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Worker Agency versus Wellbeing in the Enforced Work-From-Home Arrangement during COVID-19: A Labour Process Analysis

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Abstract: This article offers a theorization based on selected literature focused on problematizing the work-from-home phenomenon. It incorporates labour process theory and the work-from-home literature to dissect the impact of enforced working from home procedures during COVID-19. The article presents the advantages to working from home from the existing work-from-home literature and draws on labour process theory to challenge these advantages. The disadvantages discussed in this article include constant availability, enhanced productivity with unpaid labour, loss of worker subjectivity, identity conflicts, and extracting productivity while downloading costs of production to workers. While the advantages include enhanced autonomy, reduction in unproductive time and increased affordances in participation, empowerment and worker agency, the article weighs the potential, parallel impacts of worker control and reduction in personal wellbeing. Although it seems that the work-from-home arrangement is, predominantly, here to stay, I argue that workers consent to their demise, as the dark side of enforced work-from-home arrangements detract from the benefits of in-person social relations of work and learning.

Keywords: work from home; worker identity; work–life; wellbeing; agency; labour process; COVID-19

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted regular working life that involves commutes to work, in-person social interactions with co-workers, work–life boundaries, productivity management, control-resistance power relations, worker subjectivity and agency as well as overall worker wellbeing. These all coalesce to infringe on the quality of work life, and highlight an imperative to re-establish the disintegrating work and family boundaries. In this article, I critically theorize the work-from-home phenomenon, which disrupted regular work and home life as we know it. Working from home is not new, but this type of enforced, wide-spread working from home constitutes a paradigm shift with many more people working from home based on the pandemic and government lockdown procedures. Working from home has benefits and generally workers tend to prefer working from home, as it can provide freedom and control while removing some of the hassle in day-to-day commute and in-office tensions that may occur. Nevertheless, with these advantages, I would argue that workers typically ignore or, at the very least, disregard the potential disadvantages or trade-offs involved in transitioning to full work from home arrangements.

Of course, some workers, such as those considered essential services workers, had to report to work as normal during the pandemic, and considered functioning as within their status quo. This article is not primarily focused on those workers but on those that can work, remotely, from home and as such were required to work from home since the World Health Organization (WHO) classified the coronavirus (COVID-19) disease a pandemic and countries began implementing distancing procedures. These distancing procedures have resulted in employers, even those most reticent, agreeing to manage workers remotely

when they were not inclined to allow this prior to the pandemic. As such, some workers obviously see this opportunity as a boon, and do not wish to return to the original status quo of attending an office for work.

I will apply the Foucauldian tradition of labour process analysis to theorize the advantages and disadvantages presented to workers who are able to work remotely with the use of digital technology. Generally, any labour process will include the entire production process at work including tools of production, the job design, power relations including but not limited to manager–worker relationships, and the social relations within the activity of paid labour [1]. Labour process theory (LPT) is firmly established as a robust Marxist conceptual framework in the sociology of work [2], often used to analyse the tensions of paid work in capitalist economies. The problematic nature of working from home requires varying levels of analysis, and aside from LPT's Marxist roots, it has a Foucauldian tradition that brings in the subject worker [3,4]. Labour Process Theory is an analytical tool that examines the tensions experienced in work in capitalist societies. However, within the sociology of work debates, LPT has rarely been used to directly address issues related to digital work [2,5], let alone working from home. The labour process approach takes into account workplace tensions, such as social conflicts of autonomy/agency and control/resistance, that exist in paid labour, between employers and workers. Although workers feel a sense of control in working from home, they may be unaware that digital technology is used to objectify and control-manage them in this new labour process. In theorizing this "new" work-from-home phenomenon, instituted on a larger scale due to the COVID-19 lockdown and distancing procedures, I seek to contribute to the work-from-home literature and labour process debates in using labour process theories of control-resistance and worker agency to problematize the work-from-home phenomenon.

First, I begin by introducing LPT as a "method of thought"; although at times considered a classic theory, LPT is currently being used today to examine workplace tensions. Second, from the vantage point of the worker, the article looks at possible advantages of working from home using recent work-from-home literature. Third, the article incorporates classic Foucauldian LPT literature, specifically regarding work and technology, to theorize the disadvantages of working from home. Last, the article presents commentary on these two sides of working from home throughout the pandemic, and envisions the future of this flexible arrangement romanticized by workers who are allowed this affordance by the industry in which they work, and more importantly by digital technology.

2. LPT as a Method of Thought

Rooted in Marxist labour theory of value, LPT was established by Braverman's classic work on *Labor and Monopoly Capital* [6]. His thesis focused on deskilling shop floor workers through separating the conceptualization of their work tasks to the control of management. As such, classic LPT has been used to analyse micro level tensions between workers and their management (control) and the execution of their work (autonomy). The tensions created by management control and worker autonomy are primarily derived from use values, and the imperatives of capital accumulation impel employers to consistently revolutionize their labour process to extract productive use values from their workers [7]—more so in the face of a crisis such as a global pandemic. Although a classic of its time, scholars have drawn on LPT to analyse freelance work in the gig economy, such as food delivery services mediated through online apps [5], and emotional labour and control in examining the role of digital platforms in employer–worker relations [2]. LPT is underutilized in the work-from-home literature and provides a novel approach to expand our understanding of the current enforced work-from-home phenomenon, which is made possible through digitization of knowledge work. Remote work using digital technology tends to include computer algorithms. Drawing on classic LPT, Kellogg, Valentine and Christin's review of algorithmic studies demonstrates how employers control-manage "workers by restricting and recommending, evaluate workers by recording and rating, and discipline workers by replacing and rewarding" [8] (p. 368). This research also examines how algorithmic

control produce economic use value for employers through lowering labour costs while simultaneously boosting productivity.

My analysis of the enforced work-from-home phenomenon is informed by LPT due to the strengths of the theory derived from its enduring and evolving tradition throughout the years. Since Braverman, LPT has been expanded through wave research [9] in which scholars have critiqued and improved the theory. After the first wave of LPT theorists, second-wave theorists, such as Burawoy, demonstrate how workers consent to the control mechanisms operationalized at the point of production [10]. Burawoy's analysis shows how workers reproduce the relations of power through a "game of making out", where workers themselves exercise their agency to benefit from control mechanisms in the performance reward schemes of management. Successive third- and fourth-wave scholars wrestled with the lack of worker subjectivity, which they deemed as a predominant weakness of classic LPT analysis. Critical theorists, such as Knights, introduced Foucauldian studies to create a post-structuralist/hybrid analysis [11] that concentrated not only on the tensions and social relations between workers, tasks, and management, but also on the impact of the organizational structure of production [3]. It is within this longstanding Foucauldian tradition of LPT that I draw my analysis, as it offers insights into potential challenges for worker identity, agency and subjectivity within an enforced work-from-home workplace structure.

Recent COVID-19-related work-from-home research tends to prioritize health concerns as drawbacks of enforced working from home, including stress, worker burnout and poor work–life balance [12,13], and provides recommendations for long-term working from home [14]. As such, LPT is typically not utilized as a theoretical lens to interpret these findings. After presenting the advantages of working from home, as purported by the work-from-home literature, I draw on Foucauldian LPT to offer potential disadvantages that might be overlooked by those who are forced to work from home during the pandemic.

3. Advantages

3.1. Increased Participation and Reduction in Unproductive Time

Enforced work-from-home arrangements can increase participation in workplace learning through virtual affordances, integrating core and periphery workers, and generating new skills in the process. Although Braverman's work [6] contends that paid work under capitalism involves technological revolution that tends to deskill workers, this view has been critiqued as a unidimensional thesis [15]. Braverman's arguments largely ignore the possibilities for the antithesis of upskilling and improvements in worker agency and general workplace democracy, as a result. The digitization of work has somewhat leveled the playing field for some workers, where core and periphery workers [15] are able to participate in online workplace training and skills development activities with the wider use of digital technology in the way in which work from home has largely removed time–space boundaries. Moreover, adapting to the use of sophisticated software apps and devices, arguably, has expanded the utilization of a range of skills required to effectively use specific information communication technology (ICT) [4] that may not have been appropriated by some workers, specifically workers who may have been unfamiliar with the use of these ICTs in regular in-person work. This upskilling might be subtle, and can be termed "generic" skills development, and might only occur in the periphery workforce of an organization who do not normally work remotely with digital technology. Digital technology has also created affordances that somewhat level the playing field by removing "power distance" [16] between not only management and workers but also core and periphery workers. As such, generic skills are arguably being developed by a wider cross section of workers than prior to the pandemic, as they are forced to use technology in, and adapt to, new ways of working remotely from home. Labour process analyses of clerical, administrative, and service work, have long identified "the rise of 'generic' skills" and the adaptability of workers [11] (p. 919) in gaining additional tacit skills to remain productive. Empirical studies of working from home during the pandemic have demonstrated the existence of a significant correlation between worker autonomy while

working from home and productive engagement [17]. The ability of workers to adapt and continue to be productive can also be determined to be a positive outcome from the shift to work-from-home practices.

Little or no commute time and the convenience of working from the comforts of home eliminates unproductive time. In addition to less time in commute, which can be transferred into productive time, some workers might have less in-office distractions, which also boosts productivity. This boost in productivity was confirmed in a May 2020 Survey of Working Arrangements and Attitudes (SWAA) of working Americans with 30,000 responses. According to this study, working from home improves productivity by approximately 4.5 percent, as respondents confirm "better than expected" enhancements to their productivity since working from home [18]. To some extent, these productivity enhancements come from control of time and autonomy [19]. Working from home eliminates commute time and reduces ritualistic social interactions that are typically understood as unproductive. Converting unproductive time into productivity time slots can provide workers with a sense of accomplishment, as this feeling of extra-productivity satisfies the concern with getting the job done. Work-time autonomy applies to workers who are able to dictate when they start and end a workday. In this sense, workers are able to control the part of their labour process that has to do with labour time, which otherwise they might have had less control over because of the separation of work and home spaces, which results in a time to end work to return home. Even though, prior to the pandemic, some workers carried work home, unproductive time slots that were outside of their control existed in commutes to and from work, and entertaining interruptions for social interactions even within and outside of personal breaks at the workplace.

3.2. Increased Worker Agency and Empowerment

Worker agency and control over workspace design can be enhanced by working from home. In this regard, the pendulum between capital and labour has shifted slightly towards labour, as employees have increased agency to co-develop and self-create in becoming more of an active agent [20] in determining their work design, specifically in the way they choose to communicate. More broadly, in advanced capitalist economies, the social relations of production tend to be antagonistic [7], where the workplace can often become contested terrain [21], and a site for micro- and macro-aggressions, all of which can be mitigated with less forced interactions among co-workers by fragmenting the office space through the comfort of the individual worker's home. Workers may determine that working from home creates a safe space for emotional health and wellbeing because they are able to avoid tense in-person interactions. Cook, in her book *Making a success of managing and working remotely*, lists avoidance of office politics, reduced stress, and improved work–life balance and wellbeing as benefits to employees who work virtually [22] (p. 15). Although virtual and online interactions can be quite toxic, as observed on social media, workers can hide from and possibly avoid less pleasant and unwanted confrontations with co-workers and management. This perception of freedom and comfort emanates from a level of control over what would otherwise be coerced interactions born out of ritualized courtesies, office politics, and/or the in-person labour process that involves in-person team meetings and one-to-one in-person interactions. Virtual communication distills the level of everyday workplace interactions from "the primary means of communication, namely face-to-face communication" to "quinary communication" mediated through digital technology [23] (p. 384). This distillation of the means of communication grants agency to the worker in two ways: (1) simplifying the communicative process through digitized communication channels; (2) providing a choice for a more relaxed locale for communication and a mechanism to escape otherwise unwanted in-person social interactions. Working from home provides workers with increased power to manipulate the work environment and better navigate the communication landscape of their work.

Working from home empowers workers to subvert the labour process using digital technology and the work-from-home arrangements to their advantage. Although workers

subvert work processes to sustain and enhance production [3] (p. 309), even in the event of using technology to work harder in both self-sacrifice and self-satisfaction, they also find workarounds and pursue their own self-interests. More broadly, technology provides some workers a way to avoid the gaze of the employer, and find areas of reprieve and relief either from the boredom of monotonous work or the stresses of work by taking advantage of the technology to access higher levels of freedom never accessed before. In this scenario, workers tend to be drawn to opportunities that exploit self-interest and identity [24]. For some workers, finding ways to take control of their labour process is more possible within work-from-home arrangements. Workers that find workarounds and ways to prevent overwork can effectively "take back time" through manipulation of digital technology and the flexible working from home arrangements that provide gaps in the panoptic gaze of management. "Taking back time" can be analysed from a control-resist standpoint in which workers assert their subjective desires to resist overtly "controlling systems" of management [25] (p. 272). For example, some workers might find ways to login and be away from their workspace attending personal matters, while other workers might become free to select the hours of a day in which they work. These are probable instances in which work-from-home employees, objectified by technology used to micro-manage their productivity and performance, and track their availability, become empowered to subvert technological systems of control. As human beings, workers are never fully controlled by systems of management and, oftentimes, they instead, manage to find loopholes in these so called "controlling systems" that benefit their self-interests.

4. Disadvantages

4.1. Constant Obligation to Work

Given that a function of management is to track productivity, the activities of workers themselves have to be tracked, and from managerial perspective systems of tracking are implemented to ensure workers productivity. Ensuring workers productivity has always been a key function of management [21]. Cooke's research has identified this type of tracking as a 'seagull' management [26], a scientific managerial style of statistically measuring output of workers. Digital technology allows management to know when workers are "away" and not at their computers and when "available" in a productive state. This binary on-or-off state can "mechanize" workers into feeling as if the available status is the consistent preferred state. Aside from the consistent availability, knowledge workers who work from home remotely may contend with a dilemma of overwork from compulsive flexibility [15], derived from management's expectation that employees that work from home are always connected to work through a digital device.

The increased surveillance that stems from a scientific type of management tends to result in strict measurement of labour hours and measurement of achieved objectives. The obsession with tracking performativity and tracking the productivity of workers feeds into management's control imperative [21]. Workers working from home will need to be monitored to safeguard organization productivity and efficiency levels. Digital technology has supported higher levels of vigilance over the activities of workers, and this enhanced level of surveillance inevitably transforms the labour process [4]. The recent work-from-home literature has confirmed that some workers are working longer hours, missing lunch breaks, and eliminating leisure time at home due to the incessant need to remain available and productive [19–27]. Working from home digitizes the labour process and presents workers with new challenges in negotiating work versus personal time [28], as they seek to maintain personal wellbeing and remain productive under management's digital control.

4.2. Extracting Productivity While Downloading Costs of Production and Wellness to Workers

In granting workers an appearance of freedom in working from home, some employers have also downloaded some of the costs of production to employees who work from home. Extra internet data cost and the troubleshooting aspects that may be involved in, for instance, poor internet service connections, are largely the responsibility of the

worker whose home space, ergonomic, and technological set-up might be incompatible with the demands of office work. The pandemic has not only transformed space-time in everyday work–life [23], but also expanded the technical and, to an extent, the economic responsibilities of the worker. Occupational safety and health (OSH) concerns are now fully in the ambit of those workers who work from home. Even if the employer provides the computer equipment and the home workspace furniture, the employee is responsible for ensuring the safe and ergonomic design of their home workspace that may or may not be in line with workplace OSH regulations. The pandemic has provided an opportunity for employers to unintentionally abdicate most of this responsibility and transfer the social costs of workplace safety to the worker [29]. While workers could consider employer-enforced safety visits to be invasive, larger employers could consider mandated inspections to evaluate the safety of individual home workspaces to be an expensive proposition and an unreasonable expectation. Work-from-home arrangements, therefore, provide a sense of agency on the part of the individual worker, a common-sense approach to the home office set-up, and a potentially harmful physical work design. This process realizes the capitalist dream of individualizing and responsibilizing the wellbeing of workers who likely sit in front of their computers with limited movement in their home workspace. These workers must now problem-solve the costs of their inactivity and the limitations of the work-from-home set-up.

Since work–life boundaries are virtually indistinguishable when the workspace is at home, workers who are ill might be tempted, and or expected to continue to work and not report their illnesses. Typically, workers who are not well enough to come into office for fear of spreading their illness or simply for recuperation time, due to an ailment that creates an inability to work or work at full capacity, report sick and absent from work. In the current work-from-home phenomenon, and with the help of digital technology, workers who suffer from illnesses that are not chronic enough for a doctor's visit or hospitalization may feel hesitant to call-in sick, and feel compelled to continue to work, albeit, perhaps, in a more limited fashion. This mindset and practice are detrimental to workers who are legitimately ill and require personal time for self-care to recover. Moreover, working while ill interferes with a worker's ability to reproduce themself to labour another day. Working while ill is similar to extending labour time beyond a worker's required time to reproduce self and signals a problem of work intensity [6]. In this scenario, non-chronic illnesses tend to remain hidden, as workers might fear disclosure and that their employers' perspective is one of little concern because they are already at home, in a state of "comfort", and therefore, still expected to be available to work. There is a possibility that working from home desensitizes co-workers and managers to the condition of an *unwell worker* with an *invisible* illness [30] and exacerbates the interpellation of the ideal worker who is self-sacrificial in the name of productivity. As a result of internalizing the employer's and co-worker's "gaze" [31], in an effort to manage professional image, the ideal worker is a self-regulating subject who remains productive notwithstanding the circumstances. The lack of work–life boundaries shape individual work identities into one that is more amenable to exploitable labour and consensual to placing the needs of the employer first.

4.3. Always Connected Produces Time-Slots for Unpaid Labour

Elements of Foucault's work on Bentham's panopticon has been commonly applied to organizational and workplace analysis, as an electronic panopticon, specifically with regard to call centres [32]. Digital communication technology reconstitutes the home space into a workspace that can be control-monitored, such as a call centre. Foucault's conceptualization of Bentham's panopticon prison design defines it an apparatus for "creating and sustaining power relations, independent of the person who exercises it; such that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation in which they are themselves the bearers" [33] (p. 10). Although workers are not inmates in a prison, their work is controlled and mediated through the digital technology (apparatus) appropriated to perform their work. This mediation creates a watchful gaze that these work-from-home employees are impelled to

bear, whether consciously orsubconsciously. The corollary is the obligation to work longer hours in the desire satisfy management and appear productive. This extra labour time that may have otherwise been spent in personal time or time in commute is now mediated by digital technology. In management's supervisory function to ensure productivity and efficiency, technology will assume the role of "watchperson", given that the workers are not in direct line of sight of management.

Excess labour hours over commensurate compensation is the age-old antagonist in work under capitalism. For many workers who work from home, since the pandemic, digital communication technology extends their labour time [23] and essentially the work day. Whenever employees are compelled to work more hours to meet deadlines and increase productivity, they produce surplus values for their employer. The employer benefits more when employees work for longer hours with little or no change in wages. Whenever more work is carried out for the same wages, the worker technically takes a pay cut. Increased productivity with little or no change in labour costs can be argued to fulfil the capitalists' dream.

4.4. Loss of Subjectivity

Within the realm of the community of a workplace, workers are subjects in relation to other subjects. However, becoming a subject at work requires other subjects to co-construct occupational identity. "Becoming a subject in a community also means becoming an active agent, and this is based on the subject's reflective awareness of her/his identity position in the community" [20] (p. 2). While being a subject and co-constructing identities is never static but rather fluid and could be argued as perpetuated through virtual team work [16], remote work also results in limited opportunities to self-realize against a pervasive Other. The heavy reliance on digital technology to communicate can reduce meaningful social interactions that lead to self-discovery and belonging and presents challenges to situating oneself in relation to the wider community of workers. Recent studies of working from home have indicated that workers are less likely to communicate candidly with one another if not coerced [16]. The fight for subjectivity is a constant struggle within all forms of community. As Foucault observed, the objectification of people is a tension in the human experience [34]. A high probability for another form of opposition to subjectivity exists in digital technology. Workers might become even more objectified through the digital control [35] that occurs in work-from-home arrangements.

Worker objectification enhances in work-from-home arrangements as it eliminates the spatial-symbolic defensive resources against subjectification derived in the separation of home from office space. Insofar as the "appearance of freedom" disarms workers to the point where workers can feel guilty taking breaks, as working at home subjugates workers to living at the office.

4.5. Disruption of Regular Scheduled Life: Reduction in Social Interactions

Working virtually, from home, can foster a sense of isolation. Opportunities for social interaction, collective agency, derived at work from in-person and after-work experiences are reduced to online interactions. Arguably, virtual communication does not build relationships in the same breadth and depth as in-person social interactions. The relations of production become stilted in the confines of cyberspace and the multi-variant but individual home workspaces of co-workers and, sometimes, clients. More social and extraverted workers are likely to become the "guilty subject", alienated from elements of work that foster gregarious activities [36]. Becoming alienated from work involves alienation from the human capacity for community and relationship development. Although it is quite possible, with modern digital technology and social media, for virtual interactions to create meaningful relationships and interactions online, there are other avenues for human interaction that cannot be replaced by online interactions. For instance, workers sometimes may get together for lunch, a smoke break, or spend time in a pub to refresh themselves in response to the stressful aspects of their paid labour. Workers tend to spend their proverbial

"coin of fun" together in leisure and social activities, during breaks and afterwork, that might help them to combat the alienating effects of selling their labour [37]. As such, working from home, reduces these opportunities for ritualized social interactions [10], and this paucity of in-person social interaction can lead to psychosomatic illnesses including worker burnout [36]. Workers that become burned out from excessive virtual meetings tend not to engage in communication outside of these mandated meetings [16]. Ritualized social interaction from in-person work experiences, I would argue, also encourages forms of collective resistance to unfair work practices, and forms a coping mechanism to ease the stresses and monotony of routinized virtual work. Additionally, collective agency and opportunities to develop solidarity and form meaning in these social actions are more restricted when relegated to occurring virtually through digital communication technologies.

There are psychological and physiological effects from always being available, sedentary, and camera-ready for virtual meetings when working at home. There is a sense in which virtual work invades personal home space, which affects workers' wellbeing (emotional and physical health). There are psychological effects that extended use of video platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Webex, and Zoom. Zoom fatigue is an outgrowth of the work-from-home phenomenon. Excessive exposure to working through digital video platforms presents more intense psychological effects and mental strain than in-person communication [38]. The close-up camera shots of a person's face have also led to increased scrutiny of appearance and loss of self-confidence, and some workers find these mandated camera-on meetings invasive [16]. Additionally, workers are known to move throughout an office to attend meetings and commute to and from home. The increased flexibility and increased productivity gains from the shorter commute and less frequent social interactions come with compromises to wellbeing of workers, demonstrated by the reduced mobility of workers who are more confined to sedentary positions in their home workspace.

Reduced social integration and interaction tends to translate into loss of opportunities for informal and emergent learning from a lack in-person social interaction reinforces individualism. Although digital technology opens-up modern social interaction, it also provides a means to avoid face-to-face communication, and fosters remote communication within a confined locale [23] that restricts opportunities for earnest conversations that produce tensions that create dialectical ingenuity for problem solving. As a corollary to everyday social interaction, workplace communication has increasingly become digital with the use mobile work phones, digital messages, and emails. Work from home is predicated on digital communication. Human communication that includes in-person social interactions has benefits not only in relationship building but also in mediating the social relations of production (subjects) and the social objects of production [23]. There are benefits to ritualistic social interactions beyond building rapport. Learning at the workplace occurs in organic and multi-variant ways and is oftentimes informal. For example, informal conversations take place in everyday interactions in the workplace—around the break room, at the water cooler, or even during a courtesy office visit—where emergent discussions about work processes, and learning transpires through organic conversations on how to solve everyday work problems. Working from home through digital technologies presents barriers to the expanded learning typically generated through dialogical relations in the workplace and beyond. Social interactions can be messy and challenging at times. Consequently, workers highly dependent on digital technologies are more likely to focus on the production process and less likely to focus on the social relations of production, whenever possible. This preoccupation with productivity tends to occur in high stress jobs that focus on quantification of performance outcomes. As a result, the technology accelerates the labour process, compresses labour time, and encourages a "self-propelling system" [36] of work, which prioritizes the individual worker's performance while detracting from the value of a community of learners fostered through in-person communication [39] at the workplace. In this sense, digital technology realizes the dream of the capitalist, in shaping workers' perceptions, and in privileging their productivity above all other social relations that humanize work.

4.6. Identity Conflicts

Since the pandemic, working from home has been used to enhance aesthetic labour and promote a hard-working identity. Some who work from home struggle with a conscious or unconscious striving to prove their ascetism daily. This type of dedication to the hard-working identity is mediated by digital technologies and constitutes the interpellation of workers that results in motivation, commitment, and cooperativeness towards organizational objectives. Workers, therefore, become tethered to their digital work devices, as they seek to validate their productivity at home, outside the in-person gaze of management, and perhaps in an effort to show management that this way of working is optimal. Insofar as workers gain aesthetic pleasure from using digital technology to work productively [40] from the comfort of their homes. This intrinsic aesthetic labour value and the "new" work-from-home hard-working professional identity posits an industrious worker who is self-entrepreneurial and able to work more in a mechanized fashion.

Digital technology can create a type of "automaton" that functions according to the demands of the organization, as machine harnessed [21] or technologically enhanced. In this process, the technology also becomes part of an extension of the worker's home office, and as Gandini argues, digital technology not only facilitates flexible gig work, but also deformalizes and creates non-standard relationships in which workers engage [2]. In this instance, workers become fully immersed and excessively busy in their "hustle" to get work done. Additionally, workers can become obsessed with the benefits of flexible work-from-home arrangements, and some might become enamoured by a lifestyle akin to a freelancer. However, drawbacks of the flexible work arrangements include spillover effects derived from the blurring of work and home boundaries, where work is home and home is work, and poor work–life balance where workers identify predominantly with their work role while neglecting the other facets of their personal life identity, such as that which should be rendered to their family [19]. This identity-shift process is produced through the digitization of the sociology of production, wherein workers construct ideal ways of behaving and positioning themselves as a "hard worker". It also represents a normative form of control deployed through digital technology to transform workers' attitudes, behaviours, and identities to eliminate resistance and enhance worker cooperation and self-enterprise, which privilege managerial-capitalist prerogatives [5] of performance above human wellbeing.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Even with the advantages to working from home, I would argue that the potential disadvantages far outweigh the advantages of working from home. Workplace interactions encourage social integration and identity formation, even in the way in which people seek out ways to present themselves at work, even in their attire, aesthetics in appearance of workspace and in a hard-working identity. Other disadvantages relate to the problem of social interactions with colleagues. Despite the fact that virtual technology provides opportunities for socialization, it remains inferior to organic in-person communication [16], and some workers endeavour to avoid these virtual interactions [23] because they can be strenuous and intrusive at times. Additionally, a 2021 study of the impact of working from home during COVID-19 determined that working from home with increased distractions resulted in increased workload with longer work hours and reduced communication with coworkers, which was a predictor of decreased well-being [41].

Working from home is often celebrated for the freedom that it seemingly provides workers [27]. Workers typically experience increased work engagement and happiness working from home [17], and workers who are unable to work from home tend to envy those who can. However, working from home is not necessarily a paean of victory for all workers who work from home. The disruption of social relations of production and the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life intensifies work–life and removes personal time for self-care. As Davis and Green report, some workers do not remember to take time to eat, and some workers although more productive are overworked as they

work an average of three hours extra per day [42]. The illusion of freedom is revealed in the digital technology used by management as an apparatus to control workers for productivity gains. Furthermore, as a result of worldly asceticism and the interpellation of hard-working ideology, workers might compromise their work–life balance where their work consistently takes precedent over their personal life. The subjectivity of workers also shapes and reinforces the status quo of work arrangements. However, as sentient beings first and workers second, we are meant to control-manage the technology for our benefit and not become control-managed by the use of technology in privileging the organizations' work over human wellbeing.

Avoiding workplace distractions, enhancing productivity by converting unproductive time into productive time, through the elimination of a commute and the avoidance of time spent in ritualized social interactions typically found at the office, are compromises that benefit individual subjectivity, as it effectuates the ideal "hard working" identity. As is the case in much of human existence, specifically under a capitalist framework, exchange becomes a predominant principle that occurs throughout life. We gain something at the expense of relinquishing something of value we possess. Workers who see working from home as valuable may be unaware of the compromises they have made or might consider the trade-off well worth it. A trade-off might involve exchanging work distractions and interruptions for nonwork distractions and home-life intrusions, having a cancelling effect on productivity [43]. To work from home requires various forms of digital devices and ICTs that fundamentally alter the social relations of production [2]. These alterations, while they may integrate more workers, provide affordances, and in some cases, increase worker autonomy. They also affect how workers learn and interact with each other, specifically in tending to position workers self-interest above collective agency. Autonomy through digital technology in the work-from-home space; while it fosters opportunities for continuous learning, productivity and self-actualization and facilitates the construction and expression of the hard-worker identity [40], it risks constructing a more insular environment at the self-serving expense of the individual worker.

Although workers who work from home have escaped the *rat race* of physical commute, they might not necessarily escape what economists call the *rat race equilibrium*. The rat race equilibrium is a phenomenon where people work longer hours beyond regular hours to match a discourse of the ideal or diligent worker who impresses co-workers in gaining a sort of hard-worker badge of honour, and becomes appealing to management for promotions and contract extensions [44]. This phenomenon is similar to the Marxist concept, interpellation of workers, where workers manage their behaviour to conform with the expectations or obligations of their workspace. The obligation to work longer hours is influenced by digital technology where workers and managers can identify when co-workers are online and actively working. The obligation to work longer hours is also inspired in the workers willingness to try to keep-up or outpace the work of other workers in view of the realization of self-interest and improvement in identity from the perspective of other co-workers, specifically managers.

Temporal boundaries of work and home have been demolished by the new work-from-home phenomenon becoming more formally instituted as a by-product of the COVID-19 pandemic. Arguably, employers have more of an economic gain, and are the greatest beneficiaries of this change to the enforcement of the digitization of work. Since workers have proven that productivity can take place effectively outside the office, employers can potentially access economic savings in reduced responsibility for workplace safety, reduced office space rents/leases, and reduced expenditure on overheads such as internet and office maintenance. If workers are not keen, these expenses can be passed on to individual employees who have transformed, at least, part of the sanctity of their home into a workspace. Work from home arrangements can offer the flexibility of an entrepreneur to workers, the removal of boundaries for participation for peripheral workers, and offer an affordance of increase participation and integration [16]. Conversely, this arrangement can eventually lead to these workers being permanently excluded from becoming core members

of an organization's workforce [35]. The dismantling of temporal boundaries between work and home benefit individual workers in individual ways but for peripheral workers, the axiomatic principle of "out of sight, out of mind" can become a realistic deterrent to collective organizing. Reduced collective agency could possibly result in harmful employer ideologies and attitudes towards workers who work from home, where even a full-time worker is treated, indirectly, as a contracted freelancer. Without collective action, employers may be able to get away with new work arrangements that could exploit worker rights, as workplace laws cannot keep in step with the rapid changes in work arrangements instituted by the enforced pandemic lockdown procedures.

The future of work post-COVID-19, specifically for knowledge workers who can work remotely, could become blended. The pandemic has not only disrupted the work as we know it, but is likely to continue to introduce new paradigms for flexible and remote types of work arrangements [16]. With the aid of digital technology, the plausible expectation for some industries is one of consistent evolution to the labour processes of those who can remain productive as well as gain higher levels of efficiency at home, away from the traditional office. It is apparent that sociology of work scholars will agree that the pandemic has changed the trajectory of work and learning. More apparent is the fact that work from home is a comfortable state for many workers as it can enhance productivity, and it provides an increased perception of freedom and autonomy. However, I would argue that work from home is not a panacea for the contestation within a workplace. Even though working from home tends to be valorized, there can be exploitative productivity control measures within the technological demands of working remotely in always being available and signed on. Furthermore, in-person communication, social and physical wellbeing of workers can be negatively affected by enforced working from home. Depending on the temperament of workers, the more extraverted workers will be more significantly impacted by the constraints of virtual communications and loss of nuance and soulish interaction found in in-person interactivity. Thus, a blended approach to work may be well suited for the post-COVID-19 workplace structure. This work design will include even more freedom for workers to access the benefits of working from home and the office when needed [16].

In concluding, enforced widespread work from home is a new phenomenon due the pandemic; LPT is likewise new to work-from-home research analysis. The implications of insights drawn from LPT analysis bring attention to possible unexpected challenges from long-term work-from-home enforcement. These challenges not only affect workers' mental and physical wellbeing, but also impact worker identity, subjectivity and agency. I anticipate that the work-from-home phenomenon will cease to be a phenomenon and become a more permanent and normative way of work for those workers whose work does not require their physical presence. The pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital technology, and workers have demonstrated their willingness to adapt to new ways of working, specifically when it adds value to their agency and subjectivity. Empirical research in this area will continue to be imperative to examine and gain deep insights into the intended and unintended consequences of long-term work-from-home arrangements.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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