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Home at Work or Work at Home?
On the Understanding and Dynamics of Border Areas
during a Pandemic

Abstract: The article examines some of the findings of a qualitative research project that looked into the issue of daily "boundary work" as experienced by working adults with and without children during the COVID-19 pandemic. We define boundary work as work that occurs at the intersection of two domains: work and life. We concentrate on border locations in the context of two major issues: first, how people identify borders (boundary identity), and second, what individual coping strategies (cognitive and emotional boundary work) were produced by the pandemic. Because of the frequent spatial overlap between the two spheres (work and life), temporal and spatial boundaries became ineffective, and the majority of the labor of creating borders was moved to mental and emotional levels.

Keywords: work-life boundary, boundary work, collapsed role boundary, permeability, COVID-19, Poland

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused profound changes in all aspects of social, economic, political, and cultural life. The pandemic, especially during the lockdown, forced many (if not all) people in Poland to alter their work habits and daily routines. In other words, it has left its mark on how individuals adjust their work and non-work domains of life to the new and still unstable pandemic reality (Drozdowski et al. 2020a, 2020b).

The COVID-19 pandemic has further complicated the intricacies of work-life relations. In the face of the new coronavirus, almost all work institutions switched from working from the office to working from home. According to the findings of the Central Statistical Office (Statistics Poland), at the end of December 2020 (when the data collection stage of the project was being completed), 10.8% of all employed people worked remotely (this was 5 percentage points more than at the end of September 2020). People in the public sector were more likely than those in the private sector to work remotely in Q4 2020. Remote work was most frequent in areas such as information technology and communications, professional, scientific, and technical activities, financial and insurance

activities, education, and public administration (GUS 2021). This means that remote work was mostly done by persons who were relatively privileged in terms of their level of education and social and professional status. It's also worth noting that studies of the epidemic through the lens of the middle class, even in the broad sense, reveal only part of the pandemic's psychosocial consequences.

Remote work has exacerbated some of the adverse effects of the pandemic on employment and hours (see, among others, Crosslin, Bailey 2021; Ipsen et al. 2021; Okuyan, Begen 2021; Schieman et al. 2021). Researchers indicate that the pandemic has increased the care burden of women and families, especially in regard to unpaid care work (Power 2020) and balancing office work with household work during lockdown (Kaur, Sharma 2020). With the closing of or limited access to restaurants, gyms, movie theatres, and other places of social engagement, and the restrictions on in-person gatherings with friends and family outside the household, the boundaries of "personal life" narrowed sharply, and most social interactions switched to online or phone communication. At least in recent memory, no other societal shock produced such sweeping restrictions on the scope of individuals' personal and social lives (Stainback et al. 2020).

The daily functioning of both Poles and residents of all countries afflicted by the COVID-19 epidemic occurs mainly in border[1] areas, where the imbalance between work and life and day-to-day functioning in the two domains simultaneously causes individuals to cross borders. Although some researchers on boundary management strategies emphasize individuals' personal decisions or preferences for integration or segmentation (Kossek et al. 1999; Kossek et al. 2006), individual choices about the extent and timing of work-and-home role integration may have been structurally constrained during the pandemic (Gallacher, Hossain 2020; Messacar et al. 2020; Schieman, Badawy 2021). During the first four months of the pandemic, surveys performed in all European Union nations and the United Kingdom indicated that work-life imbalance was most prominent among parents (particularly women) with children under the age of 12 (Eurofound 2020: 20–22). The younger the respondent's children, the more frequently work-life problems were mentioned. Those who worked only from home were substantially more likely than those who worked outside the home to believe that their family constrained them from committing time to work and caused them to be concerned about work even when they were not working. Those who worked outside the home, on the other hand, were significantly more likely than those working at home to believe that their job hindered them from spending time with their family and that they were too fatigued after work to do housework (Eurofound 2020: 22).

It can be assumed that individuals in a pandemic are under mounting pressure to function in border areas and that as the worlds of work and private life converge, people's efforts to establish harmony, balance, and independence will only be intensified (cf. Allen et al. 2021; Kerman et al. 2021; Schieman et al. 2021).

In the following text, we focus on border/boundary areas in the context of two questions: first, what they are and how people identify them (boundary identity) in the time of COVID; and second, what kind of work people conduct around borders (cognitive and emotional

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[1] We use the terms border and boundary interchangeably, which will be explained in the following part of our text.

boundary work). We believe the defining feature of boundaries in a pandemic is their permeability; thus, we are interested in permeation directions, border-area expansion, and contraction processes.

Conceptual Background

To comprehend the magnitude of the current changes, we must return to the 1990s and the era of the "new economy," which was characterized by an increased sharing of knowledge and information and in the development of the information and communication technologies that dynamized globalization processes. With time, the "new economy" came to define social functioning, implying changes in the organization of daily life, new types of work, as well as alternative political practices or new lifestyles. Its emergence significantly expanded the temporal and spatial boundaries of paid work, allowed people to work more "flexibly" and (potentially) better reconcile paid work with other activities, including unpaid work or care for dependents, and revolutionized women's work, allowing them to take up flexible work *en masse* (cf. Gądecki, Jewdokimow, Żadkowska 2017).

As a response to these developments, the new economy has fueled the advocacy and implementation of work-life balance (WLB) regulations and programs. WLB programs, which were (and still are) designed to help people achieve satisfaction in both spheres by maintaining a balance between work and life, quickly became inadequate in the face of the increasing complexity, fluidity, and uncertainty of contemporary work-life relationships (including family life).

The relation between the domains of work and life is increasingly treated as inseparable, multifaceted, and much more complex than in the postulates of WLB. In this context, new proposals to define the essence of balance began to emerge, such as work-life integrity, which emphasizes the maintenance of harmony based on the most important values for individuals; work-life quality, which emphasizes the maintenance of quality of life; work-life rhythm, which emphasizes the management of one's productivity; and work-life blending, which emphasizes the essence of the interpenetration of work and private life (after: Tomaszewska-Lipiec 2018: 66–67).

In addition, WLB is a rather superficial depiction of the diverse challenges faced by the modern worker. WLB postulates that work is not part of life (work versus life), which seems to ignore the differences between paid and unpaid work, for example, by undervaluing unpaid care work and focusing mainly on workers who lack time and are economically well off (cf. Gądecki, Jewdokimow, Żadkowska 2017).

Furthermore, research has paid significantly less attention to the personal sphere in favor of organizational policies. Instead of the conceptions of balance that characterize WLB, in the following text we will refer to theories known as "work-life border theories," which, in our opinion, better represent the complexity of the link between private and professional life. We conclude that the complexity of the contemporary work landscape necessitates the negotiation of these borders, both to determine where they are and to manage the process of crossing or controlling their permeability (Mroczkowska, Kubacka 2019, Mroczkowska, Kubacka 2020; Mroczkowska 2020).

Border areas are not easy to define because there is an overlap between the different logics associated with different spheres of action and the performance of roles (e.g., domestic roles, work roles, social roles). Borders are broadly understood as processes of active movement of individuals between the spheres of work and life (including family life) in situations where role blurring is a widespread phenomenon (Allen et al. 2014). At the same time, border-crossing activities occur, which Georg Simmel (1955) metaphorically described as "crossing a bridge" and Eviatar Zerubavel (1991) described as a "cognitive leap between categories." These activities focus on the everyday battle with various temporal systems to master or balance them cognitively and emotionally. Furthermore, there are transition rituals, that is, routine behaviors signaling the transition from one role to another (e.g., a change of clothes, packing a briefcase) (Ashforth et al. 2000).

Two perspectives on border areas can be distinguished: (1) boundary theory and (2) work-family border theory. The first, boundary theory, focuses on the creation, maintenance, and change of boundaries, that is, the efforts made to simplify and classify the world around us (Zerubavel 1991; Ashforth et al. 2000). This theory relates to boundaries that are chiefly psychological. Such a perspective is used in the analysis of (1) meanings that individuals attribute to the work and home domains (Nippert-Eng 1996a), and (2) transitions between work and family roles (in terms of frequency and ease) (Ashforth, Kreiner, Fugate 2000). If the home and work zones are clearly separated, the boundaries are strong (thick), whereas if the two domains intermingle, the boundaries are weak and thin. Work-family border theory, on the other hand, is concerned with work-family balance, including (1) temporal boundaries, (2) spatial boundaries, (3) work roles, (4) family roles, and (5) people associated with work and family (domain members). The balance between work and family is achieved depending on the resemblance or differentiation between the two domains, or the boundary's strength. Borders have a physical dimension (providing information about where a behavior typical of a role from a particular domain occurs), a temporal dimension (when actions typical of a role from a particular domain are taken) and a psychological dimension (patterns of thinking, behaviors and emotions typical of or relevant to each domain). The literature assumes that boundary/border theories describe the same area of reality and that the differences in the name only stem from when and why these perspectives arose (Allen et al. 2014: 101). The basic assumptions of border and boundary theories are essentially the same. The theories, however, are distinct in the way they emerged. The boundary theory originated as a cognitive-sociological approach that sought to understand the processes occurring in different spheres of life (assuming that these spheres were previously developed by individuals in their everyday activities, as people seek to classify and categorize the world in order to exercise control over it) and link them to the social dimension. On the other hand, the emergence of the border theory is associated with the shortcomings of previous conceptualizations of work-family relationships (Clark 2000).

The term "boundary" is more frequently used in the literature than the term "border," and both theories are seen as presenting the same approach to the study of work-life relationships—both perspectives focus on how individuals create boundaries between work and life and how they negotiate and manage them (Allen et al. 2014).

From the perspective of the theory of boundary areas, the domain of professional work does not exhaust the concept of work, and, due to unpaid household work, care work, and

energy-intensive emotional work (performed in both professional and private contexts), the private domain is not synonymous with the concept of "life outside work" (or leisure).

In this situation, the study on border areas must go beyond the traditional understanding of borders equated with physical, temporal, and spatial boundaries, and consider cognitive (psycho-mental) boundaries and the reciprocal dynamics between the indicated types of borders. It is essential to emphasize the interplay between physical, temporal, and psychological boundaries where each may define another. The creation of boundaries is considered to be a dynamic process consisting in (re)creating, performing, ordering, and enacting boundaries in a way that has a subjective meaning to individuals (Clark 2000: 765).

Research Methodology

In this article, we refer to selected excerpts from a research project entitled "On the Treadmill of Everyday Life during the Pandemic: Work-Life Boundary Dynamics in Three Types of Organizations in Poland" conducted among residents of Poznan between October 2020 and March 2021. In that period, schools were doing remote learning at all grade levels, and the number of officially confirmed new COVID cases was around 13,000 a day. Students stayed at home, regardless of age. Nurseries and kindergartens stopped operating. Parents did not know if the entire institution had been shuttered or if a specific group had been quarantined from one day to the next. Trade, service, and cultural institutions were all subject to restrictions. Vaccination was not yet available (medical professionals, social workers, and uniformed services were vaccinated first, at the end of December, 2020) (COVID-19 Pandemic in Poland 2020).

We identified three key research questions: (1) What kinds of changes to the interface of work and non-work life have occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic? (2) How have Poles tried to adapt to the changes in their everyday lives? (3) How has the experience of the pandemic changed social expectations toward managing the interface of work and non-work life?

Our research followed the ethnographic-interpretative perspective in sociology. A mixed methodology, with a qualitative-quantitative approach (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie 2004), was used. It combined different research techniques:

(1) A survey questionnaire containing questions on socio-demographic variables and the professional and family situation of the respondents.

(2) A projective technique of story completion about the combination of family and work roles for women and men during the pandemic.

(3) A spatio-temporal diary used to record daily activities, their time and place, the interactions undertaken within them, and self-observation of feelings associated with these activities. The data from the diary made it possible to obtain information on the quantity and quality of time devoted to activities from the domain of work and family life, their separation and overlapping and interpenetration. The respondents filled in the diary for seven days and sent their entries to the researchers at a fixed time every day.

(4) A remotely conducted, semi-structured individual in-depth interview (IDI), in which respondents described the functioning of boundary areas during the pandemic

(Deakin, Wakefield 2014; Kvale 2021). During the interviews, the research participants also had the opportunity to share their reflections and feelings about the whole week's work with the spatio-temporal diary. Interviewees' statements concerned two pandemic waves: one in the spring and the other in the autumn/winter of 2020. Based on the interviews, it was possible to compare experiences characteristic of the two pandemic stages and to reconstruct specific components of their dynamics.

The interviews lasted about two hours, and due to the pandemic were conducted remotely via video conferencing tools (Zoom, Skype, MS Teams). The data obtained from the spatio-temporal diaries was categorized and subjected to a quantitative analysis (Babbie 2003), which served as the basis for the in-depth interview guidelines. The interviews were recorded as audio files and transcribed. In total, over 240 pages of materials were obtained and then subjected to a qualitative analysis using a prepared code key (in the MAXQDA program). The code hierarchy was established following the continuous comparison method (Glaser, Strauss 2009).

This paper is based mainly on the data derived from the spatio-temporal diary and in-depth interviews, in which the respondents had the opportunity to structure their experiences retrospectively. The process involved assigning meanings to both past and present experiences. The material gained from the interviews is cumulative because the previously introduced research methods (the questionnaire, diary, and story completion) provided information that enabled the context of the respondents' lives to be understood.

We surveyed 12 informants selected by quota sampling based on their type of work organization (family business, project-based non-governmental organization, corporation), and family situation, that is, whether they did or did not have dependents in their care (e.g., children or seniors) (Flyvbjerg 2006). Out of the 12 respondents (all city inhabitants), there were 6 women and 6 men of working age.

Table 1

Research participants

No.	Sex/gender	Workplace	Number of children	Children's age	Marital status
1	woman	family business	2	8 and 14	couples/family with dependents
2	man	family business	0	—	couples/family without dependents
3	man	family business	2	8 and 11	couples/family with dependents
4	woman	family business	0	—	couples/family without dependents
5	man	Corporation	2	2 and 4	couples/family with dependents
6	woman	Corporation	0	—	couples/family without dependents
7	woman	Corporation	2	8 and 14	couples/family with dependents
8	woman	Corporation	0	—	couples/family without dependents
9	man	project-based NGO	0	—	couples/family without dependents
10	man	project-based NGO	2	7 and 10	couples/family with dependents
11	woman	project-based NGO	1	5	divorced with dependents
12	woman	project-based NGO	0	—	couples/family without dependents

Source: own study.

The authors aimed to gain an insight into diverse working styles and the associated work-family relationships. The selected organizations differ in the degree of formalization

of work relationships related to the overlap or separation of personal and professional relationships. There are also significant differences in the treatment of working time as contractual or task-related and in the integration or separation of work and family life. Most respondents started working from home when the pandemic broke out (some worked partly from home and partly outside the home). Moreover, several respondents had had experience of working from home prior to the pandemic; however, having to perform professional work and care for children at the same time and in the same place was a total novelty for them. In the research, the differences related to the family situation of the respondents concerned whether or not they performed care functions for dependent family members (which was associated with having or not having children). The respondents who were parents had at least one child under the age of twelve. Analysis of the research material showed that the fact of having or not having children differentiated the respondents' experiences the most: it proved much more significant than gender or the type of organization for which the respondents worked.

Analysis of the research material was conducted in several stages, beginning with open coding to identify the content of the text, followed by focused (targeted and selective) coding. Due to the specificity of the research material, the principle of coding by paragraphs was adopted as a logical consequence of the interview questions and the themes introduced by the interviewees. Selection of the most frequent and relevant codes from the perspective of the emerging theory allowed a comprehensive categorization of the data. The authors were also guided by the principle of the theoretical saturation of categories, that is, the collection of data up to the point where data similar to that already collected appears in subsequent statements, and where further exploration of the research material does not lead to new theoretical insights. The categories constructed in the course of the analysis were concerned with but not limited to: (1) understandings of the work-life boundary, (2) flexibility of the work-life boundary, (3) role blurring, (4) segmentation, (5) integration, (6) emotions, with their individual and micro-social consequences, and (7) actions in response to experienced affective states. The boundaries between these categories were often fluid. It was common for respondents to refer in a single statement to the external determinants of their emotions, the intensity of their feelings and their expression of those feelings, and the actions they undertook in response to emotions, roles, and work-life boundaries.

Daily Boundary Work and Its Dynamics

As previously stated, defining the phenomenon of boundary areas is problematic because, first and foremost, boundary areas represent a place where different logics of rationality intersect. Boundary areas refer to a situation in which different spheres of action and role performance coincide in a single experience (Allen at al. 2014). As Edley (2001 after Currie, Eveline 2011: 534) suggests, "in reality, we never leave one realm and enter another (…), we transcend the boundaries of one or two domains while being immersed in both worlds simultaneously." Thus, exploring one domain without taking a simultaneous interest in the other does not get to the bottom of what it is like to live in either of them.

First, as revealed by their statements, all the respondents experienced boundaries—a flurry of activities and actions, with their accumulation and fragmentation (Mroczkowska 2020)—for the greater part of the day.

I was hoping there would be less work. Instead, it turns out that there's three times as much. And it appears that for the same amount of work time, one can get a triple workload of tasks. And multitasking has become even more monstrous and cruel because, you know, people are on all sorts of calls all the time. [man, NGO, no children]

The table below (see Table 2) shows selected excerpts from respondents' statements, extracted from their diaries, as well as comments they made after completing the diaries. In each case, the respondents were asked to indicate areas where they were involved in more than one activity.

As previously mentioned, the lockdown situation first of all fundamentally changed and blurred spatial boundaries and relations, because activities that the respondents associated with work, school, and other usual activities, moved into the home. As the respondents often indicated, the situation was further aggravated by the blurring of boundaries that were physically and materially associated with one of the domains of life. For example, the respondents emphasized that objects used on a day-to-day basis could no longer be classified unambiguously as belonging to the work domain or the non-work domain: business objects were used for private purposes and private objects were used for business purposes.

Second, temporal boundaries and relations became considerably fuzzier due to the difficulty and often impossibility of separating time for activities undertaken in the spheres of work and private life. The table above also illustrates situations where most of the respondents needed to perform activities from different orders simultaneously. Such situations were also conducive to using remote work to pursue activities from other domains, for example, activities from the domain of household duties and private time in the work domain, that is, shopping or doctor appointments during work hours. As one of the respondents pointed out,

Such days do happen, and often, these are Fridays. It's just that some private matters creep in somewhere there. An eye specialist, for example, a private visit of course, but in a way on business, because the fact that my eyesight has deteriorated is also, I think, unfortunately to some extent the effect of the pandemic—much more screen time than before, for instance. (…) So if I had about half an hour of free time, I would do the shopping. This is exactly how I do my shopping, when I have the time, I sometimes find about half an hour in between meetings, so I've got a list, and just go and do the shopping. [man, corporation, no children]

Third, the relations and boundaries between family and work roles have become unclear, as very often in the course of the day it is necessary to play the role of parent, carer, and employee at the same time. In emphasizing this fact, an NGO worker and father of two boys (10 and 7) said,

Well, (this remote work) is the kind of situation that disrupts everything for us here, so I go, time after time, to my younger son's room to check what he's doing and how he's managing. I interrupt my work, sometimes multiple times, to check what he is up to. [man, NGO, children aged 12 and 7]

Fourth, the boundary area related to cognitive and emotional processes has expanded significantly, which is connected with the difficulty—experienced daily—of detaching

Table 2

Examples of border areas indicated by respondents

Respondent	Border areas
Woman, family business, married, children aged 14 and 8	The computer location—it's in the office, but I also use it for private work or tasks. Macramé weaving on order—it relaxes me, but still, it's work I do in front of my family. Phone calls with clients—even though it's a business relationship, since we don't get a chance to meet in person and miss the contact so much, we often switch to private matters. Simultaneously preparing lunch, doing the laundry, allocating household chores to the children, preparing packages for shipment—until 11.30, then writing texts for the website, in the meantime also helping my sons with their remote schoolwork.
Woman, corporate job, married, children aged 14 and 8	I answer a few business emails during my brief 15 min evening "relaxation." I plan my duties from work and home while driving and listen to music for relaxation to unwind after work. Now, amid the pandemic, if I don't work remotely for 2 days, I constantly think about home, whether the children can cope with remote learning on their own, what to do if I can't help them when they call.
Woman, corporate job, partner, no children	I use my lunch breaks at home to do some cleaning, run the washing machine, eat something and make overdue phone calls—all in just under an hour.
Man, corporate job, married, no children	I tick off my shopping and doctors' appointments during working hours; they are close by so I can just pop out of the house. A 3-day business stay in a hotel. That's where I sleep, eat, work, catch up on things, talk on the phone with my wife and friends, relax, read something for myself.
Man, NGO, married, children aged 10 and 7	Project work and at the same time helping children with their online classes.
Woman, NGO, divorced, child aged 5	Something that gave me food for thought is that so many of these things are done simultaneously. At the same time I'm keeping an eye on the soup, writing a business plan, answering the phone, discussing with the contractor how the training is going, answering questions about the mysterious equipment there, and still going to the toilet—all at the same time. And just as I was filling it in, it made me wonder and I saw with my own eyes that there are rarely moments when I can simply focus on just one task, which I could complete much more efficiently and quickly, and that the brain must constantly switch into 100 different modes. And this I found to be the most tiring thing.
Woman, NGO, partner, no children	After 9:30 p.m. I visit a friend and we do work for the foundation over tea, and at the same time have a nice evening. Within half an hour in the morning—getting washed and ready, feeding the cats and the dog, cleaning litter boxes, giving medication to pets, preparing breakfast, tea and my medication, having breakfast and preparing herbal tea for the day and pouring it into a thermos.

Source: Own research implemented in the period from 10.2020 to 03.2021, as part of the COVID-19 project of the Rector of Adam Mickiewicz University: *On the Treadmill of Everyday Life during the Pandemic: Work-Life Boundary Dynamics in Three Types of Organizations in Poland*.

thoughts or emotions from either the professional or private-time domains. Given the constant spatial overlap between the two spheres (work and non-work time), temporal and spatial boundaries cease to operate effectively, and most work is transferred to the mental

and emotional level. The same respondent, working as a graphic designer for a foundation, said,

Actually, I'd lean toward the idea that I transfer work into my private life. Even if I don't physically work on my work stuff, my wife complains that I'm not present. We go for a walk somewhere in the park, and instead of talking and enjoying the moment, giving attention to the kids, I have my topics to work through conceptually. Definitely, it's more work that intrudes into private life than the other way around. [man, NGO, children aged 12 and 7]

Fifth, a blurring of boundaries in the broad sense is also facilitated by technology, which currently permeates everyday activities in a taken-for-granted and invisible way, and marks the moments of transition (e.g., day and night) into different modes of action, as well as the beginning and end of everyday activities related to work and personal life. Following Valtonen (2004: 100), ordinary performative acts can be viewed as imposing an additional strain on the process of defining and controlling limits.

The pandemic situation has resulted in less and less margin for classification ambiguity at the level of spatial, temporal, and even mental boundaries: the two spheres of work and home—with their content (substance and meaning)—overlap and coincide conceptually, physically, and temporally. In the COVID era, "home" and "work" have merged into one massive category of social existence. Boundaries within such an integrated time-space are experienced subjectively in the sense that, due to structural limitations, the essential part of work has shifted to the mental-cognitive sphere.

Performing different activities in one space shows how difficult it is to compartmentalize them, with space and objects being experienced similarly. The more the respondents regarded the activities performed in the domains of "home" and "work" as similar, the more inclusive the incorporated practices became. Integration facilitates moving from one mode of action to another, or from one realm of experience to another, with less effort. An absence of rites of passage, which appeared in such phenomena as wearing similar clothes in the "home" and "work" spaces, recording meetings and activities from the "work" and "home" domains in the same calendars, or placing a family photo on the desk, undermined the cognitive and situational distinction between the indicated spheres.

The dress code nowadays is kind of disappearing. After I switched to this fully remote mode, there was also a time when I would put on a shirt, dress smart. And then later, I still dressed like that. I got so good at it that I started to dress elegantly, even for a walk in the forest. (…) But now it has come to an end; I'm slowly getting into t-shirts; if it's not necessary to meet a client, recently it's been t-shirts all the time. (…) Maybe it's also because I don't have to go out at all, and going to the shop doesn't count. And I think that's why, if you don't go out at all, then the ritual of dressing up is gradually fading away. [man, corporation, children aged 4 and 2]

The work on boundaries is also strictly symbolic, as it is difficult physically to leave one role and prepare to enter another. How individuals manage themselves, their thoughts and tasks, and objects, produces mental boundaries and mental "journeys" beyond the boundaries. Individuals cross all space-time lines by combining artefacts and memorabilia from other worlds into their professional and personal lives. On the one hand, it can be said that the respondents, on a daily basis, transformed classificatory (temporal, physical and spatial) boundaries into existential ones and navigated mental boundaries. These tangible, observable behaviors, on the other hand, helped them physically negotiate and demarcate what was mentally the same.

Boundary Permeability

As we have outlined, boundaries have not only a temporal and spatial but also a psychological dimension (Nippert-Eng 1996a; Nippert-Eng 1996b; Ashforth et al. 2000; Clark 2000) that determines what thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are appropriate at work and outside of work. Negotiating the work-life order takes place not only at the level of practices and actions but also at the level of consciously setting boundaries in one's thoughts and emotions. Individuals are constantly engaged in cognitive-emotional work to discern what order they are currently in, and more importantly, how they should fit their activities into the social context (cf. Mroczkowska, Kubacka 2019).

The formation of the boundary area is affected by the degree of flexibility and permeability of the boundaries. Boundaries are flexible when they can be moved, for example, working hours are shifted in matters that belong to the domain of private life, as when an employee comes to work later than usual in order to take a child to the doctor, and then returns home later, after working the required number of hours or completing the tasks scheduled for that day's work. Boundaries are permeable when elements from one domain can periodically function in another. For example, when a person can, if necessary, "take work home" or take care of private matters while at work.

Flexibility and permeability can be considered in each of the dimensions of time, place, and psychological boundaries. Both flexibility and permeability are the characteristics of boundaries that indicate whether they are durable and robust (border strength) or weak (border weakness, weak boundaries). As the results of the study show, the permeability of boundaries is a function of at least two factors, namely, how much the separated domains or categories differ from one another and how the respondents manage their work on boundaries. Boundaries are also characterized by varying degrees of (a)symmetry, making it possible to identify on which side of the domain (work or private life) the boundary is more porous (cf. Mroczkowska, Kubacka 2020: 47–48). The findings show that generally, for all the respondents, any attempt to "cross the border" from the domain of work to the domain of time for oneself was a much more difficult undertaking than moving from the domain of time for oneself to the domain of work. Although people's personal life may have been restricted during the pandemic, the family side of the work-life equation became more burdensome, particularly for parents who had to attend to new demands of organizing or overseeing educational content for children and managing daily care, which before the pandemic had been covered by schools or day care facilities (Qian, Fuller 2020).

The whole weekend is busy, and work seeps in everywhere. Generally, it's hard to keep it separate. It's really hard to separate it. It's impossible to specify that I answer the phone until 5 p.m. and after that I won't anymore. Because even if it rings, I get nervous that something is going on there and these people must be needing my help. Or even just support, showing them which way to go. [woman, NGO, no children]

Furthermore, the similarity of the domains in terms of time and space during the pandemic often made their crossing a bidirectional endeavor, for example, the more the subjects integrated the domains, the more the direction of integration became irrelevant.

What I find difficult and overwhelming is that in my business, there's something going on all the time. And if I don't make a conscious effort and decide that I'm not going to do any more work now, I could as well spend

24 hours on this jumble of everything because I have a lot of these activities. On top of that, all sorts of tax office or Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) matters, lawsuits pop up, because right now I'm in a legal dispute with ZUS. It's like there's a lot of this unplanned stuff coming up, which takes up time but is completely unproductive and really annoying. [woman, NGO, child aged 5]

Both directions of penetration (work entering the family domain and family entering the work domain) are associated with a more significant number of work-life conflicts, especially for those respondents who have children. It can be pointed out that work-home integration increases role permeability, which entails "the degree to which a role allows one to be physically located in the role's domain but psychologically and/or behaviorally involved in another role" (Ashforth et al. 2000: 474). Although integration might ease transitions between roles, thereby relaxing boundaries and facilitating border crossing (Clark 2000; Olson-Buchanan and Boswell 2006), the role permeability associated with it does not translate into less inter-role conflict. Thus, in connection with the helplessness associated with the process of permeability, individuals have become increasingly more effective at mentally crossing between the most distinct categories and domains. Working with boundaries regarding the individual self is a process of establishing and sustaining more or less different "territories of the self" (Nippert-Eng 1996a: 1).

The idea of the territory of the self suggests that the self does not end with mentality but is also concerned with the processes that reinforce the self through corporeality (physicality) and the unique environment in which the individual finds themselves at any given moment. As a result, any item opposing or "transcending reality" can threaten the individual's immersion in a particular version of the self; for example, the entrance of a child or spouse can shatter the immersion in a separate professional self. Being pulled out of different "selves" caused by the immediate activation of different roles can make each of these roles (and their associated "self" or aspects of the "self") less rooted for the individual than in situations where the individual has a say in when and on what terms he or she switches roles. These abrupt "interruptions" reduce the sense of agency and the plannability of activities and, on the other hand, generate a range of feelings and emotions, such as constant tension with a degree of irritation, and also a sense of guilt whenever all the activities cannot be conducted well, fully, or on time.

Moments during the Course of the Day When Setting Boundaries Is the Hardest

Due to the lack of a temporal-spatial setting, most boundary work has shifted to the equally constrained mental sphere. The fragility of the mental boundary is reflected in a number of expressions indicating a difficulty in controlling thoughts about actions and activities, for instance, "I keep thinking about the fact that I still have so much to do…" [man, family business, children aged 13 and 10] (cf. also Table 2 and 3).

In the situation at the time of the survey, the respondents were unable to focus on one thing at a given moment because tasks from different domains would appear synchronously and kept accumulating, which resulted in a constant feeling that there was always something more to be thought about or done. As a result, the respondents were unable to reduce their tension levels and could hardly recover from psycho-physical stress.

Table 3

Moments during the day when setting boundaries is the hardest

Respondent	The most challenging moments for setting boundaries
Woman, family business, married, children aged 14 and 8	The most difficult are the final hours of work when the private and business matters overlap. Then I split my time and do a bit of both at the same time, e.g., editing texts while cooking dinner. That's when I feel pressure from both sides—pressure for perfection and for neither side to notice anything lacking. When I'm still at work, which I have set for myself from 8.30 a.m. to 3.30 p.m., and I leave the office—as long as I'm in there my family know I'm working, but during breaks, the time suddenly stretches to accommodate their needs—so to speak—they get me in the shared space.
Woman, corporate job, children aged 14 and 7	Mainly in the evening, when I know that I haven't managed to go through all my mail due to the high volume of meetings and my boss's expectations. It annoys me that I can't get all my work done at work.
Woman, corporate job, no children	Any activity that takes place during working hours and is not related to work tasks feels like I'm stealing this time, although I'm aware that at the office I take more frequent breaks and I'm more often distracted from work by colleagues. At home I kind of feel it's a bit unfair to my employer every time I step away from the computer (what if I'm not at the screen and someone calls just then?) Too long breaks from work, which I spend, for example, on making phone calls to get something done, doing online shopping or the housework, or taking too long to fill in my diary.
Man, corporate job, no children	The whole stay in a hotel. I'm used to business trips by now and I plan my work in such a way as to get as much work stuff done as possible during my stay in the hotel, so that when I return home I have more time for myself. Evenings are the worst, because on weekdays, I often find myself turning to work in the evenings.
Man, NGO, children aged 10 and 7	Working remotely from home makes it difficult for me to separate my free time from my work time. Online discussions and talks.
Woman, NGO, divorced, child aged 5	Time to work under quarantine, that is, being at home and doing domestic and professional duties at the same time; not being able to focus entirely on professional matters.
Woman, NGO, no children	The most difficult and most intensive is the time between 5.30 p.m. to 9.00 p.m., where there should be just time for home and there are always activities connected with the foundation's work. These are constant emergency calls, preparing a shelter, feeding free-roaming cats, or helping neighbors with their pets. It's a bit frustrating and causes tensions at home, because I am constantly needed everywhere and there is a constant lack of time.

Source: Own research implemented in the period from 10.2020 to 03.2021, as part of the COVID-19 project of the Rector of Adam Mickiewicz University: On the Treadmill of Everyday Life during the Pandemic: Work-Life Boundary Dynamics in Three Types of Organizations in Poland.

Among the respondents, the prevailing sense and experience of fragmentation, which was described by one as "fragmentation, permanent overlap and blending of various everyday minutiae" [woman, corporate job, children aged 14 and 7], translated into a daily process of micro-regulation consisting in a dynamic switching between the roles currently performed (Ashforth et al. 2000). At the same time, the model of employment itself (everyone works remotely or in a hybrid mode) does not seem to be of much relevance to the subject of our study, whereas what is more important here is the specificity of work

and daily tasks to be performed, the number of children that need care, and the person's engagement in family life.

During the COVID pandemic, home became a simultaneous place of work and of personal and social experiences, and it is there that, depending on the interaction framework and the situation, a person would switch between different modes of behavior and thinking, which in turn required a lot of effort and organization. When boundaries are weak in one domain, people try to strengthen them in others. For example, in the absence of spatial boundaries, people strive to establish temporal and mental boundaries. However, this approach does not always work, and habitual behaviors developed prior to the crisis could generate problems. Furthermore, difficulties could arise in interactions with children due to their reduced capacity for self-control and a lack of coherence between their cognitive understanding of the situation and their ability to respond behaviorally to its demands.

When the respondents were faced with other people's violation of the boundaries they were trying to establish between the professional and private spheres, and when their inner tolerance of tension had been exceeded, the proper expression of emotions was crucial. By expressing emotions in an unmediated way (e.g., by shouting or crying), the respondents communicated these boundaries to others in a definitive and non-negotiable manner.

Well, there are moments when emotions run high. I don't deny it. When the children suddenly need something, just when I am doing the activities that I have to finish. That kind of puts you off and sometimes I need a few minutes to help the child. (…) On the other hand, if I am writing an e-mail, I'm just about to send it and have it ticked off, and suddenly the child comes to me saying that he or she needs something, it can be somewhat demotivating. But there are times when they really break the rhythm. Sometimes it happens that I'm doing something like I start writing an email, get interrupted, and I don't come back to it. And the children are calling. And I thought I had already sent it. [Man, family business, children aged 13 and 10]

In other words, it is on this plane that the hard emotional work related to the expression and suppression of tension or undesirable emotions in the family's presence occurred on a daily basis, especially when the respondent was under a lot of pressure and was overloaded with work-related responsibilities. Trying to strike a balance between work and non-work life is particularly difficult as the two orders intertwine and are further cemented by sentiments. Emotions, especially negative ones, circulate between work and non-work life and, as proven by spillover theory (Sonnentag, Binnewies 2013), alter how employees function both at home and elsewhere. This can be illustrated by Goffman's "role distance," which allows a person to move freely between their roles but does not allow for lingering in or saturation by any of them (either cognitively or emotionally).

(…). We were doing something, but we didn't get anything done (…). I had the impression that I was in many places simultaneously (…) I was neither in one place nor the other one. (…). [woman, family business, children aged 14 and 8]

It is therefore difficult in a pandemic situation to implement a "closed door" policy that draws a line between the spheres of work and life. Hence, work tasks interrupted by other duties are often continued late into the evening, at night, or postponed until weekends, when—in the case of a family with children—the wife takes care of them. As a result, the weekend loses its demarcating function, ceases to be a taboo time for work, and becomes, as one of the respondents, a café owner, put it, "a pure utopia of the non-worker." Respondents

have to juggle the demands of private and professional life skillfully and are thus constantly caught between what is formal and what is informal. Being constantly locked between these two orders, it is not uncommon for the respondents to deliberately handle and negotiate the boundaries of each. The respondents try to enjoy spending time with their co-workers, but at the same time, they cannot forget the fact that they play two roles: the worker and the workmate. In the pandemic, this has been further supplemented by the role of simultaneous parent.

The need for workers perpetually to test and (re)define boundaries and adjust their behavior to the situational context (whether and how much they can gossip versus when they get back to work) are all aspects of negotiating (the mental battle). The shift between official and informal positions is stressful yet inevitable because performance is measured by how well individuals move between them and navigate between orders with distinct (or even conflicting) expectations of behavior. It is, however, work, not social or family life, which is given priority and overrides behavior. The interpenetration of these orders can therefore be considered to be induced through formal contexts.

Conclusion

Our proposed way of looking at boundaries allows us, first, to analyze the physical, temporal, and psychological (cognitive) boundaries between the domains of work and life. Second, it enables us to focus on the factors that may prove most significant, namely interpersonal relationships and the subjective construction of meaning in conjunction with structural factors such as organizational policies on time and work. Third, it takes into account the psychological construction and experience of boundaries and their absence (suspension, deconstruction), which makes it possible to look at the subjectively produced sense of equilibrium, as well as the experience of loss of equilibrium and attempts to regain it in the context of changes triggered by the pandemic. Fourth, it emphasizes the importance of idiosyncratic meanings attributed to work and life (e.g., the way individuals perceive their roles), preferences regarding integration and segmentation, and contextual factors (e.g., family-friendly norms and rules of behavior in the workplace, long or irregular working hours, or support from superiors, colleagues, and family) (after Mroczkowska, Kubacka 2020).

The respondents needed to make numerous decisions about whether and how to incorporate *work* into *home* and *home* into *work*. These decisions continually pushed the respondents toward either end of the integration/segmentation continuum and thereby reinforced or caused them to question the existence of the boundaries they had drawn around each sphere. Managing artefacts and activities in space and time is a crucial part of the effort on work-home boundaries since it determines the extent and character of these areas. The respondents' work on boundaries was not limited solely to creating the spheres of home and work, and to the self. They also needed to develop skills that would let them move between the spheres while preserving them. Their transcendental work on boundaries was focused on essentially transcending boundaries rather than establishing them. To this end, the respondents often created routines comprised of conscious and unconscious decisions

about how to manage elements of the self specific to the particular sphere. However, the extent to which the respondents created and relied on the routines changed as they moved along the continuum of integration and segmentation.

It could be pointed out that it is precisely this overlapping dimension of boundaries that has been sorely overlooked, for instance, in research on home and work, yet such research requires extra attention in times of chaos. If the respondents understood any two categories as opposing, inversely defined classes of things, and especially if they additionally located them in different times and spaces, they thereby failed to recognize their potential to overlap (cf. Nippert-Eng 1996a). In the case of home and work, these assumptions were magnified by the tendency to consider and treat each category separately. The study of these two domains becomes much richer if we simply recognize the categorial potential of their overlap. By locating the domains at least physically, it is possible to see the categorial boundaries that define them and the work that sustains them. It can therefore be concluded (after Mroczkowska, Kubacka 2020) that border theories, while referring to clear differences between work and private life, as two spheres with different goals or culture, do not assume that they can be balanced, yet emphasize that integrating work and (family) life facilitates transitions between these domains and extends agency to other social and non-social factors. In the pandemic situation, the level of integration—the fusion of the two domains—has reached a critical level where integration is no longer functional. This is especially relevant for parents working from home, with young children deprived of institutional care or care from grandparents (because of the potential for contagion).

Consequently, the boundary management strategy of segmentation is complicated for individuals whose work-home arrangements show extreme integration and interpenetration, increasing the risk of inter-role distractions (Hill et al. 1998; Rau, Hyland 2002). From a "role responsibility management" perspective, an individual who regularly performs work-related activities at home must manage the demands of different roles and enact strategies to allocate time and attention (Dumas and Sanchez-Burks 2015). Among workers with high work-home integration, the demands of work and children overlapped entirely in time and space. As schools and daycare centers closed and the care and education of children shifted to the home sphere (Johnstone 2021), enacting work and family roles during the pandemic may have exacerbated the competing work-family role pressures among those with children at home (Dizik 2020; Thomason, Williams 2020). In other words, high work-home integration may have intensified the experience of workers with children at home, especially younger children, who are more dependent and require greater supervision than more autonomous teenagers (Allen, Finkelstein 2014; Bedeian et al. 1988; Hill et al. 2010; Qian, Fuller 2020).

These considerations force us to reflect on other phenomena worth considering. First, to what extent has the experience of involuntary, almost complete integration enforced by the pandemic changed the meanings attributed to both domains, for instance, before the pandemic, people in the office used to long for home, while during the pandemic those confined at home longed for the office? Second, the pandemic has intensified certain conflicts and tensions that were also present before (e.g., work-family conflict or conflicts between partners who are parents over whose work has priority and who should take care of the children). It is essential to consider how else pandemic and pre-pandemic times differ,

apart from the greater intensity of events, the greater volume of issues, and the resulting tensions in the pandemic.

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