121. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031413-091330

Allen, T. D., Merlo, K., Lawrence, R. C., Slutsky, J., & Gray, C. E. (2021). Boundary management and work-nonwork balance while working from home. *Applied Psychology*, *70*(1), 60–84. https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.12300

Ammons, S. K. (2013). Work-family boundary strategies: Stability and alignment between preferred and enacted boundaries. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *82*(1), 49–58. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2012.11.002

Angelov, N., Johansson, P., & Lindahl, E. (2016). Parenthood and the Gender Gap in Pay. *Journal of Labor Economics*, *34*(3), 545–579.

Baert, S., Lippens, L., Moens, E., Weytjens, J., & Sterkens, P. (2020). *The Covid-19 Crisis and Telework: A Research Survey on Experiences, Expectations and Hopes* (SSRN Scholarly Paper 3596696). https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3596696

Bartik, A. W., Cullen, Z. B., Glaeser, E. L., Luca, M., & Stanton, C. T. (2020). *What Jobs are Being Done at Home During the Covid-19 Crisis? Evidence from Firm-Level Surveys* (Working Paper 27422). National Bureau of Economic Research. https://doi.org/10.3386/w27422

Batalova, J. A., & Cohen, P. N. (2002). Premarital cohabitation and housework: Couples in cross-national perspective. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 64*(3), 743–755. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2002.00743.x

Baxter, J. (2005). To marry or not to marry: Marital status and the household division of labor. *Journal of Family Issues, 26*(3), 300–321. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X04270473

Baxter, J., Haynes, M., & Hewitt, B. (2010). Pathways into marriage: Cohabitation and the domestic division of labor. *Journal of Family Issues, 31*(11), 1507–1529. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X10365817

Beauregard, T. A., & Henry, L. C. (2009). Making the link between work-life balance practices and organizational performance. *Human Resource Management Review, 19*(1), 9–22. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2008.09.001

Berger, L. M., & McLanahan, S. S. (2015). Income, relationship quality, and parenting: Associations with child development in two-parent families. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 77*(4), 996–1015. https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12197

Besen-Cassino, Y. (2019). Gender threat and men in the post-Trump world: The effects of a changing economy on men's housework. *Men and Masculinities, 22*(1), 44–52. https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X18805549

Bianchi, S. M., Milkie, M. A., Sayer, L. C., & Robinson, J. P. (2000). Is anyone doing the housework? Trends in the gender division of household labor. *Social Forces, 79*(1), 191–228. https://doi.org/10.2307/2675569

Bianchi, S. M., Sayer, L. C., Milkie, M. A., & Robinson, J. P. (2012). Housework: Who did, does or will do it, and how much does it matter? *Social Forces, 91*(1), 55–63. https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sos120

Blair-Loy, M. (2009). *Competing Devotions: Career and Family Among Women Executives*. Harvard University Press.

Bobbitt-Zeher, D. (2011). Gender discrimination at work: Connecting gender stereotypes, institutional policies, and gender composition of workplace. *Gender & Society*, *25*(6), 764–786. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243211424741

Bochantin, J. E. (2016). "Morning fog, spider webs, and escaping from Alcatraz": Examining metaphors used by public safety employees and their families to help understand the relationship between work and family. *Communication Monographs*, *83*(2), 214–238. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637751.2015.1073853

Bochantin, J. E., & Cowan, R. L. (2016). Focusing on emotion and work–family conflict research: An exploration through the paradigms. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, *25*(4), 367–381. https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492616642330

Boeije, H. (2002). A purposeful approach to the constant comparative method in the analysis of qualitative interviews. *Quality and Quantity*, *36*(4), 391–409. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1020909529486

Bogaerts, Y., De Cooman, R., & De Gieter, S. (2018). Getting the work-nonwork interface you are looking for: The relevance of work-nonwork boundary management fit. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *9*. https://www.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01158

Brough, P., Timms, C., O'Driscoll, M. P., Kalliath, T., Siu, O.-L., Sit, C., & Lo, D. (2014). Work–life balance: A longitudinal evaluation of a new measure across Australia and New Zealand workers. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *25*(19), 2724–2744. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2014.899262

Bulger, C. A., Matthews, R. A., & Hoffman, M. E. (2007). Work and personal life boundary management: Boundary strength, work/personal life balance, and the segmentation-integration continuum. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, *12*(4), 365–375. https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-8998.12.4.365

Byron, K. (2005). A meta-analytic review of work–family conflict and its antecedents. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *67*(2), 169–198. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2004.08.009

Carlson, D. S., Kacmar, K. M., Wayne, J. H., & Grzywacz, J. G. (2006). Measuring the positive side of the work–family interface: Development and validation of a work–family enrichment scale. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *68*(1), 131–164. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2005.02.002

Carlson, D. S., Kacmar, K. M., & Williams, L. J. (2000). Construction and initial validation of a multidimensional measure of work–family conflict. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *56*(2), 249–276. https://doi.org/10.1006/jvbe.1999.1713

Carnevale, J. B., & Hatak, I. (2020). Employee adjustment and well-being in the era of COVID-19: Implications for human resource management. *Journal of Business Research*, *116*, 183–187. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.05.037

Carreri, A. (2020). Control on the 'boundary-work' in work-life articulation for flexible knowledge workers. Insights into gender asymmetries. *Social Sciences*, *9*(6), Article 6. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9060107

CDC. (2022, January 5). *CDC Museum COVID-19 Timeline*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. https://www.cdc.gov/museum/timeline/covid19.html

Chawla, N., MacGowan, R. L., Gabriel, A. S., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2020). Unplugging or staying connected? Examining the nature, antecedents, and consequences of profiles of daily

recovery experiences. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *105*(1), 19–39. https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000423

Chen, Z., Powell, G. N., & Greenhaus, J. H. (2009). Work-to-family conflict, positive spillover, and boundary management: A person-environment fit approach. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *74*(1), 82–93. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2008.10.009

Chesley, N. (2011). Stay-at-home fathers and breadwinning mothers: Gender, couple dynamics, and social change. *Gender & Society*, *25*(5), 642–664. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243211417433

Cho, E. (2020). Examining boundaries to understand the impact of COVID-19 on vocational behaviors. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *119*, 103437. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2020.103437

Chung, H., & van der Horst, M. (2018). Women's employment patterns after childbirth and the perceived access to and use of flexitime and teleworking. *Human Relations*, *71*(1), 47–72. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726717713828

Clark, S. C. (2000). Work/family border theory: A new theory of work/family balance. *Human Relations*, *53*(6), 747–770. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726700536001

Cohen, A. (2023, May 16). *Are We "Post-Pandemic" Yet?* https://www.kornferry.com/insights/briefings-magazine/issue-59/are-we-post-pandemic-yet

Collins, C., Landivar, L. C., Ruppanner, L., & Scarborough, W. J. (2021). COVID-19 and the gender gap in work hours. *Gender, Work & Organization*, *28*(S1), 101–112. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12506

Como, R., Hambley, L., & Domene, J. (2021). An exploration of work-life wellness and remote work during and beyond COVID-19. *Canadian Journal of Career Development, 20*(1), Article 1.

Coon, L. (2023, May 9). Is the pandemic over? *OSF HealthCare Blog*. https://www.osfhealthcare.org/blog/is-the-pandemic-over/

Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology, 13*(1), 3–21. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00988593

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2014). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. SAGE Publications.

Corpuz, J. C. G. (2021). Adapting to the culture of 'new normal': An emerging response to COVID-19. *Journal of Public Health, 43*(2), e344–e345. https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdab057

Craig, L., & Churchill, B. (2020). Dual-earner parent couples' work and care during COVID-19. *Gender, Work & Organization, n/a*(n/a). https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12497

Daud, K., Turiman, S., Rahmat, N., Kasi, P., Bahasa, A., Shah, U., Sdn, P., & Bhd. (2021). Working from home in the new normal: Perceived benefits and challenges. *International Virtual Symposium: Research, Industry & Community Engagement*.

Dawes, J., May, T., McKinlay, A., Fancourt, D., & Burton, A. (2021). Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health and wellbeing of parents with young children: A qualitative interview study. *BMC Psychology, 9*(1), 194. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-021-00701-8

Delanoeije, J., Verbruggen, M., & Germeys, L. (2019). Boundary role transitions: A day-to-day approach to explain the effects of home-based telework on work-to-home conflict and home-to-work conflict. *Human Relations, 72*(12), 1843–1868. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726718823071

Derks, D., Bakker, A. B., Peters, P., & van Wingerden, P. (2016). Work-related smartphone use, work–family conflict and family role performance: The role of segmentation preference. *Human Relations, 69*(5), 1045–1068. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726715601890

Desrochers, S., & Sargent, L. D. (2004). Boundary/border theory and work-family integration. *Organization Management Journal (Palgrave Macmillan Ltd.), 1*(1), 40–48. https://doi.org/10.1057/omj.2004.11

Eby, L. T., Casper, W. J., Lockwood, A., Bordeaux, C., & Brinley, A. (2005). Work and family research in IO/OB: Content analysis and review of the literature (1980–2002). *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 66*(1), 124–197. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2003.11.003

Eddleston, K. A., & Mulki, J. (2017). Toward understanding remote workers' management of work–family boundaries: The complexity of workplace embeddedness. *Group & Organization Management, 42*(3), 346–387. https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601115619548

Fana, M., Milasi, S., Napierala, J., Fernández-Macías, E., & Vázquez, I. G. (2020). *Telework, work organisation and job quality during the COVID-19 crisis: A qualitative study* (Working Paper 2020/11). JRC Working Papers Series on Labour, Education and Technology. https://www.econstor.eu/handle/10419/231343

Farr, R. H., & Patterson, C. J. (2013). Coparenting among lesbian, gay, and heterosexual couples: Associations with adopted children's outcomes. *Child Development, 84*(4), 1226–1240. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12046

Felstead, A., & Henseke, G. (2017). Assessing the growth of remote working and its consequences for effort, well-being and work-life balance. *New Technology, Work & Employment*, *32*(3), 195–212. https://doi.org/10.1111/ntwe.12097

Fisher, G. G. (2001). *Work /personal life balance: A construct development study* [Ph.D., Bowling Green State University]. https://www.proquest.com/docview/304682757/abstract/53F2736C5B424336PQ/1

Fisher, G. G., Bulger, C. A., & Smith, C. S. (2009). Beyond work and family: A measure of work/nonwork interference and enhancement. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, *14*(4), 441–456. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0016737

Fonner, K. L., & Stache, L. C. (2012). All in a day's work, at home: Teleworkers' management of micro role transitions and the work-home boundary. *New Technology, Work & Employment*, *27*(3), 242–257. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-005X.2012.00290.x

Forbes, L. K., Donovan, C., & Lamar, M. R. (2020). Differences in intensive parenting attitudes and gender norms among U.S. mothers. *The Family Journal*, *28*(1), 63–71. https://doi.org/10.1177/1066480719893964

Forbes, L. K., Lamar, M. R., Speciale, M., & Donovan, C. (2022). Mothers' and fathers' parenting attitudes during COVID-19. *Current Psychology*, *41*(1), 470–479. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-01605-x

Fram, S. M. (2013). The constant comparative analysis method outside of grounded theory. *The Qualitative Report*. https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?p=AONE&sw=w&issn=10520147&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CA350337116&sid=googleScholar&linkaccess=abs

Franken, E., Bentley, T., Shafaei, A., Farr-Wharton, B., Onnis, L., & Omari, M. (2021). Forced flexibility and remote working: Opportunities and challenges in the new normal. *Journal of Management & Organization*, 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2021.40

Fukumura, Y. E., Schott, J. M., Lucas, G. M., Becerik-Gerber, B., & Roll, S. C. (2021). Negotiating time and space when working from home: Experiences during COVID-19. *OTJR: Occupation, Participation and Health*, *41*(4), 223–231.

Fusch, P., & Ness, L. (2015). Are We There Yet? Data Saturation in Qualitative Research. *Walden Faculty and Staff Publications*, *20*(9). https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/facpubs/455

Gajendran, R. S., & Harrison, D. A. (2007). The good, the bad, and the unknown about telecommuting: Meta-analysis of psychological mediators and individual consequences. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *92*(6), 1524–1541. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.92.6.1524

Gerson, K. (2009). *The Unfinished Revolution: Coming of Age in a New Era of Gender, Work, and Family*. Oxford University Press.

Gjerdingen, D. K., & Center, B. A. (2005). First-time parents' postpartum changes in employment, childcare, and housework responsibilities. *Social Science Research*, *34*(1), 103–116. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2003.11.005

Glass, J. L., & Noonan, M. C. (2016). Telecommuting and earnings trajectories among American women and men 1989–2008. *Social Forces*, *95*(1), 217–250.

Graham, M., Weale, V., Lambert, K. A., Kinsman, N., Stuckey, R., & Oakman, J. (2021). Working at home. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, *63*(11), 938–943. https://doi.org/10.1097/JOM.0000000000002337

Greenhaus, J. H., & Allen, T. D. (2011). Work–family balance: A review and extension of the literature. In *Handbook of occupational health psychology, 2nd ed* (pp. 165–183). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/10474-000

Greenhaus, J. H., & Beutell, N. J. (1985). Sources of conflict between work and family roles. *The Academy of Management Review, 10*(1), 76–88. https://doi.org/10.2307/258214

Greenhaus, J. H., Collins, K. M., & Shaw, J. D. (2003). The relation between work–family balance and quality of life. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 63*(3), 510–531. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0001-8791(02)00042-8

Greenhaus, J. H., & Powell, G. N. (2006). When work and family are allies: A theory of work-family enrichment. *Academy of Management Review, 31*(1), 72–92. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2006.19379625

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How Many Interviews Are Enough?: An Experiment with Data Saturation and Variability. *Field Methods, 18*(1), 59–82. https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903

Hall, D. T., & Richter, J. (1988). Balancing work life and home life: What can organizations do to help? *The Academy of Management Executive, 2*(3), 213.

Harpaz, I. (2002). Advantages and disadvantages of telecommuting for the individual, organization and society. *Work Study, 51*(2), 74–80. https://doi.org/10.1108/00438020210418791

Hays, S. (1996). *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*. Yale University Press.

Hjálmsdóttir, A., & Bjarnadóttir, V. S. (2021). "I have turned into a foreman here at home": Families and work–life balance in times of COVID-19 in a gender equality paradise. *Gender, Work & Organization, 28*(1), 268–283. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12552

Hochschild, A., & Machung, A. (2012). *The second shift: Working families and the revolution at home*. Penguin.

Igielnik, R. (2021). A rising share of working parents in the U.S. say it's been difficult to handle child care during the pandemic. *Pew Research Center*. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/01/26/a-rising-share-of-working-parents-in-the-u-s-say-its-been-difficult-to-handle-child-care-during-the-pandemic/

Ipsen, C., van Veldhoven, M., Kirchner, K., & Hansen, J. P. (2021). Six Key Advantages and Disadvantages of Working from Home in Europe during COVID-19. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *18*(4). https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18041826

Jaffee, A. (2022, March 7). *Stop asking women how we manage work-life balance. Most of us don't*. Fortune. https://fortune.com/2022/03/07/stop-asking-women-how-we-manage-work-life-balance-careers-motherhood-success-alyssa-jaffee/

Johnson, R. B., McGowan, M. W., & Turner, L. A. (2010). Grounded theory in practice: Is it inherently a mixed method? *Research in the Schools*, *17*(2), 65–78.

Joseph, J., & Sebastian, D. (2019). *Work-life balance vs work-family balance-an evaluation of scope*. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.36194.38084

Karjalainen, J., Mwagiru, N., Salminen, H., & Heinonen, S. (2022). Integrating crisis learning into futures literacy – exploring the "new normal" and imagining post-pandemic futures. *On the Horizon*, *30*(2), 47–56. https://doi.org/10.1108/OTH-10-2021-0117

Kelliher, C., & Anderson, D. (2010). Doing more with less? Flexible working practices and the intensification of work. *Human Relations*, *63*(1), 83–106. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726709349199

Kelly, E. L., Ammons, S. K., Chermack, K., & Moen, P. (2010). Gendered challenge, gendered response: Confronting the ideal worker norm in a white-collar organization. *Gender & Society*, *24*(3), 281–303. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243210372073

Kerman, K., Korunka, C., & Tement, S. (2021). Work and home boundary violations during the COVID-19 pandemic: The role of segmentation preferences and unfinished tasks. *Applied Psychology*. https://iaap-journals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/apps.12335

Killewald, A., & García-Manglano, J. (2016). Tethered lives: A couple-based perspective on the consequences of parenthood for time use, occupation, and wages. *Social Science Research*, *60*, 266–282. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2016.03.007

Kirby, E. L., Golden, A. G., Medved, C. E., Jorgenson, J., & Buzzanell, P. M. (2003). An organizational communication challenge to the discourse of work and family research: From problematics to empowerment. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, *27*(1), 1–43. https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2003.11679020

Kolpashnikova, K., & Kan, M.-Y. (2021). Gender gap in housework time: How much do individual resources actually matter? *The Social Science Journal*, 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/03623319.2021.1997079

Kossek, E. E. (2016). Managing work-life boundaries in the digital age. *Organizational Dynamics*, *45*(3), 258–270. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2016.07.010

Kossek, E. E., & Lautsch, B. A. (2018). Work–life flexibility for whom? Occupational status and work–life inequality in upper, middle, and lower level jobs. *Academy of Management Annals*, *12*(1), 5–36. https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2016.0059

Kossek, E. E., Ruderman, M. N., Braddy, P. W., & Hannum, K. M. (2012). Work–nonwork boundary management profiles: A person-centered approach. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *81*(1), 112–128. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2012.04.003

Kossek, E. E., Su, R., & Wu, L. (2017). "Opting out" or "pushed out"? Integrating perspectives on women's career equality for gender inclusion and interventions. *Journal of Management*, *43*(1), 228–254. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206316671582

Kreiner, G. E. (2006). Consequences of work-home segmentation or integration: A person-environment fit perspective. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *27*(4), 485–507. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.386

Kunze, A. (2017). *The Gender Wage Gap in Developed Countries*. CESifo Group Munich. https://www.proquest.com/docview/2033755699?pq-origsite=primo

Landivar, L. C., Ruppanner, L., Scarborough, W. J., & Collins, C. (2020). Early signs indicate that COVID-19 is exacerbating gender inequality in the labor force. *Socius*, *6*, 2378023120947997. https://doi.org/10.1177/2378023120947997

Landivar, L. C., Scarborough, W. J., Ruppanner, L., Collins, C. M., & Rouse, L. (2023). Remote Schooling and Mothers' Employment During the COVID-19 Pandemic by Race, Education, and Marital Status. *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, *9*(3), 134–158. https://doi.org/10.7758/RSF.2023.9.3.06

Lingard, L., Albert, M., & Levinson, W. (2008). Grounded theory, mixed methods, and action research. *BMJ*, *337*(aug07 3), a567–a567. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.39602.690162.47

Liss, M., Schiffrin, H. H., Mackintosh, V. H., Miles-McLean, H., & Erchull, M. J. (2013). Development and validation of a quantitative measure of intensive parenting attitudes.

*Journal of Child and Family Studies*, *22*(5), 621–636. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-012-9616-y

Livingston, G., & Parker, K. (2019). 8 facts about American dads. *Pew Research Center*. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/12/fathers-day-facts/

Lupu, I., & Ruiz-Castro, M. (2021, January 29). Work-life balance is a cycle, not an achievement. *Harvard Business Review*. https://hbr.org/2021/01/work-life-balance-is-a-cycle-not-an-achievement

Lyttelton, T., Zang, E., & Musick, K. (2020). *Gender differences in telecommuting and implications for inequality at home and work*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3645561

Manuti, A., Van der Heijden, B., Kruyen, P., De Vos, A., Zaharie, M., & Lo Presti, A. (2022). Editorial: How Normal Is the New Normal? Individual and Organizational Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*, 931236. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.931236

Martucci, S. (2021). He's working from home and I'm at home trying to work: Experiences of childcare and the work–family balance among mothers during COVID-19. *Journal of Family Issues*, 0192513X211048476. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X211048476

Matthews, R. A., & Barnes-Farrell, J. L. (2010). Development and initial evaluation of an enhanced measure of boundary flexibility for the work and family domains. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, *15*(3), 330–346. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019302

McBride, K. (2023, July 13). What is "post-pandemic"? *NPR*. https://www.npr.org/sections/publiceditor/2023/07/13/1187493251/what-is-post-pandemic

Mennino, S. F., Rubin, B. A., & Brayfield, A. (2005). Home-to-job and job-to-home spillover: The impact of company policies and workplace culture. *The Sociological Quarterly, 46*(1), 107–135. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.2005.00006.x

Messenger, J. C., & Gschwind, L. (2016). Three generations of telework: New ICTs and the (r)evolution from home office to virtual office. *New Technology, Work and Employment, 31*(3), 195–208. https://doi.org/10.1111/ntwe.12073

Miller, K. (2021, November 18). *Productivity has risen with remote/hybrid working, but worker trust may pose a larger challenge: PwC survey*. PricewaterhouseCoopers. https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/news-room/press-releases/2021/pwc-future-of-work-survey-2021.html

Munsch, C. L. (2016). Flexible work, flexible penalties: The effect of gender, childcare, and type of request on the flexibility bias. *Social Forces, 94*(4), 1567–1591. https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sov122

Munsch, C. L., Ridgeway, C. L., & Williams, J. C. (2014). Pluralistic ignorance and the flexibility bias: Understanding and mitigating flextime and flexplace bias at work. *Work and Occupations, 41*(1), 40–62. https://doi.org/10.1177/0730888413515894

Netemeyer, R. G., Boles, J. S., & McMurrian, R. (1996). Development and validation of work–family conflict and family–work conflict scales. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 81*(4), 400–410. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.81.4.400

Nippert-Eng, C. E. (1996a). Calendars and keys: The classification of "home" and "work." *Sociological Forum, 11*(3), 563–582.

Nippert-Eng, C. E. (1996b). *Home and work: Negotiating boundaries through everyday life*. University of Chicago Press. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uncc-ebooks/detail.action?docID=574767

Noonan, M. C., Estes, S. B., & Glass, J. L. (2007). Do workplace flexibility policies influence time spent in domestic labor? *Journal of Family Issues*, *28*(2), 263–288. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X06292703

Noonan, M. C., & Glass, J. L. (2012). The hard truth about telecommuting. *Monthly Labor Review*, *135*(6), 38–46.

Nsair, V., & Piszczek, M. (2021). Gender matters: The effects of gender and segmentation preferences on work-to-family conflict in family sacrifice climates. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, *94*(3), 509–530. https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12361

Oleniuch, I. (2021). Employees' perception of the difficulties of work at home from the perspective of their experience on remote working. *European Research Studies Journal*, *XXIV*, 781–796. https://doi.org/10.35808/ersj/2627

Parker, K., Horowitz, J., M., & Minkin, R. (2020, December 9). How Coronavirus has changed the way Americans work. *Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project*. https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/12/09/how-the-coronavirus-outbreak-has-and-hasnt-changed-the-way-americans-work/

Parker, K., Horowitz, J. M., & Minkin, R. (2022, February 16). COVID-19 pandemic continues to reshape work in America. *Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project*. https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2022/02/16/covid-19-pandemic-continues-to-reshape-work-in-america/

Pedersen, V. B., & Jeppesen, H. J. (2012). Contagious flexibility? A study on whether schedule flexibility facilitates work-life enrichment. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, *53*(4), 347–359. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9450.2012.00949.x

Pedulla, D. S., & Thébaud, S. (2015). Can we finish the revolution? Gender, work-family ideals, and institutional constraint. *American Sociological Review*, *80*(1), 116–139. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122414564008

Perry-Jenkins, M., & Gerstel, N. (2020). Work and family in the second decade of the 21st century. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *82*(1), 420–453. https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12636

Peters, P., & Blomme, R. J. (2019). Forget about 'the ideal worker': A theoretical contribution to the debate on flexible workplace designs, work/life conflict, and opportunities for gender equality. *Business Horizons*, *62*(5), 603–613. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2019.04.003

Petts, R., Carlson, D. L., & Pepin, J. (2020). *A gendered pandemic: Childcare, homeschooling, and parents' employment during COVID-19*. https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/gwkzx

Pew Research Center. (2015). The rise in dual income households. *Pew Research Center*. https://www.pewresearch.org/ft_dual-income-households-1960-2012-2/

Powell, G. N., & Greenhaus, J. H. (2010). Sex, gender, and the work-to-family interface: Exploring negative and positive interdependencies. *The Academy of Management Journal*, *53*(3), 513–534.

Rothbard, N. P., Phillips, K. W., & Dumas, T. L. (2005). Managing multiple roles: Work-family policies and individuals' desires for segmentation. *Organization Science*, *16*(3), 243–259.

Rudolph, C. W., & Zacher, H. (2021). Family demands and satisfaction with family life during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Couple and Family Psychology: Research and Practice*, *10*(4), 249–259. https://doi.org/10.1037/cfp0000170

Saunders, B., Sim, J., Kingstone, T., Baker, S., Waterfield, J., Bartlam, B., Burroughs, H., & Jinks, C. (2018). Saturation in qualitative research: Exploring its conceptualization and operationalization. *Quality & Quantity*, *52*(4), 1893–1907. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-017-0574-8

Scarborough, W. J., Sin, R., & Risman, B. (2019). Attitudes and the stalled gender revolution: Egalitarianism, traditionalism, and ambivalence from 1977 through 2016. *Gender & Society*, *33*(2), 173–200. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243218809604

Schieman, S., Badawy, P. J., A. Milkie, M., & Bierman, A. (2021). Work-life conflict during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Socius*, *7*, 2378023120982856. https://doi.org/10.1177/2378023120982856

Schieman, S., & Glavin, P. (2016). The pressure-status nexus and blurred work–family boundaries. *Work and Occupations*, *43*(1), 3–37. https://doi.org/10.1177/0730888415596051

Schieman, S., & Young, M. (2010). Is there a downside to schedule control for the work-family interface? *Journal of Family Issues*, *31*(10), 1391–1414. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X10361866

Senarathne Tennakoon, K. L. U. (2021). Empowerment or enslavement: The impact of technology-driven work intrusions on work–life balance. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences / Revue Canadienne Des Sciences de l'Administration*, *38*(4), 414–429. https://doi.org/10.1002/cjas.1610

Sherman, J. (2017). “Stress that I don’t need”: Gender expectations and relationship struggles among the poor. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *79*(3), 657–674. https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12387

Shockley, K. M., & Clark, M. A. (2020, April 6). *Work-Family Balance Struggles in the Time of COVID-19*. Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology. https://www.siop.org/Research-Publications/Items-of-Interest/ArtMID/19366/ArticleID/3454/Work-Family-Balance-Struggles-in-the-Time-of-COVID-19

Shockley, K. M., Shen, W., DeNunzio, M. M., Arvan, M. L., & Knudsen, E. A. (2017). Disentangling the relationship between gender and work–family conflict: An integration of theoretical perspectives using meta-analytic methods. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *102*(12), 1601–1635. https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000246

Shows, C., & Gerstel, N. (2009). Fathering, class, and gender: A comparison of physicians and emergency medical technicians. *Gender & Society*, *23*(2), 161–187. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243209333872

Thébaud, S., & Halcomb, L. (2019). One step forward? Advances and setbacks on the path toward gender equality in families and work. *Sociology Compass, 13*(6), e12700. https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12700

Thomas, M. (2021, March 29). *Improving Work-Life Balance: Is There Such a Thing As Business Hours Anymore?* Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/sites/maurathomas/2021/03/29/improving-work-life-balance-is-there-such-a-thing-as-business-hours-anymore/?sh=1a8b4eee2e69

Tone Innstrand, S., Melbye Langballe, E., Falkum, E., Espnes, G. A., & Aasland, O. G. (2009). Gender-specific perceptions of four dimensions of the work/family interaction. *Journal of Career Assessment*, *17*(4), 402–416. https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072709334238

Townsend, N., & Townsend, N. (2002). *Package Deal: Marriage, Work and Fatherhood In Men'S Lives*. Temple University Press.

*United States Tracking: Overview*. (2022, June 27). Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center. https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/

Valcour, M. (2007). Work-based resources as moderators of the relationship between work hours and satisfaction with work-family balance. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *92*(6), 1512–1523. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.92.6.1512

Van Kessel, P., Baronavski, C., Scheller, A., & Smith, A. (2021, March 5). How the COVID-19 pandemic has changed Americans' personal lives. *Pew Research Center*. https://www.pewresearch.org/2021/03/05/in-their-own-words-americans-describe-the-struggles-and-silver-linings-of-the-covid-19-pandemic/

van Zoonen, W., Sivunen, A., & Rice, R. E. (2020). Boundary communication: How smartphone use after hours is associated with work-life conflict and organizational identification. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, *48*(3), 372–392. https://doi.org/10.1080/00909882.2020.1755050

Vaziri, H., Casper, W. J., Wayne, J. H., & Matthews, R. A. (2020). Changes to the work–family interface during the COVID-19 pandemic: Examining predictors and implications using latent transition analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *105*(10), 1073–1087. https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000819.supp

Waddell, N., Overall, N. C., Chang, V. T., & Hammond, M. D. (2021). Gendered division of labor during a nationwide COVID-19 lockdown: Implications for relationship problems and satisfaction. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *38*(6), 1759–1781. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407521996476

Wayne, J. H., Butts, M. M., Casper, W. J., & Allen, T. D. (2017). In search of balance: A conceptual and empirical integration of multiple meanings of work–family balance. *Personnel Psychology*, *70*(1), 167–210. https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12132

Wayne, J. H., Matthews, R. A., Odle-Dusseau, H., & Casper, W. J. (2019). Fit of role involvement with values: Theoretical, conceptual, and psychometric development of work and family authenticity. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *115*, 103317. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2019.06.005

Wayne, J. H., Matthews, R., Crawford, W., & Casper, W. J. (2020). Predictors and processes of satisfaction with work–family balance: Examining the role of personal, work, and family resources and conflict and enrichment. *Human Resource Management*, *59*(1), 25–42. https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21971

Weeden, K. A., Cha, Y., & Bucca, M. (2016). Long work hours, part-time work, and trends in the gender gap in pay, the motherhood wage penalty, and the fatherhood wage premium. *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, *2*(4), 71–102. https://doi.org/10.7758/RSF.2016.2.4.03

Wiese, B. S., Seiger, C. P., Schmid, C. M., & Freund, A. M. (2010). Beyond conflict: Functional facets of the work–family interplay. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *77*(1), 104–117. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2010.02.011

*Women in the labor force: A databook : BLS Reports: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*. (2021, April 7). U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/womens-databook/2020/home.htm

Wright, K. B., Riemann, W., & Fisher, C. L. (2021). Work–life-imbalance during the COVID-19 pandemic: Exploring social support and health outcomes in the United States. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 0*(0), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/00909882.2021.1965186

Yavorsky, J. E., Dush, C. M. K., & Schoppe-Sullivan, S. J. (2015). The production of inequality: The gender division of labor across the transition to parenthood. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 77*(3), 662–679. https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12189

Young, M., & Schieman, S. (2018). Scaling back and finding flexibility: Gender differences in parents' strategies to manage work–family conflict. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 80*(1), 99–118. https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12435

APPENDIX A: Interview Participant Characteristics

| **Characteristics** | **% or Average** | **Min** | **Max** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender (% Female) | 50% | | |
| Ages | 40.7 | 27 | 59 |
| Hours Worked Per Week | 40.4 | 30 | 48 |
| Tenure in Role (months) | 61.6 | 2 | 301 |
| Race | | | |
| White (Non-Hispanic) | 78% | | |
| Black | 9% | | |
| Asian | 3% | | |
| Latinx | 6% | | |
| Multiple races | 3% | | |
| Sexual Orientation (% Heterosexual) | 94% | | |
| Education | | | |
| No college degree | 16% | | |
| Associate's or Bachelor's degree | 41% | | |
| Master's, Professional, or Doctorate degree | 44% | | |
| Number of children | 2.3 | 1 | 5 |
| Age of children | 7 | 0 | 23 |
| Remote work before pandemic? | | | |
| Yes (most or all the time) | 19% | | |
| Some (several times a week or month) | 16% | | |
| No (rarely or never) | 66% | | |

*Note.* $N = 32$.

APPENDIX B: Interview Themes and Categories

| Theme | Category | Description | Example |
|---|---|---|---|
| Set Realistic Expectations | Mindset | Work with your family and coworkers to set realistic expectations | “It's a lot of it, the habits that I built up, and also communication with, like my manager and my teammates at work they very much know, like I’m a dad. I have a wife who’s a nurse. I have children who are young ages, and they know what my life is, and I’m very open about that.” - Justin |
| Know Your Priorities | Mindset | Prioritize what is important; family and life come first | “I try to keep them separate, and you know life is far more important than work. Like I said, you. You work to live, not live to work… because that there's been some things that have happened, and you know the last three years that have dramatically changed the paradigm, and what's important” - Haley |
| Turn off Technology | Strategy (Technology) | At the end of the workday, turn off or limit time on work technology | “Well, I'm definitely back to putting my phone away. putting it on silent, ignoring it. Announce, like on instant messaging, announcing, I'm not available, and really being not available.” - Kelsey |
| Stick to a Schedule | Strategy (Time) | Time management; Block off time and set firm end hours for work | “Yeah, 7:30 to 4:30, all right. I'm done with work. It's home time. It's kids’ time. It's wife time, whatever. And then, if I need to make up anything, I'll do it after everybody else has gone to bed.” - Nicholas |
| Designated Home Office Space | Strategy (Physical) | Have a designated space that is used for work that you can walk away from at the end of the workday | “By physically being separated in the upstairs of the house in a separate room. That was sort of a good way to just enforce that boundary, and then if I come out at the room, that means I’m more like available, you know I’m not working when I’m out of the room for the most part.” - Justin |
| Door Closed Policy | Strategy (Physical) | When the door is closed, your family knows that you are doing focused work and cannot be disturbed | “The biggest thing is I lock my door. Ain’t no one coming in here. This is, this is Dad's work time.” - Jordan |

# APPENDIX C: Qualtrics Survey

[Page 1: Introduction to the study/consent form]

(Consent Form – Survey)

[Page 2: Inclusion criteria]

1. Do you work full-time (at least 30 hours a week)?
    a. Yes
    b. No
2. Do you work from home (work remotely) at least 50% of the time in an average week?
    a. Yes
    b. No
3. Are you married to someone who identifies as a different gender than you?
    a. Yes
    b. No
4. Do you have at least one child under the age of 18 living in your household?
    a. Yes
    b. No

[Page 3: Interested in Interview?]

5. *Are you interested in participating in a follow-up interview? If you participate in the interview, you will receive $25. The interviews will be about 1- to 1.5-hours long and will be conducted over Zoom.
   I am interviewing parents who work from home to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their work-life boundaries. In the interview, I will ask about work tasks and household and childcare tasks before the pandemic, during the lockdown period, and now. If you have questions about participating in the study, please contact me at adicks10@uncc.edu.
    a. Yes, I am interested in an interview (continue)
    b. No, I am not interested in an interview (move to demographics)
6. Thank you for your interest! Please provide an email address where I can contact you to schedule a follow-up interview. The email address you provide should be an email that you check regularly. This will help make sure I can contact you to schedule the interview. I recommend using a non-Prolific email address since Prolific emails do not allow attachments to be sent. The interview consent document is sent as an attachment and must be signed before the interview. You must provide an email address if you want to be interviewed.
    a. [fill in]

[Page 4: Demographics]

7. Which best describes your gender?

   a. Woman
   b. Man
   c. Non-binary
   d. Transgender woman
   e. Transgender man
   f. Agender
   g. Prefer to self-describe
8. What best describes your sexual orientation?
   a. Straight/heterosexual
   b. Gay or lesbian
   c. Bisexual
   d. Queer
   e. Asexual
   f. Prefer to self-describe
9. Which best describes your race/ethnicity? (Select all that apply)
   a. American Indian or Alaskan Native
   b. Asian
   c. Black or African American
   d. Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish origin
   e. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   f. White
   g. Some other race, ethnicity, or origin
10. What is your age (in years, whole numbers only)? (Fill in)
11. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   a. Less than a high school diploma
   b. High School, diploma or GED
   c. Some college, without degree
   d. Trade/technical/vocational training
   e. Associate's degree (for example: AA, AS)
   f. Bachelor's degree (for example: BA, BS)
   g. Master's degree (for example: MA, MS, MEng, MEd, MSW, MBA)
   h. Professional degree (for example: MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD)
   i. Doctorate degree (for example: PhD, EdD)
12. How many hours do you work per week (whole numbers only)? (fill in)
13. How long have you been in your current role (in months, whole numbers only)? (fill in)

[Page 5: Completion code for Prolific]

Please use the completion code below to confirm on Prolific you have completed the study. Once you submit the confirmation code, your payment will be processed within 24 hours.

(Completion code provided by Prolific)

[Page 6: Thank you and end of survey]

Thank you for participating in the study! If you indicated that you are interested in participating in a follow-up interview, the Primary Investigator will contact you. If you have any questions, please email Ashleigh Dickson at **adicks10@uncc.edu**.
Completion code: (Completion code provided by Prolific – same code as above but put in two places in case they forget to copy the code on the page before)

*Required question for logic

# APPENDIX D: Interview Guide

## Introduction

Thank you so much for taking the time for this interview today. I am hoping this study will help us better understand how parents, especially those working remotely, have had their work and lives changed by the pandemic. First, I want to confirm that the email I initially contacted you at is where you want to receive the $25 Amazon gift card. Is that correct? [If yes, move on; if no, confirm email address they want to use]

Before we begin, I want to confirm that you consent to the recording of this interview. It will only be used to create and check the transcript of our conversation. You will be given a pseudonym in the transcript so your name and any identifying information will be removed from the transcript. Zoom also automatically creates a video recording file when using the transcript feature, but the video file will be deleted immediately after the interview since it will not be used for the study. The audio recording will be deleted after I review the transcript for accuracy. Do you consent to the recording?

[If yes, begin audio recording] To confirm, do you consent to the recording? Great!

## Information about the Participant

Thank you again for your participation. I am excited to hear your perspectives. First, I'd like to provide a brief overview of the interview. To begin, I will start with a few general questions about you, your family and life, and your work. We'll talk a bit about your life pre-pandemic and then we'll move on to questions that address how COVID-19 has affected your work and life. So, unless you have any initial questions, we can begin!

- First, can you introduce yourself?
- Tell me about your family.
    - Spouse name, how long you've been together
        - Spouse's job
    - Children, age(s) and grade(s)
    - Pets?
    - Is anyone else in the house?
- What do you do for work? Elevator-pitch style (1-2 minutes)
    - Briefly find out more about the organization they work for, their job, and their responsibilities

## Work/life pre-pandemic

*Next, we'll be moving on to questions about your life and work before the pandemic.*

- What did a typical work week look like for you before the pandemic? What would a typical workday look like?

  - How many hours did you work per day/per week?
  - What did your commute look like?
- How often did you work remotely?
  - If worked remotely, how often and what did that look like?
  - Where did you work from?
  - Could you work from home if you needed to?
  - Did your spouse work remotely?
- How often would you bring work home with you?
  - What did that look like?
  - How did you manage that work?
- How often did you do home or family tasks at work?
  - What did that look like?
  - How did you manage those tasks?
- How did you and your spouse divide housework?
  - Childcare?
- In work-life research, we often look at work and life as two spheres (show image). In one sphere you'll have work tasks such as emails, calls with clients, and meetings. In the other sphere, you'll have the things that make up the rest of your life, such as household tasks, childcare, your social life, friends, etc. Think about your work and life spheres **before** the pandemic – how did you handle the responsibilities of the two spheres?
  - Did you tend to keep the two separate, or did they sometimes blur or blend together?
  - Did you like how much they were (or were not) separated? Or would you have preferred a different way of handling the two?
  - What strategies did you use to keep work and life separate (or to blend work and life together)?

**Effects of COVID-19**

*The next set of questions will ask how the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic affected both your life and your work. Think about the period when lockdown measures were in place, beginning in March 2020 and throughout the rest of 2020.*

- How did COVID-19 affect your work in your job?
  - When did you first begin to feel the effects of COVID-19 at work?
  - What changed?

- When did you switch to working remotely full/part-time?
    - Did you have a choice in working remotely?
    - How did your hours change?
    - What did a typical day look like working remotely at the beginning of the pandemic?
    - What was the biggest adjustment working remotely?
- Was your employer supportive or not of you working remotely?
    - How did your organization support (or not support) you during this shift?
- How were your children affected by the pandemic?
    - Childcare dropped?
    - School – virtual?
- How did childcare closure/school changes affect the amount of housework and childcare you did during a typical workday?
    - How did you and your partner adjust housework and childcare?
    - Did your partner also work remotely?
    - What factors went into deciding who did what around the house?
- (Bring up the image again) How did the pandemic affect how you handled both your work and life spheres?
    - Did you find that work was interrupting life more often? Or life interrupting work?
    - Did your preferences for keeping them separate or letting them blend change? If so, why?
    - Compared to before the pandemic, was this blending or separation better, or would you have preferred something different?
    - What strategies were you using to keep your work and life separate? (Or to allow them to blend together)?

**Managing work and life in the new normal**

*The last set of questions addresses how you are currently managing your work and home life in the "new normal."*

- What does a typical work week/workday look like for you now?
    - How often do you work remotely now? Hours/percentage of the time?
        - Is working remotely now your choice?
    - Is your employer supportive or not of you working remotely now??
        - How is your organization supporting (or not supporting) you as you work remotely?

        - Can you provide an example of how your org supports you working remotely? Like how does your employer show that support?
    - How would you compare work now to before the pandemic?
    - What is the biggest challenge you currently face at work?
- What does your current childcare or your children's schooling look like now?
    - What do you do if they need to stay home?
- Does your spouse work remotely now?
- How are you and your partner currently splitting housework? Childcare?
    - What factors influence how you and your spouse split these tasks?
    - How does this compare to how you and your partner handled housework/childcare before the pandemic?
        - More or less equal than before the pandemic?
- (Bring up the image again) How would you describe your work and life spheres now? How does that compare to before the pandemic?
    - What would be your ideal way to handle the two spheres now that you've been through COVID and are in the new normal?
    - Are you working toward this ideal? What strategies are you using to keep work and life separate (or to allow work and life to blend together)?
    - Do you feel constrained in trying to reach this ideal? If so, what is keeping you from what you prefer?
    - Is it easier or harder now to manage both work and life?

**Wrap-up**

- Are there any final things that came to your mind that we did not talk about?
- THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME. Your responses have been incredibly insightful.
- Confirm that the Amazon gift card will be sent within 24 hours.

**Image**