Remote Newsrooms:

The Place and Labor of Digital News Production

A thesis

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To Alek

DISTRIBUTED NEWSROOMS:

THE PLACE AND LABOR OF DIGITAL NEWS PRODUCTION

Rowan McMullen Cheng

Abstract

This study offers a systematic qualitative exploration of the perceived impact of remote work on news workers' professional experiences in the U.S. news industry. It describes the experiences of news production situated digitally, socially, spatially, and temporally by combining labor process theory, Gieryn's concept of place, and Braverman's (1974) time management concept. This study presents findings from 30 in-depth interviews with news workers throughout the U.S. during pivotal moments of the coronavirus pandemic between 2021 and early 2022. Findings describe how working remotely influenced the experience of news production through digital technology, professional socialization, place, and time. Overall, these findings present an increasingly professionally dominated work-life balance within news work, contributing to labor intensification and an internalized panopticon The conclusion encourages a closer exploration of internalized labor control and labor intensification to better prepare future news workers for professional precarity.

Keywords: digital, journalism, labor, place, socialization, temporality

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Imagine you're a news reporter. It's seven in the morning on a weekday and your face reflects the blue glow of your phone as you turn off their morning alarm, trying to ignore the Slack icon locked in your notifications bar. Your editor is Slack messaging you because there was a flood, and they need to follow-up on the story. Wanting to respond at the beginning of the workday in an hour, you instead repress this instinct and message back right away since you're already up, feeling physically healthy, and your laptop is only down the hall in your house. After sourcing and writing in the morning, picking up groceries during an extended lunch, and editing in the afternoon, you remain firmly planted in a work chair after dinner cleaning out emails and preparing for tomorrow's workday.

For many news workers, this scenario isn't hard to imagine, and indeed may already have come to pass. The relentless urgency of work and near-constant digital immersion feels callous and inhuman. Scenes like this play out all across U.S. news organizations as the boundaries between profession and personal life blur together. Based on this real application, the impetus for the following study aimed to generate a dialogue within journalism academic pursuits with regards to labor studies. Specifically, whether remote news work is a path toward new found flexibility, the intrusion of work into personal time, both, or a different phenomenon altogether.

Pandemic Remote Work

The following thesis focuses only on journalistic work between 2020 through 2021, which acts as a unique case study in remote work due to the Coronavirus pandemic and subsequent vaccine availabilities in the U.S. Remote work is an umbrella term defined by working within an industry where the employees work somewhere other than an employers'

centralized office. Remote work includes work from home (WFH), hybrid, and work from anywhere (WFA). Unlike WFH, which definitionally includes the home office as a requisite, remote work is not prescriptive as to where someone works, as long as it is not from the employers' centralized office a slight majority of the time. In this sense, different journalistic careers requiring "field" work (e.g., parachute reporters), or on-the-ground reporting, would be considered hybrid remote work. The WFH concept was originally introduced by Nilles (1975) dating back to 1973 with synonymous including 'telecommuting' or 'telework' (Messenger and Gschwind, 2016). Despite the systematic interest in digital work in the news industry, there was relatively little scholarship dedicated to systematic qualitative research exploring the perceived impact of *prolonged* remote work in the U.S. news industry until the COVID-19 pandemic inspired a reacquired interest in the exploration of remote labor.

The remote work the news workers reflect on throughout this research was marred by the ongoing pandemic. A pandemic refers to an epidemic that has "spread over several countries or continents, usually affecting a large number of people" (Kelly, 2011). In the spring of 2020, a novel coronavirus (COVID-19) gave rise to a pandemic. The politicization of COVID-19 by partisans, coupled with inflammatory rhetoric from the White House (Summers, 2020), reduced the influence of official public health requests aimed to diminish the virus' negative impacts (Gollwitzer et al., 2020). This public health crisis further exacerbated anxiety over COVID-19 and additional mental health concerns associated with the long-term isolation that was anticipated to stymy the virus (Jeffers, et al., 2022; Staal Bruun Overgaard, 2021). Most of remote work was WFH between March 2020 through July 2021 in the U.S. because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Pandemic-induced remote work also added layers of mental and emotional stress onto the news workers. Before the pandemic, typical remote work consisted of asking to work from home for the rest of the day after a dental appointment, for example. The remote work this study references is prolonged, almost entirely at home without the option to WFA, and consistent rather than sporadic WFA with a short duration, which is more typical with the history of parachute and field reporters. As such, this study describes the experiences of pandemic-related remote work, specifically WFH, within the U.S. news industry.

Studies on journalism and pandemics have often focused on a content analysis of news coverage from journalists, usually leading to the important line of inquiry of information access (Tandoc et al., 2022). The politicization of COVID-19 by partisans, coupled with inflammatory rhetoric from the White House (Summers, 2020), reduced the influence of official public health requests aimed to diminish the virus' negative impacts (Gollwitzer et al., 2020), leading the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) to declare an 'infodemic.' The pandemic sent the world into crisis, making access to accurate and timely information as important as ever. It also required journalists globally to carry the responsibility of informing the world about the virus and pandemic. As further chapters will describe, this responsibility impacted them, too.

Nature of the Newsroom

To look at how news workers coped with working from home during the pandemic, we need to understand the larger forces that have shaped news labor over the past decades. There have been over one hundred newsroom closures since the pandemic-induced remote work began in March of 2020 (Margalit, 2020; Hare, 2022). Most of which were newsrooms focused on specific local communities rather than dense urban areas or regional areas. This amplifies the net

loss of nearly 1,800 newsrooms since 2004 (Abernathy, 2018). As newsrooms closed, news worker numbers were also reduced. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Employment Statistics, there were nearly 51,000 news workers in 2012. This has since dropped to roughly 41,500 news workers in 2020, accounting for an approximate overall decrease of 18% or a difference of 9,180 employed news workers over eight years according to the most recent U.S. labor statistics at the time of this research (April 2022).

The newsroom closures of 2020 have not been replenished in an equal amount of newsroom openings (Hare, 2021), demonstrating that today's newsrooms are confronted with economic and/or human capacity challenges. Financial strains, though noted in 2004 by Abernathy (2018), have a history several decades in the making. U.S. news organizations were not inoculated against the historical scale of corporate restructuring and takeovers from the 1980s and 1990s (Ho, 2009). In tandem with the 2008 global financial crisis, the shareholder market logic and corporate takeovers enabled the profuse amount of conglomeration seen in the contemporary news industry (Shieber, 2020). These conglomerates have presented numerous labor challenges, including layoffs from restructuring. Using the shareholder and corporate takeover market logics, conglomerates have been significantly more likely to "cut the fat" (Ho, 2009) across newsrooms, leading to corporate restructuring and layoffs that dramatically alter roles and the work-life balance for the remaining news workers. While the news industry was already in a financial downturn, the uncertainty coupled with the pandemic all but amplified the prolonged financial struggles.

It is imperative to recall that while journalism is perceived as a public service or public good (Deuze, 2005; Holliday, 2021), particularly from nonprofit news organizations (Konieczna, 2018), it is nonetheless governed within a capitalistic framework to generate revenue and

increase the bottom line (Pickard, 2011). A capitalistic framework that philosophical scholars, such as Yanis Varoufakis, believe to be a dying ideology in favor of "technofeudalism" (Varoufakis, 2023) where technology companies (e.g., Google, Amazon, Microsoft) reflect the fiefdoms of the Middle Ages.

In addition to financial insecurity and labor precarity, the COVID-19 pandemic crisis also further exacerbated anxiety and additional mental health concerns associated with the long-term isolation that was anticipated to stymy the virus (Staal Bruun Overgaard, 2021). Remote work required by pandemic restrictions added layers of stress onto the news workers, as the results of this research support. For example, one could not rely on normal remote work habits, such as working in a coffee shop or working without childcare, considering business closures, the seasonality of infections, and anticipated health risks.

The normative role of an unbiased or distanced "news from nowhere" (Epstein, 1973) became impossible as all members of society, including news workers, were directly impacted by the ongoing pandemic. The pandemic only increased the casualization faced by digital journalists as the ongoing economic crisis became more acute (Cohen, 2019; Finneman and Thomas, 2021). Sreedharan et al. (2020) conducted a Nepalese survey on news workers during the pandemic and discovered increased precarity and emotional harm. In Singapore, Tandoc and colleagues (2022) focused on news worker coping skills and a blurring of work-life balance. Bernadas and Ilagan (2020) found the pandemic to be a unique health crisis as news workers described how it "felt like there was no end in sight" (p. 4). While these scholars, among many others, identified the unique challenges of the pandemic on news labor, there is a continued need to better understand how news workers experienced the unique labor conditions of professionally reporting on a topic they also have a lived experience from.

News Worker Experiences During Remote Labor

One of the many challenges in understanding the impacts of the pandemic on the U.S. news industry was establishing causation, or identifying what changed *because* of the pandemic compared to what changed simply *during* the pandemic. Fortunately, to help differentiate, much scholarship has already been dedicated to the overall institution of U.S. journalism and the nature of its contemporary condition. By focusing on the news worker experiences, this research provides a nuanced perspective on how news workers labored during the pandemic. The pandemic gives way to unique insights on news laborers under pressure while the structural conditions that preceded the pandemic persisted. It is appropriate then to ask, how do news workers experience journalistic labor during pandemic-restricted remote work conditions?

Since this study leverages concepts generated from qualitative interviews with news workers, it is inherently about the news workers' day-to-day experiences and thus grounded in Bourdieu's "habitus" (1984). The concepts have been iteratively constructed based on the narratives from news worker's experiences during pandemic-related remote work. The complex nature of human experience commands the subject matter and concept of this research. This is in part because, according to Tuan (1977), "experience is a cover-all term for the various modes through which a person knows and constructs a reality" (p. 8). In this way, experience is a window of opportunity to explore the social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) during remote work in the news industry. As such, this study applies a social constructivist perspective throughout.

This thesis explores news worker experiences through digital, social, spatial, and temporal contexts. This exploration is conducted through 30 in-depth interviews with news workers, including reporters, editors, managers, and photojournalists, who worked full time for

digital and/or print news organizations in the continental U.S. These interviews provided rich and thick descriptions of the practices and experiences of news workers and remote news production more broadly. What can be known from interviews is a reality that has been constructed based on experience and memory recall, which has been shown to be imperfect (Weiss, 1995). The method for this study is outlined in detail in Chapter 3. A list of interviewees is included in Table 1. In-depth interview questions utilized as starting frameworks, excluding improv follow-up questions, for the participant sessions are available in Appendix A.

Contributions and Chapter Outline

Despite remote work being the majority of pandemic news worker experiences and the ongoing scholarly interest in digital work in the U.S. news industry, there is more research to be conducted with regards to focusing on relationship labor, work-life balance, and the domestication of labor via the concept of space. Additionally, existing scholarly pursuits to explore how news workers are impacted, if at all, while reporting on a global health crisis, are particularly pertinent considering the unique scale of the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was relatively little scholarship dedicated to systematic qualitative research exploring the perceived impacts of long-term remote work in the U.S. news industry despite the vastness of labor theory and journalism literatures, which outweighs the literatures on workplace socialization and sociology of place. This study builds upon these highly imperative and worthwhile foundations for further research, considering how they can identify and describe the labor experience of the U.S. news industry, which have profound implications for holistic labor control strategies, the resources for producing news, the ideology of democracy, and the application of objectivity as a conceptual framework.

This study delivers insights on news workers' experiences with pandemic-required WFH in the U.S. It provides a unique contextual perspective on digital labor during a time of prolonged and uncertain crisis, the coronavirus pandemic, which made labor insecurity pellucid. Specifically, this study uses a qualitative in-depth interview approach to garner further insight into this understudied aspect of the struggling U.S. journalism industry, the news workers' experiences, and their relationships with each other during remote work.

This research endeavor aimed to better understand the experiences of these news workers from a grounded theory approach to better understand their perspectives and identify pain and joy points. This research aims practically to help improve news workers' ability to uphold their normative professional contributions without sacrificing their well-being (Holton and Belair-Gagnon, 2023) and to better prepare current students or prospective news workers for the professional field (Nelson and Cohen, 2024). It is appropriate then to ask, how do news workers experience journalistic labor during lockdown-restricted remote work conditions?

The theoretical chapter, Chapter 2, will unpack one theory and three concepts and synchronize their contributions holistically. The first furthers Labor Process Theory by applying the theory to remote news work. The second introduces the concept of workplace socialization. The third illustrates contemporary digital news labor. The final defines and describes the concepts of space and temporality as they relate to worker experiences.

Chapter 3 explores the qualitative in-depth interview methodology utilized to explore the experiences with regards to this study's research objectives and introduces the author's positionality and reflexivity.

Chapter 4 explores the five primary findings. The first finding section begins with a discussion of the digital and technological requirements news workers experience to successfully

engage in remote labor to better understand the working conditions of labor in the U.S. news industry as the trajectory of labor continues into a more technological space that de-centers human labor (e.g., artificial intelligence). The second finding section explores how news workers relate to and socialize with their colleagues and community sources, or in some cases, how remote work encourages professional isolation, a harbinger of exploitation. The third findings discussion centers around the on-going popular debate about what is considered work-life balance and demonstrates this topic is subjective and best explored on a micro-individual rather than macro-cultural level. The fourth finding section explores place and temporality in remote work, particularly how it influences news workers. This section argues that place and temporal expectations are weaponized against workers as a form of internalized worker control based on cultural and industry-related professional norms. The final finding section concludes with exploring how news workers are unique white-collar workers in the pandemic-required WFH context.

The conclusion emphasizes that remote work in the U.S. news industry, while seen as a feasible alternative during the pandemic, intensified the precarity of news labor rather than liberated news workers. Technological reliance grew as newsrooms transitioned to digital platforms, which, while supporting remote work, also supported heightened news worker monitoring, blurred personal-professional boundaries, and a loss of control over news workers' time. Social isolation and diminished workplace socialization further reduced historical newsroom culture expectations. While remote work allowed for schedule flexibility, it also intensified work responsibilities and self-exploitation with news workers struggling to balance personal-professional lives. This study highlights the paradox of remote work, where autonomy coexists with surveillance and isolation. This finding emphasizes the need for strategies that

balance flexibility with news worker well-being. This study concludes with encouraging future academic endeavors that contribute to supportive insights for industry professionals, such as longitudinal impacts on mental health, productivity and future news worker labor structures (e.g., WFH, WFA, hybrid), that advocate for a more sustainable, collaborative, ethical, and inclusive approach and to intentionally prepare current students or prospective news workers for the state of the U.S. news industry post-pandemic.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the theoretical framework used for this study and to review previous relevant literature on the subject. The review begins with Braverman's (1974) labor process theory (LPT), which was the theoretical foundation used for this study. Then, this chapter explores the current state of the digital news industry, specifically defining journalism as a form of labor with unique precarity and work-life balance considerations. Cultural studies then sets the stage for how news workers' digital workplace influences socialization and social relationships. Finally, this section concludes with an examination of the relationship between temporality and place with regards to labor control and workplace socialization.

Labor Process Theory

To generate a better understanding of economic issues and with the hope of identifying potential solutions in what Örnebring (2010) termed the "labor turn" in journalism research, several journalism scholars pivoted toward a labor and work studies approach (Konow-Lund, 2019; Bunce et al., 2018; Bunce, 2019; Cohen, 2019; Finneman and Thomas, 2021; Hayes, 2021; Nelson and Cohen, 2024). This thesis furthers the upswell of research regarding digital journalistic labor in recent years by focusing on extending LPT as it constitutively entangles labor with technology (Braverman, 1974; Örlikowski, 2007; Örnebring, 2010).

This research contributes to the LPT literature by applying the seminal research of Harry Braverman's (1974) *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*. LPT is a Marxian critical economic theory aimed at describing the organization of work as it's impacted by the financial structures of capitalism. The labor process, as used throughout

this study, refers to purposeful production to produce values (Buraway, 1978). In other words, the labor process is defined as the intentional production of some form of product. The 'process' of LPT refers to the process where labor is materialized and organized as an interaction between the person doing the labor, the materials they interact with, and environmental context around them (Braverman, 1974).

LPT was the most relevant theory to apply to this thesis because it was more widely used across academic management literature to explore how people work, identify who controlled the work, and what skills were often used in that specific work. This study sought to identify how news workers labor (e.g., lived experiences), who controlled the labor (e.g., management, internal panopticon), and what skills were required (e.g., technological challenges, social literacies). LPT is often applied to assess antagonistic workplace relationships in capitalistic or neoliberal economies regarding deskilling and managerial control. For example, LPT has been frequently applied to include income or compensation disparities in feminist and race studies literature (Weeks, 2007), particularly as it relates to inequality and worker control.

The news industry has historically used traditional forms of labor control (e.g., scientific management) that ultimately exploit and alienate workers through a capitalist labor system (Marx, 1844). Within journalism studies, most research on control pertains to audience studies, such as (in)civility in comment sections (Juarez Miro, 2022), professionalism (Jackson et al., 2009), and institutionalism (Lowrey, 2018), rather than control through a labor perspective specifically. This research applies LPT regarding worker autonomy, or rather the lack thereof, due to an internalized panopticon (Jackson et al., 2009) monitored by the expectations of U.S. and journalistic cultural professionalism.

Professionalism plays an important role in dictating standards of journalistic labor. Soloski (1989) defined "professionalism" as, "an efficient and economical method by which news organizations *control the behavior* of reporters and editors" (p. 207, emphasis added). Soloski (1989) believed professionalism alone does not entirely control worker behavior. Professionalism is a cultural concept that standardizes workers, alienating themselves from the product they produce (Marx, 1844), meaning de-centering the worker from the finished product. To Soloski, professionalism is a strategy used to limit the amount of managerial oversight necessary, suggesting the concept of professionalism, or being a professional, can be an internalized worker control mechanism.

While Soloski also points towards news organization policies and managerial control strategies, the contemporary question of what happens when there are no other colleagues to enforce those policies due to remote work remains. Rather than directing attention toward external influence via the cultural peer pressure of professionalism to follow policy, this study instead argues an internalized panopticon (Jackson et al., 2009) provides news workers the framework to regulate and manage their work relatively independent from hierarchical top-down management strategies.

This independence from management, no matter how relative, exemplifies what Braverman (1974) conceptualized as labor alienation, as aligned with Marx (1844). Independence is a dual-edged weapon, where one edge cuts with autonomy from oversight while the other edge cuts with colleague estrangement. Considering LPT's focus on the power dynamics of labor, it is those with power that determine the balance of this duality. This duality is further evident in news work where journalism is labor, especially considering the shift to

remote work during the pandemic that amplified autonomy (e.g., work routine flexibility) and alienation (e.g., news sourcing challenges).

Journalism as Labor

During pandemic-related remote work, successes were celebrated with less triumph and glorifications of workplace productivity became the epitome of an unfulfilling life (Creech and Maddox, 2022). Modern journalism labor studies are saturated with examples of workplace precarity. So much so, that precarity has become a common denominator among journalistic labor literatures to varying degrees based on social status within the workplace (e.g., intern compared to manager) (Salamon, 2015; Cohen 2015). For the purposes of this study, precarity is defined as "work that is *uncertain, unstable,* and *insecure* and in which *employees bear the risks of work* (as opposed to businesses or the government) and *receive limited social benefits and statutory protections"* (Kalleberg and Vallas, 2017, 1; emphasis in original). Historic market logic matched with contemporary digital transformation amplified professional precarity in what Huws (2016) considered a form of worker control (Braverman, 1974; Burawoy, 1982).

Neff (2012) argued professional precarity is often accompanied by the aspirations of future opportunity. To further Neff's (2012) framework, these aspirations are typically from an individual, rather than group, perspective based on empowerment both internally (e.g., wanting to produce quality work for their reputation) and externally (e.g., not wanting to be fired from work). This frame of precarity aligns with Ahmed's (2010) description of ideological neoliberal empowerment as a forward-thinking, affective (e.g., emotional) goal. Furthering individualistic empowerment, previous literature indicated that while professional news workers have been within some state of precarity, there are varying intensities and structural challenges depending

on identity intersectionalities (e.g., sexual orientation, race) (Wooten and Couloute, 2015) and job type (e.g., institutional news workers compared to freelance workers) (Massey and Elmore, 2011; Edstrom and Ladendorf, 2012; Salamon, 2016).

The perspective of journalism as a public good (Konieczna, 2018) also serves a Foucauldian internal control function (Jackson et al., 2009) that encourages news workers to regulate themselves in alignment with a service-minded mission rather than enforcing traditional forms of worker pressure. Obfuscated as flexibility for the worker, these conditions actually provide flexibility to the employer, usually through a workforce that can be hired and fired quickly or a workforce that engages in around-the-clock or always-on productivity.

This precarity is felt by employees that then respond by overworking, or accepting work intensification out of threat or fear of unemployment, which is often destructive to self-value and access to medical care in the U.S. This acceptance of labor intensification, stemming from the previously mentioned precarity, additionally increases the current precarity within the journalism profession as more managers expect intensification acceptance (Warzel and Helen Peterson, 2021). Kelly and Moen (2020) demonstrate work intensification through case studies of over-work that showcase intensification is not a matter of exploited work-life balance.

Work-life balance, and tensions between the two boundaries, is a topic that has received attention regarding knowledge workers (Derks et al., 2016; Kreiner et al., 2009; ter Hoeven and van Zoonen, 2015) and on time management in a digital society (Wajcman, 2019), but significantly less so with news workers specifically. This thesis uses the vernacular term "work-life balance" as it's colloquially known. Gregg (2013) uses the term "presence bleed" to describe, "the always-on office culture where boundaries between professional and private identities no longer apply" (p. 3). Work-life balance requires boundary maintenance between the

two forms of individual-self and work-self, considering work-self is masked or filtered through the frame of professionalism (Soloski, 1989). Boundary maintenance is culturally viewed as the individual laborer's responsibility to determine what balance works best for them. However, this decision is an illusion of choice since it remains positioned within neoliberal capitalism. "This is the dark truth of remote work as we know it now: it [remote work] promises to liberate workers from the chains of the office, but in practice it capitalizes on the total collapse of work-life balance" (Warzel and Helen Peterson, 2021, p. 4).

For many employees, intensification is a matter of overwork through escalating demands and expectations, sometimes their own internalized expectations, at work. For example, this was seen during the 2008 financial crisis when so many employees were laid off that those that were retained were settled with the workloads of those fired (Haththotuwa, 2023), demonstrating precarity and work intensification. It is yet to be determined at the moment of this writing if this is a recurring trend as seen in the technology industry layoffs (De Vynck et al., 2024) or future predictions concerning journalism and the advance of artificial intelligence (AI) (Henshall, 2024). Looking to recent history, the pandemic catalyzed massive layoffs and furloughs within the news industry (Hare, 2022), once again settling the remaining workers with a more intense schedule as they did the work of multiple employees with the layoffs exemplifying workplace precarity. This was a direct result of macro-economic structural changes that caused dramatic implications for worker health, family life, and the internalization of work productivity (Kelly and Moen, 2020).

Based on the academic momentum in labor studies and new production that has been expanding its interest to include prolonged remote work, we can ask the following research question:

RQ1: How did news workers perceive their work-life balance while working remotely?

Culture

Adding further nuance, this thesis also explores remote relational labor via workplace socialization (Breed, 1955) and relationships that are formed and maintained through technology at work as these relationships are the structural cornerstone for remote workplace culture. This thesis inevitably pivots to a sociocultural approach grounded in Berger and Luckmann's (1967) social construction of reality concept as well as Swidler's (1986) concept of inescapable culture and cultural toolkits through the frame of workplace culture. Since this thesis focuses on the experience of the news worker during remote labor, it's imperative to consider culture since "culture is a model of and a model for experience" (Geertz, 1973), particularly as this relates to culture defined by the news industry's professionalism norms. It is also important to remember that journalism and entertainment media are also powerful institutional nodes of cultural production (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1995). As such, the culture included within workplace spaces is also a focus of this research.

As Sewell (1999) notes, there are two entirely different understandings of culture. The first understanding of culture derives from a more abstract meaning of the word, culture, that explores culture as a category of social life and considers culture as a singular "culture," similar to studies of the "economy" or of "biology." The second understanding of the word culture is more physically bound to the material realities, or a more practical rather than theoretical understanding. This second understanding recognizes "cultures" in an anthropological sense (e.g., Mead et al., 1973) as bounded by beliefs and practices (Sewell, 1999).

For the purposes of the remainder of this thesis, the term "culture" is used as an understanding of culture in the latter sense, as an understanding of learned behavior in physical practices. This is the most appropriate use of the definition of culture for the intended purposes of this study considering "culture is a sphere devoted specifically to the production, circulation, and use of meanings" (Sewell, 1999, 41), which can be most directly applied to news production processes, and thus the labor of news production. This thesis considers culture as an institutional macro-sphere of influence similar to the macro-sphere of influence of neoliberal capitalism. Both macro-spheres of influence are top-down forces acting upon news workers that then internalize and reflect a reinforcement of the macro-spheres of influence. Cultural sociologists have long been determined to connect a causal efficacy of culture as a macro-sphere of influence to gain scholarly recognition (Sewell, 1999, p. 45). Swidler's (1986) toolkit often remedies this causal efficacy.

Swidler's (1986) toolkit provides a "repertoire," or toolkit of symbols, stories, rituals, and worldviews and deduces culture's causal role in shaping "strategies of action" via tools that can be applied variably (p. 273). Swidler argues, "culture has an independent causal role [on behavior] because it shapes the capacities from which such strategies of action are constructed" (p. 276-277). In other words, culture is "not a unified system that pushes action in a consistent direction" (p. 277). Strategies of action from a fractured system ultimately provide variable micro-decisions, thus individual autonomy in action choice. Swidler (1986) also details how "unsettled" periods are often the most productive cases for exploring culture's influence on action, thus the applications for this study with regards to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. "In such [unsettled] periods, ideologies- explicit, articulated, and highly organized meaning systems…- *establish* new styles or strategies of action" (p. 278, emphasis in original). Applying

Swidler's (1986) toolkit provides a framework for exploring the pandemic as the "unsettled" period with workplace culture and news worker action strategies being the focus of this thesis.

The following sections, Digital Technology in Journalism and Work Socialization, both provide examples of action strategies during the unsettled time of the pandemic. The first, Digital Technology in Journalism, explicates sociomaterial action strategies utilized within the U.S. news industry's production labor processes. The second, Workplace Socialization, explores news laborer's social action strategies amongst each other, including socializing and work-life balance.

Digital Technology in Journalism

Facing mounting challenges, the U.S. news industry sometimes looks toward technology as a solution within the pre-existing neoliberal capitalist framework. In the sociology of work literature, the impact of various digital platforms, networks, services, and tools has been described as the transformation from 'work' to 'transmedia work' (Fast and Jansson, 2019). This pivot toward technology for practical (e.g., expanding reach, streamlining workflows) and strategic (e.g., adapting to evolving consumption patterns) answers became rapidly apparent during the coronavirus pandemic when many news organizations incorporated more technology into work rhythms and routines during the transition to remote work. Transmedia work contains a "connectivity paradox" where the tools and services relieved routine tasks and made time for more creative or reflective introspection have also caused interruptions and enabled procrastination and distractions (Fonner and Roloff, 2012; ter Hoeven and van Zoonen, 2015). These pervasive (dis)connection conditions can be considered part of the news workers' experiences of digital labor (Mollen and Dhaenens, 2018; Karlsen and Syvertsen, 2016). Interruption, multi-tasking, and their influence on overall labor productivity have been well

documented in sociology of work literatures (Gregg, 2020) as both positives and negatives depending on the management scheme required at any given time and emphasized in transmedia work environments. Interruptions can reduce productivity, but high-availability can lead to unproductive stress (McFarlane, 2002). Multi-tasking can limit work efficiency because of "attention residue" or "switching costs" (Rubinstein et al., 2001; Leroy, 2009), but it can also help replenish mental resources. As these paradoxes suggest, the impact of digital technologies on work is characterized by contradictions and is indicative of the need for additional research aligned with the aims of this study.

Technological tools in the news industry are designed to be exploitative of the workers using them (Benanav, 2019a-b) and increase labor intensification. Technological tools do not liberate workers from future labor; they devalue the work that is done because it is assisted by technologies. As tasks are devalued, more is demanded from workers via intensification. While technological innovation can be a source of revenue (Royal and Kiesow, 2021), even if temporarily, this myopia for a technological solution to contemporary financial woes reflects the market logics behind the resulting challenges and does not holistically account for the use of technology during prolonged remote work, specifically work from home, in the contemporary U.S. news industry.

Media domestication theory (Hartmann, 2023; Berker et al., 2005; Silverstone and Hirsch, 1992) concerns itself with the process of acquiring and integrating new media technologies into the "moral economy of the household" (Karlsen and Ytre-Arne, 2022). This theory of media domestication is primarily applied in the process of new media devices or technologies being purchased, then experiencing placelessness around the home, before being placed permanently within the home. Bakardjieva (2006) suggests that where and when the

technology (e.g., sociomateriality) is placed within the home signals the values and uses ascribed to the materiality. Media domestication theory is an important sociomateriality consideration since it includes place and temporality dimensions, particularly as they relate to human reflection on their norms and values (e.g., where the office desk will be placed). It highlights the placement of people and materialities as well as defines the boundaries of activities in everyday life rather than in unique circumstances. In Pierson (2023), Pierson notes that media domestication theory involves boundary work of everyday lives between spheres, including household and work, both mentally and physically (e.g. Doorway effect). Media domestication theory, thus, ultimately, concerns itself with how materialities are situated and negotiated within the macro-spheres of influence of neoliberal capitalism and culture (Martínez and Olsson, 2021) as well as the domestication of remote workplaces situated within the home in WFH contexts like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Regardless of innovation, the news industry has been connected to a specific material context since the beginning of the profession (e.g., the printing press). Since the technology boom of the 1990s, news workers have interacted with many information and communication technologies (ITCs), namely Slack, audience analytics platforms, social media platforms, and content management systems (CMS). These options can be accessed via mobile device and can be set to produce LED light and sound notifications if updates occur. This indicates their embeddedness into everyday life- both professional and personal. These materialities are socially bound, “inseparable from culture, power, technology, infrastructure, process and change” (Hoof and Boell, 2019, 637). Contemporary news work, specifically workplace socialization strategies, would be entirely different without the labor materialities of news production.

As detailed above, digital technology to complete journalistic labor and digital technology in newsrooms have been increasing steadily for over two decades. Given the above details about the "presence bleed" of digital technology from professional into personal, we can ask the following research question:

RQ2: How did news workers describe their technology use during remote work during the pandemic?

Workplace Socialization

Remote labor can also shift how laborers relate to each other. During the pandemic, digital technologies were both applauded for their ability to keep coworkers in touch, while simultaneously disparaged for not meeting the human need for the physical connection. This has potential implications for workplace relationships among colleagues (Bunce et al., 2018; Bunce, 2019; Baym et al., 2021) and throughout management structures (Jackson et al., 2009). As used here, structures refer to management hierarchies, power relations, production processes, and technological infrastructures that enable production processes.

Zelizer (2010) defined relational work as the process by which people establish, maintain, negotiate, and terminate interpersonal connections, typically through various types of capital transfers (e.g., social, gifts, media exchanges). The concept of relational work inherently implies a labor to all interpersonal connections. This thesis furthers relational labor by focusing on workplace socialization as a form of labor.

Remote labor has potential implications for how laborers structure themselves not only in terms of relationships, but also workflows, task management, and desk arrangements (Zaman, 2013; Boczkowski, 2015). Remote labor can shift how laborers live, particularly through the

action strategies in which they create symbolic boundaries (Lamont and Molnár, 2002) between their professional-personal lives and identities that ultimately shift work-life balance and labor expectations. For example, Barley and colleagues (2011) identified email as a "culturally sanctioned" strategy to complain about work intensification and as a "tangible ritual for regaining control" (e.g., email action strategies such as inbox zero) (p. 903). Considering the above, this study explores the influences on and of workplace relationships during journalistic WFH labor conditions.

Professional relationships within virtual places provide rich relational data imperative to understanding workplace conditions and news production processes during prolonged periods of remote labor. For example, remote labor that not only uses, but relies upon digital technology, has been identified as influencing communication (Brown et al., 2020; Methot et al., 2021), team collaboration (Kiesler and Cummings, 2002; Boh et al., 2007; Konow-Lund, 2019), and productivity (Wu and Chen, 2020). Thorhauge and Lomborg (2016) also note that digital technologies enabled the micro-management of professional life that also blurred into the personal sphere. It has also been documented that remote work that relies on technology interactions has led to powerful surveillance and managerial oversight (Bunce, 2018; Bunce, 2019; Jackson et al., 2009), usually provided by the affordances of metrics (Petre, 2021; Christin, 2020) and scientific management-esque time tracking (Van Oort, 2019).

Social settings, such as newsroom offices or shared technologically-mediated environments, socialize laborers (Breed, 1955; Jackson et al., 2009) by associating these particular places with specific professional norms and schemas that influence social expectations. Each of these social places have boundaries that influence individual and group identity, which can influence the extent of social cohesion (Kiesler and Cummings, 2002). Brown et al. (2020)

found that distributed teams engaged in in-group communication tended to form subgroups rather than communicate as one team, which subsequently affected social relationship dynamics.

One of many social relationship dynamics, and the primary one this thesis focuses on, is social capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Social capital in the workplace generally refers to the network of relationships that colleagues build and leverage through routine interactions that facilitate a sense of belonging, collaboration, and an exchange of information. Remote labor has profound implications for workplace social capital. According to Baym et al., (2021), social capital in remote labor, particularly organizational connections (e.g. collaborating with a colleague from another department at the water cooler) is critical to well-functioning workplace conditions. Without these connections, laborers may feel disconnected and isolated considering close network interaction increased, but distant network reaction decreased.

However, Konow-Lund (2019) found renegotiation of previously practiced news routines rather than team coordination. Distributed labor appeared to silo laborers' knowledge by limiting their connection networks, which ultimately shifted news routines and processes. Baym et al., (2021) also found these workplace connections strongly impacted innovation and productivity. This is supported by the quantitative analysis performed by Wu and Chen (2020) that found productivity decreased while the workload increased (p. 702). Finneman and Thomas (2021) support this claim with examples from U.S. newspapers where news production workers were challenged by extra scheduling pressures and emotional tension of having routines upended. Holistically, this research suggests that the shift to distributed labor during pandemic-required remote work disrupted traditional news routines, siloed knowledge, and strained workplace socialization. This in turn decreased productivity, intensified labor, and increase emotional stress for news production workers.

In addition, task interdependence, workflow management, and organizational dynamics also contribute to labor relations along with social capital. Distributed labor teams adapt their communications to align with available technology and management experience. However, it remains unclear the extent to which these technologies increase productivity and collaboration or lead to blurring of relational boundaries (Lamont and Molnár, 2002) and personal-professional commitment imbalances. These considerations deserve intentional exploration into the actual compared to normative practices of news production considering the unique condition of prolonged remote labor. Considering this thesis is about a snapshot of the COVID-19 specific remote work, it is thus prudent to turn to the workers themselves to reflect on their remote work social experiences instead, including the following research question:

RQ3: How did news workers perceive their socialization into their labor roles during remote work?

Temporality and Place

Overall, LPT includes the worker (e.g., socialization, culture), the materiality (e.g., technologies), and also the environmental context (e.g., place and time). The workplace precarity and work-life balance, as discussed above, implicitly highlighted the general trend of work intensification of journalistic work (Warzel and Helen Peterson, 2021). Work intensification is often associated with the rise in the "on-demand" economy (e.g., Uber Eats, Amazon Prime). Within the on-demand economy, Shapiro (2018) provides contemporary nuance into the balance between worker control and autonomy through a temporal framework. The "just-in-time" managerial philosophy, grounded in retail but since applied to other industries, demands labor surveillance that is fully integrated into the production process (Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992).

For example, a customer orders a Dominos pizza through the Dominos app. That customer has a time estimate that indicates where the pizza is within the production and delivery process in an incremental step-by-step flow that requires technological surveillance for semi-accurate results. This example demonstrates how technology can be included in managerial systems as surveillance support, but it also ushers in the more foundational question of how managers control workers during remote work.

For many news workers, the balance between autonomy and control is demonstrated through worker temporality. The recognition that temporality is a profoundly important research consideration unites the journalism studies and work control literatures. For example, controlling workers through the mechanism of time can be realized through the work process via intensification, reordering the sequence of tasks and rhythms, scheduling nightly news broadcasts or printing press times, and concepts such as "just-in-time" labor (Harvey, 1990; Adam, 2003) as applied to "breaking" news and the relentless pace of social media news updates. Worker control via temporality is what Nadeem (2009) refers to as "time discipline" (p. 24).

From the foundation laid by Thompson (1967), temporal technologies (e.g., clocks) are not constructed in a vacuum. Social scientists have since been intrigued by and motivated to explore how time interacts with the socially constructed relational worlds, particularly with regards to productivity (Wittmann, 2009). Social scientists often develop definitional boundaries between time and temporality (Nagy et al., 2021). Time refers to the objective time of the natural world whereas temporality refers to time perceived through human existence (Hoy, 2009). As such, this research concerns itself with the subjective experiences regarding perceptions of temporality. The linear logic of time has been replaced partially through the fragmentation of

media technologies, or what Urry (2012) considered “instantaneous time” (p. 1). A burgeoning body of social science research indicates people perceive the speed of life has accelerated (Wajcman et al., 2008) and as a result feel as though technologies can help them save time, considering technological products are often marketed as time-saving and productivity-increasing tools. Yet, scholars know “surprisingly little about whether and how information and communication technologies influence the experience of work in the twenty-first century” (Wajcman, 2015, p. 87). Work intensification gains clarity through the perspective of how digital technologies interact with perceived temporalities.

When contemporary capitalism values efficiency and productivity (Wajcman, 2019), the non-stop breaking news cycle becomes an entrenched norm, both culturally and professionally, which manufactures and perpetuates immediacy (Couldry and Hepp, 2016). Transparent immediacy is the medium’s capacity to make people believe what they are experiencing is perceived as immediate and direct (Bolter and Grusin, 2000), regardless of whether that immediacy is accurate or not. This immediacy, as well as the increasing pace of life, is characterized throughout the history of neoliberal capitalism (Harvey, 1989 from Nadeem, 2009, p. 22) and has amplified contemporary work intensification. Technologies, in this case, have provided new outlets for workers to structure and manage their time that often also blur work-life balance boundaries (Nagy et al., 2021).

Time and space are inextricably linked as mutually inclusive concepts. Lefevre (1976) notes, “when we evoke ‘time,’ we must immediately say what it is that moves or changes therein. Space considered in isolation is an empty abstraction; likewise energy and time” (p. 12). Everyone knows what is meant by a “room” in a home, a “corner” at an intersection, an “aisle” in the grocery store and so on. These vernacular terms serve to distinguish, rather than isolate,

particular spaces by defining the social context of the space. Lefevre (1976) described it as "social space is a social product" (p. 26), meaning space is the embodiment of social expectations. This thesis is concerned with temporality and with workplace relationships, a specific type of relationship that fulfills and provokes unique labor rituals (e.g., water cooler small talk). Thus, this thesis is also concerned with space and place. The final concept for this thesis focuses on how news workers are impacted when their sense of place at work becomes decentralized, such as in prolonged remote work, and when the historic sense of temporality is blurred into the rhythms of domestic life.

Exploring how place influences news production processes and labor relationships is critical to understanding news laborer working conditions and the norms, practices, and epistemologies of distributed journalistic labor (Usher, 2019). For the purposes of this study, place is a particular spatial point that contributes to shaping everyday life and reflects power structures. While place and space have been used interchangeably (Usher, 2019), place is less abstract than space and space is the area between two places (Adams, 2009). By using place and space interchangeably, it collapses the definition of both terms to mere references to geospatial locations. The full definition of place is an important consideration in distributed labor studies because products, including news, are affected by their producers' access to and the condition of workspaces. The concept of place is an imperative component to understanding journalistic distributed labor social processes considering workplace relationships as well as news production processes reflect contextual norms bound in a specific place (e.g., the difference between a water cooler and an executive office). Palvalin and colleagues (2017) found that one of the most important factors for high labor performance was spatial conditions appropriate for concentration, such as quiet spaces, and appropriate spaces for communication and social

interaction, such as co-working spaces (e.g., meeting rooms). Taylor (1999) also included that place is where we live our lives and where we source some of our identity. Thus, place situates the laborer in a particular setting that dictates temporary identity and acts on the laborer through materiality and symbolic power structures. Defined as such, place is an imperative component when considering distributed labor. This is particularly true for journalistic labor which tends to have highly collaborative processes and routines.

The concept of place as a pillar of scholarship was established primarily through Gieryn's (2000) framework of place as an "agentic player" since human behavior "happens somewhere and involves some material stuff" (p. 466). To avoid a spatially deterministic perspective, this study not only accounts for how the design of digital places enables and constrains certain social and news production processes, but also how the design itself is shaped by a specific social context in addition to the intentions and workplace practices of the designers. Journalistic laborers also have their own cultures, intentions, and practices that may enable them to utilize distributed labor places in ways that were initially unintended. As such, this research carefully considers the use of technology's role in work routines and relationships without being undermined by a deterministic perspective.

Gieryn's (2000) sociology of place framework conceptually transitions from place as only a setting or background to become a more active element. This definition aligns with place as a role in power structures. According to Anderson (1983/2006) and Lamont and Molnár (2002), place-making defines boundaries, physical and symbolic, that require exclusion choices. These inclusion and exclusion choices are reflective of power structures pertaining to who is allowed to make these boundary decisions. Usher (2019) continues this discourse by connecting place to journalism's efforts "to position itself as a cultural authority" (p. 85). Papacharissi

(2015) adds that place is "assembled and attained relationally, but also reflective of power structures" (p. 28). The places of news production then must be considered socially constructed locations that reflect dynamic and complex power structures that ascribe value. This is especially relevant to this study as power of place directly corresponds to internal power structures through social workplace relationships as well as news production processes.

Previous research on the concept of place in journalism studies has offered meaningful conceptual advancements. One example is journalistic proximity to news sources, where journalistic places are considered physical locations where reporting happens rather than where news laborers go to do their labor. Proximity impacts have been well documented as influencing workplace relationships (Kraut, et al., 2002; Boh et al., 2007; Methot et al., 2021). Ahva and Pantti (2016) examined amateur photojournalism's use of proximity as a means of establishing physical presence to gain legitimacy and convey a likeness or similarity to audiences. Another perspective on proximity was furthered by Huxford (2007) which found a "deplacing" in news that ultimately makes it easier to devalue the land and the people that live in those places (p. 670). While proximity to news stories and sources are meaningful research endeavors, these do not account for relational proximity for internal news laborers nor the internalized work intensification needed without shared-place managerial guidance.

This study furthers the concept of journalistic proximity to include internal newsroom proximity, such as close workflows or status along an internal hierarchy that determines informational flows. This is connected to exploring journalistic work routines, practices, and relationships during distributed labor conditions. Thus, it's imperative to better understand how news workers analyzed and positioned this themselves. Therefore, this thesis addresses the following final research question:

RQ4: How did news workers describe place or work environments and remote work during the pandemic?

Literature Review Conclusion

From the place and time where labor occurs, to the digital technologies and social relations, this literature review has detailed the primary contextual indicators of distributed journalistic labor. Journalistic labor, as a cultural institution and physical location icon, exemplifies the contemporary evidence of distributed labor challenges, including precarity, internalized management, and work intensification.

While pre-existing temporal norms and worker control strategies are challenged by remote work, newsrooms rely more on internal worker control for production. Though there are new working conditions, others do not change as quickly, as seen in the institutional isomorphic tendencies of journalism (Lowrey, 2011) and professionalism studies (Soloski, 1989). Additionally, temporality is a crucial consideration since it is ingrained into even the most basic desire to increase the speed of messages (Carey, 1989), thus the speed and efficiency news workers are required to perform. The temporality of journalistic working conditions demonstrates increased worker precarity and work intensity during remote work.

With historic shareholder market logics and conglomeration within the news industry, there has been an increase in journalistic precarity, thus intensifying the working conditions for news workers that remain in the industry. Worker control, particularly time management and internal worker control, demonstrates this argument. Structural dimensions of temporality include the myth of flexible schedules, an "always on" professional culture, and work breaks. Drawing on Örlikowski's (2007) concept of sociomaterial "constitutive entanglement,"

journalistic production working condition choices are guided by convenient technological infrastructures.

All of these issues coalesce when we examine how news workers negotiated their work during the pandemic. This study uncovered how remote work intensified pre-existing challenges in journalistic labor. With limited physical managerial oversight, news workers relied on internalized professionalism and digital technologies to maintain productivity. However, the digital technologies also blurred the boundaries between their personal and professional life. This shift challenged collaboration, which led to a perceived increase in isolation and work intensification. Ultimately, these conditions coalesced in ways that increased news worker precarity as newsrooms prioritized digital technical solutions when news workers needed well-being structures and social capital.

Chapter 3: Methodology

To answer the above mentioned research questions, this study embarked on a series of 30 semi-structured in-depth interviews. Qualitative methods were used because this research does not seek to establish causation directionality or predict human behavior (Creswell, 2007, p. 97). Instead, the interview method best addresses "how" and "why" questions (Creswell, 2007). All of the aforementioned research questions presented are "how" questions. In-depth interviews enabled respondents to engage in self-reflection and discussion on their meaning-making and social construction captured through dialogue. In other words, interviews were advantageous in that they provided more detailed information compared to other types of data collection, such as surveys (Boyce and Neale, 2006). Interviews were also advantageous compared to a digital ethnography since the research questions aimed to generate self-reflection instead of distanced digital observation. Moderation guides with intentionally open-ended questions designed for a discussion setting rather than "yes/no" or multiple-choice responses excelled at generating respondent perceptions and more contextual nuance compared to surveys. While surveys would provide a more generalizable sample, this research aimed to capture nuance in participant reflections, justifications, and rationalizations rather than a breadth of respondents.

Participant Characteristics

This project provides insight and analysis through purposive in-depth interviews with U.S. news workers. The respondent criterion sampling was focused on interviewing news workers that experienced prolonged distributed labor due to the coronavirus pandemic. This excludes freelance (Hayes and Silke, 2017) and other non-traditional laborers since they are more accustomed to distributed labor practices and have separate, distinct work cultures. The

sampling criteria was necessary to examine the transition from office to remote journalism work during a time when remote work was relatively widespread in a historical and national context.

While this study did not gather participant demographic data, (e.g., race, gender, socioeconomic status), intentionally as to not introduce bias, all participating news workers held full-time employment status within an institutional U.S. news organization. This is not an exhaustive account of remote work experiences in journalism, but it draws from a heterogenous cross section of news workers' experiences with remote work to be useful as a case study. Respondent identities were made anonymous for their job security and participant numbers have been assigned instead of naming conventions to minimize participant identifying information and demographic assumptions.

U.S. news workers were recruited iteratively to provide a highly variable sample among rural and urban news workers and to counterbalance recruitment sampling across geographic demographics and professional titles. This variability was intentional as to provide a representative sample of experiences and repeat shared experiences. News workers included reporters, copyeditors, digital strategists, data visualists, producers, and editors. This sampling criterion included beat reporters since many refrained from returning to their offices full-time despite returning to field work with new caution routines. With regards to professional titles, "Editor" and "Reporter" were the most captured titles in the data segmentation. Additionally, all "Producer" titles were within the "West" geographic segment and all "Director" titles were within the "Midwest" geographic segment.

While variations in demographic data, particularly race and gender at the time of this writing, have been explored within journalism studies (Usher, 2021), geographic differences in the U.S. have not yet had similar scholarly consideration despite the growing urban-rural

political divide within the U.S. (Usher, 2019). An even geographical sample was considered so historically larger, East Coast newsrooms did not dominate the sample despite a higher density of newsrooms along the East Coast (Usher, 2021). This also helped account for cultural differences across the U.S. sample. The "East" sample leaned more heavily for-profit, particularly amongst "Reporter" titles. The "South" segment included the most non-profit representation. Otherwise, geographic segments are varied in balance with each other.

News workers were also selected across organizations based on their variety of previous experiences with remote work. For example, some news workers were employed by digital-only news organizations that worked remotely prior to the coronavirus pandemic while other news workers adapted to remote work due to the pandemic across the range of labor experiences between the summer of 2021 and the spring of 2022.

Interview Characteristics

Prior to interviews, participants were provided a detailed consent form that described the nature of the research, any reasons they specifically were contacted, general insights into the interview process, confirmation that their participation was voluntary, and a confidentiality agreement. While the Grounded Theory analytical approach was used (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), the topics of distributed labor, place, and journalism production were examined prior to the interview process and helped inform the iterative data collection and qualitative coding processes.

Twenty-seven interviews were initiated via cold emails, with three interviews generated from snowball sampling. Interviews were conducted in two phases. The first phase was conducted from July 15th, 2021 through September 10th, 2021. The second phase was conducted

from December 20th, 2021 through March 15th, 2022. Interviews conducted in the first round primarily focused on remote technological reliance, socialization and isolation, as well as work-life (im)balance. Interviews conducted in the second phase largely included place and temporality as well as what made news production unique. This was in part due to reaching saturation on certain topics, but also in large part because of what participants felt most confident talking about at these different times. For example, in the first phase, remote technological reliance was much more widely discussed because it was still relatively new and also a massive part of the news production process compared to the timing of the second phase when some news workers were returning to the office in a hybrid schedule. It was at the end of the second phase that theoretical saturation was confirmed, a key requirement for descriptive research where no new themes emerged and findings became repetitive (Stebbins, 2001). This time lapse ensured the news organization had enough time to experiment with and select technologically-mediated remote work practices that aligned with or compliment pre-existing newsroom norms, practices, and epistemologies. This timeline also ensured some news workers ventured back into the newsroom, so they could reflect on their remote work practices. The different phases accounted for possible changes in remote work conditions after vaccine availability while also being near enough to the initial coronavirus pandemic shut-downs to rely on participant memory. Many news workers included in this sample were continuously engaged in remote work practices and were rationalizing the uncertainty of foreseeable remote work.

All interviews were conducted virtually through the videoconferencing software (e.g., Zoom and Google Meet) of the participants' choice, a necessary component from the University IRB to reduce the spread of the ongoing pandemic. Interviews averaged approximately 60 minutes each. Among the interviews conducted (n=30), there was a nearly even distribution

between for-profit (n=16) and non-profit (n=14) newsroom representation as a comparison strategy for tax status and production expectation differences (see Table 1). Interviews were recorded with participant consent, transcribed using the University of Minnesota-approved REV Transcription Services, then manually cleaned in an Excel sheet for transcription errors.

Analysis Procedures

Over time, themes were developed from the transcripts to reflect recurring response patterns and establish connections between responses (Luker, 2008). To begin the process, key concepts from the profiles were included as open codes (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The first complete read was conducted without coding the content (Lindlof and Taylor, 2017) to focus on noting potential unexpected themes throughout the interview process. The transcription reading process was repeated a second time to include coding for secondary and primary categories (see Saldaña, 2015). This pacing of analysis established a constant comparative method, common to Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), including verification, audit trails, and the iterative process, which built validity and reliability (Morse et al., 2008). This pacing confirmed the saturation point of interviews via category replication and lack of new category emergence. Using constant comparative techniques, categories were collapsed to the more abstract levels of meaning to ensure common themes were understandable compared to other interviews.

In addition to interview transcripts, I developed field notes during the interview process and memos on the data after the interview was completed. These field notes include information about body language, tone, emotion, and any interruptions or events during the interviews. For example, most interviews contained at least one event of technological malfunction, either

through dropped calls, pet interruptions, low batteries, and so on. Simultaneous open coding such as this benefits the iterative process. Axial coding took place after all data was collected.

The interview protocol (see Appendix A) used a semi-structured approach consisting of several key focus areas about the participants' perceptions of remote work, including but not limited to news production, technology, and work-life balance. A conversational tone was used to construct a relaxed interview setting with natural focus themes (Boyce and Neale, 2006). I introduced important considerations into the conversation if they did not emerge naturally. The semi-structured protocol enabled divergence that allowed me to pursue a participant response in more elaborate detail and explore themes I did not pre-emptively account for (Gill et al., 2008).

Finally, the semi-structured approach consisted of several broad themes enabling participants to respond to questions they felt qualified and capable of discussing. Rather than having participants answer questions in each theme, the semi-structured approach enabled the interview to focus on some themes over others depending on the respondent's familiarity and experience. In other words, the semi-structured interview approach lent itself to some respondents "going deep" by thoroughly discussing a narrow selection of the themes, while other respondents "go wide" by generally discussing a broad selection of the themes. Most "Editors" and also most in the "East" geographic segment wanted to talk about place and temporality. Participants in the "West" geographic segment preferred discussing socialization and isolation. Those in the "Midwest" geographic segment leaned into talking about work-life (im)balance. Seven of the thirty news workers that participated requested not to be directly quoted in thesis and publications and those findings were considered within the overall insights generated by this research or significantly paraphrased. These interviews contributed to the findings overall by confirming quotable respondents without sacrificing their identity through direct quotations.

Positionality and Reflexivity

Considering this study is qualitative research, reflexivity must be addressed (Cramer, 2016). Hand (2003) suggested that true reflexivity provides credibility to the researcher. Considering the interview style, my own subject position and social identity is implicated through this research. As a white, young adult, well-educated, literate woman in the U.S. with high access to digital technologies, I experienced relatively open access and hospitable treatment from participants through all stages of the data collection process. Having a relatively gender-ambiguous name may or may not have improved my recruitment efforts. Being a graduate student, my interest in these research questions required minimal justification, as the institutional reputation of the university helped support my own validity.

However, as a woman, I could lean into curiosity in a way that could surface participant sexism. That said, my inexperience with working in newsrooms meant I was an outsider in many meaningful ways. The first time I stepped foot in a newsroom as an employee occurred in a brief contract job that occurred after these interviews occurred. This research would not have been conceptualized without my lack of professional newsroom experience, which ultimately led me to ask: "how does that work, practically, considering the coronavirus pandemic?" multiple times in my graduate seminars. The base of the question "how does that work?" ultimately catalyzed my interest in journalistic labor. This also confirms I did not know any of the participants prior to the interview process. Additionally, this outsider status allowed me to ask clarifying questions or descriptions about experiences that may not have been possible if participants assumed I was a newsroom insider.

As a young adult, I was just young enough to feign naiveté if needed to dig deeper into experiences and justifications. However, I was old enough to be considered roughly on peer with

the news workers I spoke with. As an able-bodied person, I was able to take for granted access to digital meeting rooms to conduct interviews and my physical ability to take notes and focus during the interviews. Whiteness marks me as a member of a dominant social group in post-colonial capitalism, which mattered in both marginalized and non-marginalized interviews. This whiteness confers many advantages that helped make this research possible. It also meant that there were a few conversations where I was not particularly privy to knowing about for print. I sought out some of these conversations, but due to a history of many people of color feeling burdened by white feminists, I also consciously avoided pushing for my own inclusion out of respect for the dynamics of these tragedies. As a native English speaker, I was not excluded from or in need of accommodation to follow spoken conversation.

Being an American provided unparalleled access to U.S. newsrooms. While this research is entirely bound within the continental U.S., it attempts to be critically reflexive about how regionally diverse geography is culturally situated. Since my primary argument is about how respondent identities are rooted in place, my own identity is also rooted in place. I am from a small and sleepy suburb of the Illinois capital, moved frequently around the U.S. during my childhood, experienced traveling abroad to non-English speaking countries, and conducted this research in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The concept of place may not have been conceived as productive to this literature if I had not earned a GIS (geographic information systems) certificate and explored geography during my undergraduate studies.

Chapter 4: Results

The results of this research are divided into six sections, including a section for each of the four research questions. Those research questions are interconnected and coalesce to form the overall story of pandemic-related remote news work in the U.S. For example, RQ1 explores work-life balance, RQ2 focuses on digital technology uses, RQ3 emphasizes the news workers' abilities to set personal and professional boundaries socially, which works in tandem with the results from RQ4 about place and temporality. Each research question has its own section with the understanding that the reality more closely reflects these research questions working in unison rather than as individual categories. However, this reality does not naturally care for cohesive writing. An additional fifth section of the results explores what is so unique about news workers compared to other white-collar workers in the U.S. A sixth section on temporality specifically investigates internalized worker control during remote work.[1] Together, the results demonstrate the challenges news workers confronted along with strategies to potentially minimize those challenges.

Remote Technological Reliance

This section explores the first research question presented, "How did news workers use technology during pandemic-related remote work?" It examines the perceived impact the

[1] This findings section feels different from the other findings sections because it was originally written for Dr. Rachel Schurman's Labor seminar final term paper. In other words, it was written at a different time in my life for a different purpose and wasn't edited as much as these other sections because it doesn't feel right for me to change the tone in honor of Dr. Schurman.

newsrooms' pandemic closure had on news workers' experiences with technology during remote work.

While proprietary content management systems (CMS) (e.g., Salesforce, iSite, Chorus) have been used widely in digital news production, most news workers did not include these systems when they reflected on the kind of digital technology they used during remote work. The only news worker to include this information was a reporter who primarily worked in software other than the CMS. CMS was the only digital technology used regularly that was not inherently social.

Remote work required more technologies with the primary utility of socially connecting news workers across geographic distances. While most of these technologies were not created specifically for or during the pandemic, many of them saw sharp increases in use during the pandemic. One of these technologies was email (e.g., gmail, outlook). Email has been used to communicate electronically for decades, but has been gradually falling out of favor despite remaining a professional platform requirement. "*I hate email and the less email I have in my life the better. I answer email as little as possible*" (P71). One of the reasons supporting email as becoming unpopular was because it was primarily seen as too formal for the quick rhythms of news work, including editing. "*My last job, we would submit everything over email. If I had just one question for my editor, I had to send him a big email just like, 'Hey, do you have the phone number for this person,' which gets very tedious after a while"* (P7). While the temporality of news work intensified in a digital age, the social norms of email being formal communication did not shift with the new tempo of labor, causing news workers to prefer other, more instantaneous chat options that felt less formal.

Despite many news workers not wanting to engage with email, some used email in innovative ways. To supplement and modernize email, several news workers added systems that would translate voicemails from on their office desk into emails. This modernized use of email was popularized in part because many news workers rarely, if ever, had access to their newsroom desk voicemails during pandemic-related remote work. "*We get reader emails and messages and things like that still. Luckily, when someone calls my extension, which no one's there, we get an email transcript of it in an audio message, which has been great*" (P74). Meanwhile, news workers that often worked outside of the physical newsrooms (e.g., sport reporters, storm reporters) had email with the unspoken industry standard option to text or call their cell phone for more urgent messages. Email remained a relied upon technology during pandemic remote work, if even only for slower, more formal messaging and inaccessible voicemails.

Instead of email, many news organizations either began or formalized their transition toward instant messaging systems, particularly Slack or Microsoft Teams. "*For some people, that was a hard transition to move away from email and towards Slack just to kind of give more of that real time feel and communication"* (P12). Slack is an instant messaging system with the affordances of voice messaging, instant "huddles" or video conferencing, emoji reactions, and more. Through these affordances, Slack creates a consistent connection to colleagues that help maintain workplace relationships, *"Slack facilitates that kind of relationship with the workplace, which I appreciate. It's definitely better than email"* (P71). Slack in particular became popular in 2020 when the pandemic in the U.S. began, citing a 57% increase in year-to-year profits for 2020 (Slack, 2020). Much of the popularity arose around being able to directly message colleagues and create group chats or channels where multiple colleagues can share information with others

simultaneously. "*Slack is very easy to communicate and have multiple people communicating at once*" (P7).

While convenient, this instant messaging system also inherently suggested that its users, in this case news workers, should try to keep up with temporal intensification. "*I have Slack on my phone and I will use that there, but I really tried not to do a lot of work on my phone just for my own sanity"* (P12). Despite encouraging an always-on ethic, and unlike calling or texting where there would be a phone notification (e.g., blinking indicator light, vibration, etc.), Slack users can mute notifications outside of customizable working hours. The onus was on the news workers to create notification boundaries. *"Sometimes, I would just have an idea at 10:00 at night on a Saturday. And I know that before I forget, I can share it over Slack. And everyone usually has their notifications turned off until Monday so I don't have to worry about bothering someone. But I don't have to worry about absolutely forgetting what I just thought of"* (P2).

While Slack was "pretty much required" (P2), news workers mostly used it for information sharing rather than nuanced communication, such as collaborative brainstorming or troubleshooting. "*For Slack, I'm mainly using it to ask for small things. So more like things that are very easily explained and don't require a lot of more nuanced communication"* (P71). While news workers used Slack mostly to share information quickly rather than have full conversations, most did engage in multiple channels where they could interact with various colleagues. This ranged from topical professional channels (e.g., sports news, marketing, etc.) to more strictly social channels (e.g., water cooler, music playlists). *"Our Slack channels are structured by team mostly. Sometimes with special projects and so we'll have #staff_editorial, #staff_public newsroom, #development, or #marcom… Then there are several channels that are open to*

everyone in our community and that's a water cooler channel feel or stuff that is bringing you joy. We do have an all-staff channel just for general purpose" (P71).

Despite these benefits, Slack also has drawbacks; like most digital technologies, it is imperfect. Similar to other digital written communication, Slack is text-based with a rarely used action option for speech-to-text messaging. As with other text-based forms of communication, it was common for remote news workers to misinterpret the tone or emotion of the text that the writer was intending. "*People's tone on Slack can be really hard to read depending on how they communicate"* (P71). Some participants recounted being misunderstood and accidentally misunderstanding others, which sometimes caused emotional tensions. Despite this, those that experienced this phenomenon mentioned they eventually had a video conference conversation with the colleague to realign. "*There would be moments where you misinterpret something and then you're like, 'I can't believe they said that.' And then you step back and have a conversation with them later and it was like that's not what they meant at all, it's fine"* (P36).

To help mitigate these Slack shortcomings, many news organizations pivoted longer and more nuanced conversation to video conferencing platforms, such as Zoom or Teams, that help users hear, see, emote, and whiteboard with each other. News workers used Zoom slightly more often compared to Teams, to communicate with colleagues internally. Zoom also provided the possibility for many public meetings to be remote accessible. "*A lot of meetings are now on Zoom, city meetings, school board meetings"* (P70). This often meant news workers spent most of their working time in both internal Zoom meetings for the news organization and in external public Zoom meetings.

Shortly after the pandemic closed most physical coworking spaces in the U.S., including newsrooms, the term "Zoom fatigue," meaning exhaustion from looking into a camera or at yourself, entered cultural vernacular. Zoom helped mitigate Slack's shortcomings, but also generated an additional layer of fatigue. "*Earlier on, we tried to do some virtual social events, but we think that overall, everyone's collective Zoom fatigue if this turned into like no one wanting to do them. They were on Zoom all day for work"* (P2). Despite the Zoom fatigue of being on camera during the day, many others were desperately seeking and trying to maintain social connections in the workplace. *"Even though being on a Zoom with a bunch of people, you're just looking at a bunch of squares of people's faces, and it's not really like being in the room together, I just feel like it would foster a little bit more of a sense of connection"* (P71).

As email faded from the forefront of electronic communication, Slack and Zoom shared modern relevance regardless of the disadvantages unique to each. Slack, Zoom, and email communication connected users to each other. There was a reliance on these tools to help form and maintain the social connections desperately lacking in most Americans' lives between 2020 through 2021.

The following sections elaborate in greater detail about how news workers use these digital technologies during remote work for newsroom socialization and socializing, followed by news workers' work-life balance strategies.

Socialization and Isolation

This section explores the second research question presented, "How are news workers socialized into their labor roles during remote work?" This section first investigates how news

workers were socialized into their profession then explores how news workers socialize with colleagues and the public.

Most news workers chose to enter the profession at some point in their career progression. Their motivations to pursue journalism often supported metajournalistic discourse regarding professional definition (Carlson, 2016). This occasionally included situating their professional motivations within a larger context of news workers, such as "*I think journalism really is just history in the present time… I think a lot of what I do in my job and journalists do internationally is talk about what's important right now*" (P45). News workers' impetus to pursue and continue in a specific professional role has wide ranging implications for the norms that are accepted, legitimized, and encouraged.

Valuation of these professional norms often began as an adolescent, like P7 described, "*I always knew I wanted to write from a very, very, very young age, like five or six.*" Further, high school and early college experiences also influenced professionalization into the field. "*I think like a lot of journalists, I started writing in high school when I was 15 for my high school newspaper. I also was streaming for our local newspaper doing sports… I had a lot of encouragement from advisors and other journalists*" (P120).

Many noted that educator encouragement during their early education influenced their decisions to pursue professional journalism during their college education. Several news workers asserted most of their training occurred within their undergraduate education rather than post-graduation in their early career. For example, P7 described how their university newspaper trained them more than their journalism coursework, "*The best training I've ever received was their [university] practicums and that was fantastic training. But it was honestly the [university student-led newspaper] that taught me everything I know.*" These professional socialization

experiences not only taught required skills for news workers (e.g., writing, fact-finding, photography), but through collaboration and social networking, they also socialized prospective news workers into a socio-cultural sphere of other prospective news workers that contributed to boundary definitions of what was and wasn't working for new workers in general. "*I think it's less about support. It's more like, you talk about your work and you, I don't want to use the word gripe, but you discuss the things that are working and the things that are not"* (P108). Early educational experiences, particularly practical training through university newspapers and practicums, were imperative in shaping professional skills and news worker socialization expectations, providing both technical knowledge and informal networks.

The more experienced staff consistently described how professional training occurred in being physically in the newsroom around other colleagues. For example, P74 described how professional news workers, particularly journalists, could miss out on learning opportunities by not being in the newsroom, "*You miss just overhearing everyone in their conversations, and that's a way to… learn from each other about interviewing styles and questions you ask. Things like that, you learn from people, from being around them. That's something that I think might be missing, just learning through osmosis of listening to people around you.*" Additionally, P112 supported this, "*We've got some news reporters and they are not in the newsroom to pick up on the atmosphere. Sometimes you learn something from hearing other people do interviews.*"

This difference in perspective on where less experienced news workers receive the most valuable training (e.g., during undergraduate education or informally in newsrooms) is up for debate and stratified between less experienced against more experienced news workers' perspectives. While this research did not ascertain explicit

details into this perspective divide, based on context gathered from other news worker responses, it was implied that the less experienced news workers that have only worked remotely do not yet know what type of education or training they missed without being in the physical newsroom.

To justify the position of less experienced workers believing they learned the most during their undergraduate years, they described a nearly non-existent workplace on-boarding process. On-boarding processes are typically aimed at ensuring a new hire has the hardware and software access to fulfill their role requirements. On-boarding also socializes them into a particular news organization by introducing them to their team, cross-functional colleagues, and other stakeholders regardless of their experience level. When asked about the on-boarding experience, the majority share negative experiences. For example, P80 described on-boarding as "awful," "really, really chaotic," and "*There really, really, really wasn't an onboarding process. I had no idea what was happening. Any step of the way, I kind of had to navigate it on my own."*

On-boarding was an even higher hurdle for news workers that were entirely remote because they did not know who to reach out to or how if they were experiencing any setbacks or confusion. "*It was already hard not really knowing what was happening, but it was even harder being remote and not knowing who I needed to talk to to get the right information about something*" (P80). Similarly, P124 reflected on their remote on-boarding process, "*It was just a little bit harder to organically ask questions about that or just make sure you're kind of doing everything right before then you were sort of swept up in the day-to-day of your work.*"

Beyond knowing how to get information, on-boarding challenges also created gaps in knowledge for new hires that were never trained on particular templates, procedures, or benefits. For example, P139 recently began a new role and mentioned, "*I do think that there are gaps in my institutional knowledge just because I've been remote the entire time working for this company*" (P139). In supporting this, P124 also described, "*It's taken time for me to figure out how things work in a real work sense, like, 'Okay, this piece goes here and this editor touches it and then it gets copy edited,' whatever that looks like*." Overall, remote on-boarding created knowledge gaps significant enough to be mentionable because the lack of in-person training and informal guidance left several struggling to understand internal processes and organizational structures.

Most experienced news workers described how it was their responsibility to welcome and help train new employees rather than a company-wide on-boarding protocol to introduce them to the basics. This challenge was internal with other news workers, some more experienced news workers admitting their own perceived shortcoming. "*I don't really do a great job, especially being home all the time, at reaching out to people and cultivating those relationships. Historically, I've done that in-person, just naturally by being around people you get to know them. So yeah. I think the support base is less"* (P108). Not only did newly hired remote news workers not know who to connect with or how to connect with them, but the legacy hires were also admitting they were not as welcoming or engaged in new hire socialization success. Internal news culture formation was deprioritized during remote work due to minimal on-boarding.

Regardless of experience level, it was a social challenge on-boarding and also exiting a news organization remotely. Several news workers never met more than one or

two people from their organization in-person, and sometimes not multiple times. For example, P7 described meeting their boss in-person only twice, once when they on-boarded and once when they off-boarded. Expectations for leaving one place of work for another was typically expected to be a bittersweet moment shared with colleagues. However, with remote work, news workers were disappointed they didn't have the collective moment of closure. P7 described the experience, "*I gave my boss my laptop and my office key. It's like a three-minute conversation. Then I was like, 'Wow, that's really anticlimactic.' And I was done.*" (P7). To combat the "anticlimactic" feeling associated with remote off-boarding, some news workers partook in ritualistic off-boarding when possible, demonstrating that when legacy colleagues contributed effort it often fulfilled pre-remote work expectations. This strategy allowed the news workers social closure and a marked end to their time in that news organization. P124 described a few ways their team supported their off-boarding, including an exit interview, writing a manual for their predecessor, an in-person sendoff, and a remote happy hour.

In addition to personal socializing with colleagues, social barriers from remote work also impacted the internal professional culture. Most news workers described a vibrant, sometimes inconveniently noisy, newsroom before the pandemic. "*It used to be that you could just walk over to someone's desk and chat with them about life, or just also about a story you're working on and you could go back and forth, and sometimes you get really good ideas from your colleagues that way, from that spontaneous conversation that happens, or just walking past someone or talking to them"* (P74). However, casual and impromptu conversations were less likely to occur during remote work due to the nature of technological capabilities. Many news workers did miss these discussions with colleagues, but understood the need to distance due to

the pandemic, as P105 described, "*I want to go into the office to meet people and bond and I do miss the newsroom, but then I also don't want to go in a closed space during the pandemic as well.*"

The majority of news workers identified social relationships as the main challenge of remote news work, especially those that were new to the news industry and those that switched companies during remote work. P124 described the challenges of meeting colleagues and new stakeholders shortly after they were hired, "*But I think the challenge has just been forming more relationships. And I've been there a year and three months now, and I just feel like I have some good relationships and everyone I've worked with has been great, but there are just less opportunities to meet people organically unless you happen to be on a project with them*." Furthering this, P7 noted how for journalists in particular, most of their job would be talking to people, "*but it's also weirdly isolating to work from home as a reporter because it's you talking to strangers, but you don't get to necessarily have regular relationships with a lot of people*, *whether it be coworkers or even just the people that you see every day coming in to the office building.*" New hires were challenged in building connections with colleagues, leading to isolation as legacy colleagues withdrew socially and remote work decreased organic interactions.

Meeting colleagues was a significant barrier, but once the initial interactions occurred, newly hired news workers also struggled to understand the organization's culture, specifically social power structures. P124 was hired nearly a year and a half before I spoke with them and as they described the challenges of meeting colleagues, they explicated how even after meeting colleagues they were still challenges with understanding the social landscape:

> *It's really just like, 'How does this place work in terms of the power dynamics?'*
>
> *And I don't even necessarily mean that in bad... Maybe in a bad way, and also in*

positive, like just who is a leader here? What are these people's different management styles? Are these people friends, and that's why they collaborate together a lot? Are these people not really friends and so they wouldn't really want to be like in a group... I don't know, like you just pick up on so many of those things kind of intuitively when you're with everyone altogether. And so that I think is kind of a challenge, like the culture of the place can be harder to pick up on remotely.

Social challenges with internal colleagues significantly altered the internal newsroom culture, particularly for new hires that were hired during remote work policies and didn't know the pre-remote culture. However, social challenges were not delegated to only internal newsroom affairs with colleagues. External public and community members were also more challenging to connect with because of remote work requirements from the pandemic. Social challenges also impacted the news workers' ability to find sources during remote work. P82 noted, "*It was really, really hard, trying to meet people, and develop sources, and get scoops when people have never met you face-to-face.*" While this is the case for most news workers, it was especially challenging for those with less professional experience and those that moved across the U.S. for their new employment role. P120, who entered news work and moved across the country for their job during remote work described, "*I didn't have a chance to really meet any of my sources. I didn't get to meet any of my coworkers. So that made it a lot harder those first couple weeks to find stories because I didn't really know anybody. And on the flip side, nobody knew me."*

Overall, the socialization process, or more specifically the lack thereof, surfaced several meaningful challenges for news workers. News workers, especially journalists, rely on relationships, trust, and access. However, remote news work made it more difficult to find and

cooperate with sources, limited internal colleague networking and pre-existing network understanding, reduced community access for identifying stories, and complicated professional credibility formation.

Work-Life (Im)Balance

This section explores the third research question presented, "How did news workers negotiate work-life balance while working remotely?" This section examines news workers' work-life balance, or lack thereof, during remote work.

Most news workers were familiar with the concept of work-life balance. Unanimously, the participants all believed work-life balance was imperative. However, this belief also catalyzed self-judgment for their own individual work-life balance needs regardless of their professional role or experience level. Work-life balance was the priority component in determining news workers' mental health when compared against themes of technology, socialization, place, and temporality.

Burnout emerged as a central theme for many participants, with some connecting it to the challenges of maintaining their personal-professional boundaries. P12 reflected, "*I'm not sure that I would call my work-life balance strategy successful, which is maybe part of the reason I've been fairly burned out… And because of that, then I had a hard time motivating my team and my coworkers. Doing the other things that you talked about to separate life from work became less. It seemed like there was less of a point. I think what I'm describing is depression actually. Just kidding. I mean, maybe.*" Similarly, P19 shared how their experience of burnout during the pandemic deeply impacted their mental health more broadly and their professional capacity, "*Being a reporter during the pandemic, I experienced immense burnout to where I took January*

of this year off, because I just couldn't do it anymore. I think what was really hard was that all of the news was bad, and we were responsible for telling those stories... And then processing people's stories, that is a hard part of the job, there's a trauma response that happens to reporters when they ingest the traumatic stories, and then it's our job to regurgitate them in a way for the public, and not exploit it, and be sensitive and ethical and fair to the source. And all of that was compounded." These accounts demonstrate the emotional labor of navigating the professional demands of news work without the sufficient recovery or support mechanisms from their professional news organization nor in their personal lives.

Mental health challenges and work-life balance emerged as significant themes for news workers, particularly for those less experienced or who transitioned between organizations during remote work. Reflecting on early-career pressures, P70 noted, "*At the beginning it's, I think, a lot harder because you don't want to let anyone down and you're trying to build trust in the job and everything. So I think in some ways it was just having to be like, 'Okay, if I don't do everything right, I'm not going to get fired. I'm not going to... The world is not going to end.' I just have to be able to say no to some things for my sanity.*"

By contrast, other news workers prescribed a more work-centered approach, often to their detriment. P80 described, "*I got into this method of always saying yes even though I was 100% depleted.*" Similarly, P89 responded to questions about work-life balance with a cautionary, "*Oh boy,*" while P139 admitted "*My life is to work. There's no life work. It's all the same thing.*" These responses underscore the self-imposed expectations many participants carried, alongside a belief that managing work-life balance was primarily an individual responsibility rather than a shared effort. As P19 explained, "*If you don't create those boundaries, they'll never exist.*"

For some, supportive teams played a critical role in fostering work-life balance. P48 shared an example of a newsroom culture that prioritized covering for one another, "*It's important to have a good team and a staff that will allow you to do it* [work-life balance] *because they also know how important it is and they also want to be able to disconnect when they go out of town. So if somebody is on vacation, the rest of us step up and make sure that we're taking over whatever duties that we can from them so they can actually enjoy their vacation. And I know not everybody's like that. I've worked at a lot of newspapers that were not like that at all.*"

However, many other participants described how managerial behaviors shaped their own approach to balance. P36 recounted, "*both my bosses are super workaholics so at times I felt like maybe they weren't a great influence in terms of modeling because I just seemed to work at odd hours. But they've been more cognizant and more intentional about making a point to take vacations.*" Yet, others felt pressure to be available at all times. In reference to the opening introduction paragraph of this theses, P74 shared, "*Last week a couple editors had wanted me and a colleague to work on a story. Breaking news had happened and so this was day two, and there were some aspects of it that relate to me and my coworkers' beat. Early that morning they were messaging us about it, and it was before work hours started. But it seemed easier for them to message you earlier, because you're like, 'Well, what else are you doing,' kind of thing.*" Managerial behaviors influenced how news workers and their direct reports approached work-life balance. Some managers modelled a greater emphasis on work-life balance while others reinforced an implicit expectation of near constant availability.

To manage these challenges, some participants set firm boundaries, particularly around social relationships. P71 explained, "*I don't like to blend work and personal life. I have pretty firm boundaries around relationships with my colleagues. I have a social world and friendships*

that have nothing to do with my work whatsoever. There are very few people in my personal life that have anything to do with my work life." In addition to defining group boundaries to help distinguish between personal and professional, some news workers also referred to technology's role in their work-life balance, "*I feel like I don't have a lot of really hard and fast boundaries. I use the same phone for my work and personal life. I only have one phone. So in a lot of senses, it really gets blurred together*" said P70. Supporting this, P80 described how it was a challenge to disconnect from their digital platforms for work, "*It definitely became something where I was constantly looking like, oh my gosh, what's happening on Slack? What's happening on Teams? What are these missing things? What are these unread notifications on these apps? Is there anything I can do to help?*" To manage remote work challenges, some established and maintained clear boundaries between their personal and professional lives, while others struggled to disconnect, especially when digital technology blurred the line between personal and professional.

News workers frequently used technology to establish and maintain work-life boundaries. Many implemented strategies, such as setting time restrictions on company messaging systems, like Slack or email, to pause notifications or forward messages until the next workday. For urgent matters, several only allowed their personal phones to be accessible. Participants also took deliberate steps to separate their personal and professional lives on social media. P71 explained, "*I don't let anyone that I work with follow me on Instagram, and not even anyone who I know in a professional capacity, because I feel like it's the only space online in social media that is my private space... I don't want to think about the gaze of someone that I work with in that space, because I want to be able to feel like if I wanted to post something, I don't want to have to think about, 'What are my colleagues going to think about it?'*" In addition to limiting access to social

media platforms, some participants went further by removing social media apps from their devices altogether to avoid being immersed in even more news during their personal time. P120 shared, "*I deleted Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram off my phone completely. A long time ago, I made a decision with myself after honestly getting screen time reports on my iPhone, where I was spending like five and a half hours a day on Twitter. I was like, 'This is just not healthy.' So I set up those boundaries for myself.*" P89 noted, "*I don't get my work email on my personal phone, just because those tend to be less time-intensive, less urgent.*" Similarly, P112 described leveraging specific technologies to create firm boundaries, "*We have Vonage. I do have the option of my desk phone ringing to my cell phone, but I've turned that off. So I've tried to create those limits... Before, I created a Google Voice account number on my own. So that way I was trying to kind of create a little wall with people. I'm like, 'You can text me here or you can call me here and I'll answer if I'm available.*'" Overall, of the news workers that used technology to reinforce their work-life boundaries, many used strategies that restricted access to work communication outside of normal work hours and separated their personal and professional social media use to maintain privacy.

For many news workers, working from home during the pandemic disrupted their work-life balance in significant ways. P2 highlighted how their home environment directly challenged their ability to work effectively, "*In the early stages, we're thinking that it* [the pandemic] *was just going to be temporary, I didn't have appropriate space for myself to work, and this led to me just working into the night constantly.*" Others described similar struggles with the monotony of remote work and the blurred boundaries between personal and professional life. For example, P5 reflected, "*What does it mean during a pandemic when work and life take place in the same building, and you can't go anywhere? I wrote at one point, like what the pandemic*

day was, because it's the same goddamn day over and over again. The only difference between Saturday and Friday was like Saturday, you didn't have to sit at your laptop, but you're still sitting in the same room." This overlap between home and work often resulted in longer workdays. P36 described this overlap, "*There were times when it was just like you looked up, and we were both working, and it's very late. There was never the need to be like, 'Oh, I better go home to see my family,' because I was home with my family, and my wife was also working hard.*" The work from home requirements from the pandemic lead to challenges including inadequate workspaces, blurred work-life boundaries, and extended work hours because there wasn't a physical separation between home and office.

The dual challenges of place and time shaped work-life balance for many. Temporality, specifically, the blurred lines between when work ended and personal life began, was a recurring theme. This was especially pronounced for news workers in smaller communities that could encounter sources in everyday settings or for those with social or cultural beats whose personal lives could be leveraged for content. P7, a cultural or lifestyle news worker, described experiencing both: "*They want me to turn my everyday life into content. Because I run this Instagram account and I'm supposed to post two original posts a day. Every time I go out for drinks at a bar, I got to take a picture of it and turn it into content. So, even in my off time, it feels like I have to be working in some kind of capacity. That has been a constant struggle… when your life becomes the content that they want you to have.*"

Overall, this section explored how news workers negotiated their work-life balance during the work from home requirements from the pandemic. This section also highlights the importance of mental health for their overall well-being personally and professionally, with managerial behaviors playing a critical role in either healthy work-life balance or constant

availability expectation modelling. Most experienced significant challenges setting and maintaining professional boundaries, often leading to exhaustion, isolation, and sometimes burnout. However, some managed by setting and maintaining firm boundaries early in the pandemic by using digital platforms to disconnect from work, such as separating personal and professional social media use. Regardless, most struggled with the monotony during work from home because inadequate home office spaces and extended working hours blurred the separation between personal and professional life. Ultimately, remote work blurred temporal and spatial boundaries via digital technologies.

Place and Temporality

The following section explores the fourth research question presented, "How did news workers negotiate between place and time during pandemic-related remote work?" This section examines news worker experiences surrounding hybrid workplaces, relocating, and the temporalities of remote news labor. Though place and temporality are often combined in colloquialisms, the following results section separates them into two distinguished phenomena to isolate the findings for each. The first subsection explores place while the remaining sub-section explores temporality.

Place

Prior to the pandemic, remote work in the journalism industry meant WFA reporters that were in the field rather than in the physical newsroom. Otherwise, journalists were expected to be located in the newsroom. Assumptions about a lack of productivity and self-motivation (Bower, 2023) have been internalized by both managers and news workers alike, "*I've heard it from other employers who were like, 'Oh, we didn't know about productivity, no one's going to*

do work,' and things like that that the pandemic has proven wrong" (P74). The belief of a remote work productivity slump, combined with increased digital security risk of remote work (Nurse, 2021), kept most news workers either in the field or newsroom. To highlight how taboo remote work was before the pandemic, when P74 was sick with food poisoning their manager requested they complete their story and they described them reluctantly letting them finish the story at home.

When the U.S. news industry had to work from home during the pandemic (not work from anywhere because of COVID-19 restrictions), it was the news workers' responsibility to determine exactly where in their home they were going to work for the foreseeable future. Several news workers had dedicated office spaces already or converted a room into a dedicated office space. However, most did not already have the option for a dedicated office space before the pandemic and needed to transition a room in their home into an office. It was more common that a room was shared with others occasionally, such as a living room, kitchen counter, or entertainment basement room. Sometimes the workplace was shared with others also doing work (e.g., significant other's also working from home or school children in online education). During our interview for this study, P5 picked up their laptop to give me a house tour, "*You're looking right now at my basement. I'm sorry. It's a little bit messy because my son had a sleepover, but you know, that's where I watch TV. That's my wife's desk back there, though she's actually moved up to the dining room.*" With shared workspaces, many news workers had to rely on over-communicating their schedules to have enough privacy to work efficiently, or to find a flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008) without interruptions for themselves and others.

Despite the inconvenience of sharing spaces, nearly all of the news workers that participated in this research had become emotionally attached to their home workspace and the wider range of multi-tasking options they could do while they were working from home. "*I'm definitely attached to this apartment as a working space. I love being able to get up and go for a walk in the middle of the day, just around the block. I love being able to reheat my coffee or make a cup of tea. It's the actual experience of being at home most of the day, I'm pretty comfortable with and attached to, actually"* (P124). Despite the many challenges of working from home during a pandemic, several news workers developed emotional attachments to their home workplaces and appreciated new flexibility in their daily routines.

Supporting emotional attachment to their home workplace, it was rare to find home workspaces that didn't include personal or "home comfort" items alongside their professional work items. "*I took some stuff home from work, like they said we could take a chair and a monitor, my mouse, but, yeah. Some people really went in on the three screens and the standing desk and the work treadmill and all that stuff"* (P108). Of the new workers included in this study, only two had work-specific items in a designated space and both of these news workers received a remote work employee stipend to help fulfill their remote work needs. Both news workers also perceived this stipend as being a rare and temporary benefit within U.S. journalism and both attributed it to working in smaller, nonprofit newsrooms.

Interestingly, when news workers were restricted to only WFH during the pandemic, many began to mimic the variation and stimulated restlessness of a centralized newsroom. Most news workers moved around their house as they worked depending on their moods and on what work task they were trying to accomplish. P19 noted how they moved around the house to "delineate" between different work tasks, "*As someone who works on multiple projects at a time,*

I often need a change of space to reframe my brain. So if I'm transcribing interviews or going and selecting quotes, I often like to do that at a coffee shop. And then I come home, take my break, go on a hike, do whatever, and then I'm home at my desk and that's where the writing happens." The majority of participants realized the movement helped with changing mental tasks, like P19, and helped support distinguishing work-life boundaries, such as working in rooms but never their bedroom.

Some news workers associated the change of spaces to more than helping them complete different tasks more efficiently or be more comfortable. Interwoven in this narrative about efficiency is a mindset based on productivity, such as P70 describing, "*for me, it's like being able to switch up where I'm working is one of the main things for my productivity.*" Typically, in household settings "productivity" tended to lean closer to household chores and family responsibilities. However, pandemic-related remote work furthered the concept of productivity into the household setting, contributing to work-life imbalance.

Moving around the house at first glance seemed to increase news worker productivity. However, as they moved from one room to the next, news workers also described feeling distracted by household objects and tasks. While that pile of laundry would have waited until the end of the work day before the pandemic, remote work introduced more productivity-related multi-tasking into the daily routines of news workers. The most common challenge remote news workers confronted during remote work was home-specific distractions that challenged their pre-existing time management skills. P45 described, "*The main table in my house is in my cross area between my living room and my kitchen. So if something was dirty or if I got hungry or if my dog needed to go out, it was kind of like all these different things that could serve as an alternative to what I was doing. And that was a little bit more difficult for time management and*

keeping my attention span." Many news workers used these distractions as breaks in-between tasks, while they were waiting, or during legally required breaks. For example, P89 described task-switching between work productivity and home productivity, "*You can obviously have somebody on the phone interviewing them, and maybe in between that you toss in a little laundry or just get some dishes done quickly.*" However, distractions are not a remote work-only challenge. News workers also described how the noise level of a newsroom would distract them and made certain tasks (e.g., conducting phone interviews) significantly more challenging compared to a quieter or more controllable WFH environment.

As the U.S. began to reopen business from the initial phase of the pandemic, some news workers tried to balance their productivity and distractions by integrating a WFA strategy, often from coffee shops, libraries, and rental coworking spaces (e.g., WeWork). Regardless of whether or not the news workers had used a hybrid workspace or not, most were not certain of the details or long-term sustainability of the hybrid work model, oftentimes because of inconsistent schedules (e.g., community meetings, breaking news). As some news workers transitioned to hybrid work, several were challenged by the unpredictability of their schedules and the logistical challenges of balancing which tasks would be better suited for remote or in-person labor. Some noted how this unpredictability was emphasized in journalism because coverage demands dictate work location and even non-field news workers sometimes experienced disruptions in their routines.

> *We're in a weird profession where it's not like, I don't know, finance or something, where you can go Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and that's a set schedule. We have council meetings, city council meetings sometimes on Thursdays, and so do I work from home that day, or am I in the office that day? The office is closer to City*

> *Hall, so that would make sense. So can I work from the office that day, or might there not be a desk for me, or how to do that. And then if you have an interview nearby, can I just swing by and work for the rest of the day there, or not? Do I have to go home?* (P74)

If news organizations were considering hybrid options, most news workers described feeling uncertain about the realistic mechanics of how hybrid work would actually operate. Most news workers felt removed from the decision-making process and did not know the exact details, often only a few weeks in advance to whether or not they will return on a hybrid schedule or continue working remotely, adding a layer of precarity for those that could not as easily return to shared office spaces. Many were uncertain and expressed frustration over the lack of clarity and communication with regards to hybrid or return to office plans. Some news workers described how when hybrid plans were communicated, they felt like the plan was ambiguous and last-minute. They felt like it was up to them to know how or when to transition back to the office.

> *They originally were going to have us come back two times a week in January, but then Omicron slowed that down. They're saying maybe mid-February, but I don't know, maybe. Our cases are starting to, or they're still really high, but they're starting to go down a little bit here. Our editor has said he does not foresee us being there five days a week. Gannett has said that they know that people like the hybrid model, but they also know that there's benefit to being together. I think what they're talking about is two days a week we'll have some type of meeting and then try to stay in the office if you can. And it'll be interesting to see how it works. I don't know… This is corporate wide and then they say stuff like, "You'll be*

communicated through your leadership." And then our leadership will be like, "I just saw that email just like you. I don't know." (P112)

Demonstrating the uncertainty and lack of clear communication about hybrid plans, many news workers described feeling uninformed, an uncomfortable feeling for many that generate information for the public, and removed from the newsroom decision-making process. Interestingly, while it appeared there was a strategic approach to returning to a hybrid schedule, in reality, the plans often seemed improvised and/or inconsistent. Overall, ambiguity, unclear communication, and the last-minute sense of hybrid decisions added to news workers' sense of precarity and isolation since they were left to navigate hybrid transitions mostly on their own.

Some newsrooms moved out of the office space entirely, sending implicit signals about the newsroom's viability (Usher, 2019) and thus forfeiting the option to return on a hybrid schedule or at all. Other newsrooms moved to downsize or to move into a more modern building, as P124 hypothesized, "*If I had to guess they're just going to a smaller space because it will be less expensive to lease and because they just anticipate that they don't need as much office space.*" It's important to note that the participants with newsrooms that did move during the pandemic reported the newsroom did not relocate because they were outgrowing their current newsroom and scaling up. P70 experienced a newsroom relocation during the pandemic that on the surface had more natural light from more window space and newer furniture, but also acknowledged that it came at a cost, "*I mean, overall it's shitty because we used to own a building and we had free parking. We could have made money off of that building easily by renting out the unused floors and everything and now we pay rent. So it overall sucks because [news organization] basically gobbled up all of our equity and now we're constantly having to*

pay rent and we all have to pay for parking." The symbolic and practical consequences of these relocations reflect the remote work precarity as moving to smaller spaces signaled a decline in stability and long-term viability. For many news workers, the loss of owned properties for leases added to their personal costs for parking and further highlighted diminishing financial returns for news organizations.

News workers eventually learned whether they would not return to the office, return with a hybrid schedule, or completely return to their newsrooms. News workers described their return to the newsroom differently based on their memory of newsroom culture and their feelings about the newsroom building. P12 summarized what most participant experienced when they returned to the newsroom:

> *It feels very strange… It was just like all the lights were off, it was very quiet. In some ways it was kind of serene and enabled me to focus a little bit. So it felt like that when I went back a couple of weeks ago just for a few days. It felt very much like that. I had [to] go look for the light switches and I just kind of wandered around to maybe see like who's here even. But at this moment in time, it also feels not only is it a built environment for a lot of people who aren't there, but it feels very much like a time capsule because when all left and started working from home very suddenly and of course in a newsroom, there are newspapers everywhere and things that are dated for March 8th and March 10th, 2020 everywhere. And everything's yellowing. The to-do list that I had on my whiteboard at my desk, it's still there. I never erased it because it references super Tuesday 2020 before, because I was working on some stuff for that at the time. So*

> *it's a little eerie actually to be... It feels like a little bit post-apocalyptic that you're kind of walking into this space that most people have not been back to… And a little bit, the other thing I'll mention is it feels a little bit like grieving the loss of the vibrant newsroom that was there because I don't know if it will be the same as it was.*

The return to the newsroom was a deeply unsettling and often emotional experience for many news workers. Their experiences were shaped by the physical environment and lingering memories of a pre-pandemic life. Entering spaces that felt abandoned, with untouched materialities, evoked eeriness, nostalgia, and a sense of loss or grief for the once-vibrant newsroom that may not fully return.

Before the pandemic, remote work in journalism was mostly associated with fieldwork. However, the shift to working from home because of the pandemic forced news workers to adapt their home to fit a workspace. Some embraced new flexibility in their routines and emotional attachment to their new workspaces despite challenges like distractions and shared spaces. Moreover, the unpredictability of hybrid models, unclear communication from management, and symbolic loss of newsroom spaces from downsizing or moving added to news worker precarity. When news workers returned to their newsroom, they reflected on materials that reminded them of the newsroom culture they lost.

Temporality

The qualitative interviews with news workers revealed several general findings about temporal journalistic working conditions. The first finding indicated an increasing intensification

of news work through more open availability and longer working hours, partly made an option from digital communication technologies. The second finding demonstrated news worker autonomy and control through the example of breaks.

News workers consistently described ongoing changes to their work routines as a result of both pandemic-related work from home and digital platforms that, when combined, escalated work intensity. These changes varied greatly depending on the news worker's lifestyle and contextual circumstances. For example, some news workers yearned for time together with their colleagues while others sought remote work for the remainder of their employment, and everything in between, including hybrid work. Regardless of their differences in disposition, discussions nearly always came back to the same general notion: much more of their time was dedicated to work compared to pre-pandemic conditions.

How news workers adjusted to spending more time working varied depending on their personal circumstances. However, all described utilizing their semi-flexible schedule to navigate work intensification. "*I could go into the office for a couple of hours and then come back home. I don't necessarily feel obligated to stay there all day in a way that I might at a more traditional 9:00 to 5:00 in office kind of job*" (P9). This participant was working most of the day, but had the autonomy and flexibility to determine which time blocks reduced the negative consequences of work intensification to improve work-life balance.

Temporal flexibility was at least partially predominantly determined by managers, most of whom agreed that as long as the required work was accomplished on time, they did not need to surveil their employees' schedules. As one newsroom editor explained, it was not only their employees, but that their supervisor also did not surveil them, "*We don't have to sit at our computers for eight hours a day just to say we're at our computers for eight hours a day*" (P48).

Though many had the autonomy to decide when they worked, the nonprofit news workers expressed a greater degree of flexibility regarding when they worked and what they worked on. However, the nonprofit news workers also expressed a never-ending cycle of work. "*And then the non-profit industrial complex doesn't rest and so I think that's always a little bit in the back of my mind also*" (P71). Unlike their for-profit counterparts, most nonprofit newsrooms had a significantly smaller staff size. There are not enough employees to break into groups or beat topics, such as breaking, daytime, and nightly news. Thus, the nonprofit news workers experienced a higher degree of work intensification, particularly by working longer hours regardless of their greater flexibility. Moreover, non-profit news workers believed their labor intensification to be a more recent phenomenon compared to the historic intensification in for-profit news production.

However, schedule flexibility did not spare news workers from increasing work intensification through an accelerated pace of work because of unyielding pandemic-related breaking news. For example, P2 was a long-form editor and reflected on the publishing pace expectations set by shifting contexts, "*We were in this time when things were just moving so rapidly and it seems like to stake out a three-month investigation you had no idea what the conditions would be like by the end of that three months or whether it would be relevant. The result ended up just being that we had to move a lot quicker than we were used to.*" While a flexible schedule helped news workers cope with increasing intensity, it also resulted in working longer hours for most participants, usually by adding work in the evenings and at night. "*Especially earlier in the pandemic, I didn't know when to shut it off for the day. So, I would constantly work into the night because I just didn't have that space, it felt like it was at home*"

(P2). This demonstrated that "shutting off," or ending work, was a significant challenge during pandemic-related remote work.

Some news workers resisted certain types of work external to the typical American working day (between 9am and 5pm Monday through Friday). For example, interviewees described how they did not keep social media on their personal cell phone to support their temporal boundaries between working hours. As one interviewee discussed, "*I don't have Slack on my phone. I don't have Twitter on my phone. I use my phone to make calls for work, but I don't use it so that people get me at all times. My team all knows my phone number and if they need me at night, they can text me and I'll respond*" (P17). However, this boundary was not shared by all. "*It doesn't feel like a burden to be texting about or posting pictures late at night because it's just like that's what's happening and that's just what needs to be done. I mean, we live, breathe it. I mean, it's very hard to have any separation between life and work*" (P48). The first (P17) viewed journalism as a for-profit business (Pickard, 2011), whereas the second (P48) viewed journalism as a public service (Holliday, 2021). This is particularly interesting considering P17 is an Editor at a nonprofit, but views this boundary from a traditionally for-profit position, whereas P48 is an Editor at a for-profit, but views this boundary from traditionally a non-profit position. This suggests professional norms and perspectives are not entirely determined by the financial structure of the news organization, but are also shaped by the ideological positions of the news workers individually. Despite there being a cultural presumption that nonprofit news would not be intensified to the same degree as for-profit news production, the findings in this data describe intensification to similar degrees regardless of organizational financial structure.

While most participants were working longer hours and since their schedules remained relatively flexible as long as deadlines were met, many discussed how it felt as if they were always "on," or constantly working. This insight illustrates that during remote work news workers use internalized management schemas, similar to an inner Foucauldian panopticon (Jackson et al., 2009) to maintain productivity. While this internalization was professionalized through industry norms and many news workers shared the always "on" sentiment already, there was some resistance through temporality boundary construction with regards to working from home. For example, some news workers set an approved schedule with their managers and agreed not to work outside of that schedule with both individuals holding each other accountable for those boundaries. These strict boundaries certainly assisted and empowered some, but not all, to reject work tasks after agreed upon work hours. Often, the news workers were their only defense against management asking them to work longer hours. P19, for example, described maintaining their temporal boundaries, "*In the beginning [of the pandemic] it was just, everyone was working all the time at all hours... So if this person's calling me at 8:00 PM, I'm not answering.*" In other words, it was the news workers' responsibility to construct and maintain their temporal boundaries, often despite their colleagues' expectations. This example also demonstrates the additional affective labor of news work and boundary regulation (Van Oort, 2019; Papacharissi, 2015; Wahl-Jorgenson, 2013).

Temporal boundaries often became emotionally exhausting to reinforce. Some news workers expressed a more difficult time "unplugging" from work platforms or to take a break from their work. "*I feel it's more of a thing where I have my cellphone with me all the time. Even if I leave work for the day to go do something else, someone might contact me about something*" (P54). Through this example, we can see an anxiety related to missing work opportunities or

breaking news, things that many of the news workers valued regarding their employment. This is also illustrative of the dependence on digital platforms, like Slack, to feel constantly connected. Either way, the news workers described exhaustion, anxiety, and oftentimes "burn out," though they all defined "burn out" differently.

Work intensification left them fatigued and sometimes unable to disconnect from work, further worsening their fatigue. "*I think for people who work in news, it was just this non-stop cycle of breaking news. It was like running a marathon after a marathon after a marathon and never getting a break to kind of heal and recover*" (P17). This was a shared sentiment among the news workers. In some instances, the "non-stop cycle" did not include actual work, but was identified mostly through the total consumption of thoughts or internal dialogue even during personal time. When asked about when they stopped thinking about their work, P45 responded, "*I think I always think about my job. I think that's something, I don't know if it's the normal thing but it's definitely something I feel like I do all the time.*" Work intensification led to fatigue as news workers struggled to disconnect from the near-constant breaking news, often describing how their thoughts were consumed by work even during their personal or off-work time.

In rare instances, some news workers worked later hours because of a lack of productivity during the day. "*And then, there's just those times where it's like, 'Oh, well, I should have actually used that time to actually work. Now I just know that I'm going to be still typing things up at 8:00 p.m.*'" (P2). Some of these were individual errors in time management or prioritization, but for those that discussed changes in the time of productivity, the most consistent feeling was being overwhelmed enough to resort to procrastination.

Many news workers identified a new challenge in taking breaks: themselves. Historically, news workers have been challenged by employers for breaks in a long unionization history or

fighting external forces for more break time throughout the day. Remote work added another layer of complexity by introducing internalized worker control as demonstrated by breaks. P2 described their situation, "*When I worked in the office, I used to take a lot of breaks to go out and go for a walk and things such as get some fresh air. I don't do that as much when I'm at home now.*" This new worker went on to describe how having coworkers and others around that follow a break schedule helped remind them to also take a break. This is supported by others that also expressed how having other people around that take regular breaks helped the remote news workers also break. P54 noted that even sharing space with other household members that would take breaks actually helped their work-life balance by reminding them to rest, "*I feel like maybe it [remote work] made my balance better, actually. But, mostly because I had people... I lived with people who were my friends who would tell me to stop working at a certain time, which was helpful.*" This also demonstrated how news workers utilized breaks to resist social alienation. By holding each other accountable for break reminders, news workers collaborated and socially constructed professional norms with regards to work breaks. Without frequent and brief breaks, the news workers were more likely to dedicate more time when infrequent breaks did occur, "*but I think when I was home doing that it would probably happen more irregularly than it does at work and for longer periods*" (P45).

Seen here, these breaks are not usually an active resistance against the news organization in terms of time theft. Practically, the news workers that did acknowledge some of their breaks go beyond the standard limit associated this behavior with working from home specifically. Rather than connecting longer breaks to caring for mental health or as a form of worker resistance against labor intensification, the news workers usually did not intend to break longer than the typically anticipated time, which reflects more on news worker time management. Also

demonstrated by this quote, news workers did not have a standard time in which they break like other jobs or professions. For example, in retail labor the workers receive a fifteen-minute break every three and a half or four hours of labor. Whether that actually occurs is debatable (Van Oort, 2019), but the breaks are integrated into the worker schedule. News workers do not have these structured breaks, especially if there is a major breaking news story or an ongoing report that requires frequent updates, such as the coronavirus pandemic.

While there was temporal worker control through breaks, workers also resisted control by demanding and encouraging breaks. For example, one news organization's CEO published a scathing editorial review of remote news work that included threatening workers that do not participate in the extra work of office culture (e.g. mentoring juniors, celebrating birthdays, etc.) with being reduced to contract-only employees (Merrill, 2021). The day after this was published, the news workers organized a publishing strike (Izadi, 2021). These news workers described the challenges associated with the event being so public, "*the media fallout of that was that we were able to negotiate a very generous work-from-home policy, and the longer-range fallout is that we unionized*" (P5). This demonstrates that as managers and CEOs try to tighten their grip on control during remote work, there is still worker autonomy to resist. However, P5 noted "*we also had a very difficult situation, in that our boss canceled our vacation for the year. That was pretty tough on a lot of people. Even though we couldn't really go anywhere, people really needed the time off to decompress, and we didn't get that.*" This example was not the only newsroom to struggle with breaks for mental health time, "*this year, we've just been really big on pushing each other to take two weeks off or take a long weekend to really get yourself back into a good headspace. I think that was one of the biggest problems was that we were all very tired. And then, there is the resisting uncertainty and that it was starting to lead toward burnout*" (P2).

News workers struggling to take time off to reduce the chances of burning out demonstrate the importance of mental health broadly, but specifically the critical need for structural care in U.S. journalism, particularly for adequate time off to recover from challenging stories.

Working longer hours without breaks was common, but for many nonprofits and weeklies there was less work to do. A reporter from an urban nonprofit described, "*I feel like in the past I've tended to kind of push through to be really productive and get things done and 'succeed.' And this past year just in a lot of ways, just really forced me to slow down…*" (P9). Supporting this was the story from a reporter for a news weekly; "*I was told early on that 'This is not a daily. This is not like any other job you've had"*" (P26). This distinction between weeklies and dailies is critical considering the urgent pace of pandemic coverage. Temporal worker control strategies varied between breaking news compared to investigative news. When pressed further about a slower pace during the pandemic, P26 noted they recently accepted a new role at a daily because they missed reporting more, even though it meant returning to temporal urgency, "*I think as much as I enjoyed the work-life balance I was able to develop, I still have that old daily pressure, which is why I'm going to this other job, because I'll be publishing a little bit more regularly. It has a little bit of a faster pace. Just the training and the experience I have, I'm accustomed to moving quickly and publishing and getting things out, and doing as much as I can in a day, and that totally slowed down*." This highlights the discrepancy between dailies, weeklies, and long-form news work. While some workers may have enjoyed the slower pace of news work where breaks were more likely, others were challenged by the slower pace. P26 illustrated an internal worker control strategy, even mentioning being "*accustomed to moving quickly*" and "*doing as much as I can in a day.*" This is an internal regulation of the expectations

that news workers have become accustomed to and showcases the extent of work internalization within the U.S. news industry.

News Production as a Unique Form of Labor

While this research did not intentionally seek to differentiate the uniqueness or differences of experiences of news work compared to other professional practices (e.g., legal, medical) during remote work, participant questions nonetheless generated a visceral response from news workers on how they perceived the professional impacts of pandemic-related remote work within journalism specifically. This section examines how news workers perceived the challenges and the benefits associated with remote work during the pandemic that were specifically unique to U.S. news work and journalism industry.

Working from home, regardless of profession, came with challenges specific to each profession and each home condition (e.g., children, studio apartment). News workers were confronted with challenges unique to capturing the impacts of the pandemic while also living through the pandemic themselves. "*Working from home is one thing. Working from home during a pandemic while covering a pandemic has made it extra hard,*" reflected P12. U.S. news workers lived through the pandemic alongside the rest of the population, but had the additional challenge of also reporting, editing, and producing news content related to the pandemic. P70 reflected on how the pandemic intensified how journalistic witnessing impacted mental health, "*It can also just be extremely depressing to just kind of witness all of the terrible impacts of the pandemic all the time. And it's harder to find time to write about nice things when it's just overwhelming every day how many problems there are to try to illuminate and write about. I think that it's always hard for us to strike that balance, but especially in a pandemic, it's really*

hard." The content news workers reported on became mentally and emotionally challenging, particularly due to the consistency, repetition, and longevity of the pandemic. While crisis communication in journalism is an established academic field (Perreault and Perreault, 2021), often these crisis situations were resolved within a more temporary timespan with a clearer delineation of when the crisis is over. The pandemic was a unique crisis to report on not only due to the global scale, but also because of the uncertainty around when it would end, if ever. Most news workers were dedicating their professional days to story after story about the pandemic for daily deadlines unsure of when they were ever going to stop writing about the pandemic. At the time of this writing, it has been nearly five years since the pandemic began and there is a remaining argument as to whether the pandemic is over or not considering the U.S. never reached less than 10,000 new COVID-19 cases daily before May 1, 2024 when the CDC, HHS, NHSN, and hospitals stopped requiring case tracking data.

In addition to the content challenges of news work during the pandemic, the ceaseless deadlines, 24-hour news cycle, and immediacy of social media expectations formed a unique challenge to remote news work during the pandemic. "*It's working for a daily newspaper, you have to produce every single day. It's not like if you don't get a story done it's okay. It's like if you don't get a story done we have to figure out something else to put there*" (P45). Many news workers were expected to produce content that was emotionally laborious under frequent and short reporting deadlines either for social media or for daily publications. P124 described how these challenges compound in a situations that non-news industries don't plan for:

> *We're so responsive and reactive to what's happening that day. You can't really know what your day is going to look like. And so being reactive really quickly, I think we're pretty good at that, but it's a challenge, like on Slack and phone calls*

and stuff when something huge happens to organize everyone, get the reports and photographers, or they need to have the Editor's plan. Yeah, I think that that is something that comes up probably more for us than other industries.

News workers are also challenged by one of the main pillars of professional journalism – being an informational resource for the community (Wenzel, 2020). The nature of the pandemic required social isolation to reduce the contagious spread. However, a primary function of a news worker is to be active in the community to gather accurate information (Deuze, 2005; Konieczna, 2018; Wenzel, 2020; Holliday, 2021). P108 described the following impact remote reporting has had on news industry standards:

They call it the Twitter reporting, right? You find out about things remotely, you report them remotely, you write about them remotely. And as opposed to just showing up or going somewhere or meeting someone in person and looking them in the eye and seeing if they're telling you the truth or not or just building a relationship in person. And I think it's cheaper and you can write more stories faster if you just do everything online and you just take that approach. But I think for the industry at large, it's probably accelerated the trend towards doing that as opposed to taking the time to go out and walk around and talk to people.

This style of remote reporting was sometimes used with a condescending tone. It was not the normative standard among industry professionals. "*It's really hard to be connected to your community if you're not going out and being in your community every day. And I think good journalism is locally centered*" (P82). This was primarily because it could be easier for reporters to miss information that would be present in-person, but not virtually.

"*[Managers] are afraid that there are things happening that we [news workers] don't know about because we're not coming in and out of a newsroom and driving down the street seeing it*" (P112). For example, one participant indicated their story was better because they were in-person and were able to find individuals that contrasted each other. Overall, news workers indicated that in-person communication with their community and community stakeholders improved their reporting. This is partially due to "being there" or being on the scene to report on live events, as P71 notes, "*a lot of journalism is being somewhere with people, experiencing a set of events as they're happening. In some ways, remote work makes that more challenging.*"

While news workers primarily reflected on the challenges brought by pandemic-related remote work, some noted that it has provided greater accessibility based on the type of news work their role requires. For example, P71 noted, "*the kind of journalism that I do, I would say that remote work has also been beneficial for access to information.*" In large part this was because of the wide use and cultural normalization of video conferencing software and live streaming, such as Zoom mentioned in the Remote Technological Reliance findings section. "*I think remote work has made a lot more people a lot more accessible. I don't have to physically drive or go to somebody to interview with at the very edge of our coverage area if I really need to*" (P139). This was particularly true with participants that were under-funded, covering their own travel expenses, or those that had a large area to cover (e.g., a region beat rather than a topic beat). News workers also reported that remote work helped them "micro-disconnect" when possible (e.g., grocery shopping or picking up kids from school).

News work has been remote historically to some extent due to the nature of field work and press conferences. P74 described this seemingly organic switch to remote work from anywhere (e.g., not necessarily a federal work from home), "*our profession lends itself to working remotely, because before this, sometimes we would work at coffee shops or things like that, or we'd be at a council meeting and typing the story there.*" It should be noted that the news workers that indicated these benefits consisted entirely of news workers that had worked at their organization for several years before the pandemic and did not change jobs during the pandemic. P70 provided perspective that this was not generalizable among news workers that did not match these conditions, "*I haven't even met most of the school board members that I watch on YouTube every week and so most of them don't answer my calls either. And if I was in-person, I could just go up after the school board meeting and ask them my questions in person and also then develop a relationship and maybe they'd answer my calls.*" Overall, less experienced news workers and news workers that changed news organizations during the pandemic were disadvantaged compared to their more professionally consistent peers because of the unique news industry sourcing requirements. P82 indicated additional and imperative job performance components were missing during remote work for less experienced or recently hired news workers:

> *I can't help but think of all of the in-person reporting I missed, and the people out in the community that I would have met had I been in person more… But I think it's honestly been kind of a reminder of why we have to be so local oriented and community oriented, and that we are much better on the ground. That's why I'm doing this job, you know? I'm not doing it because I like writing about school*

*board meetings. I do it because I hope that we can work together to make education better for everyone***.**

While experienced news workers adapted to remote work, less-experienced or new colleagues were challenged with isolation from social distancing and colleague absences despite personal connections, particularly for community sourcing, being essential for many news workers.

This section explored how news workers navigated the complexities of remote work during the pandemic to surface both the universal labor challenges from pandemic remote work and the unique pressures of news work. While most in the U.S. faced similar challenges adjusting to remote work, news workers had the added burden of covering the ongoing pandemic, which intensified emotional and stress strain. Remote work also disrupted traditional news reporting strategies, such as in-person sourcing interactions that are imperative for building and maintaining source and community trust. Pandemic remote work revealed how news workers' commitment to their profession and values, despite relatively low pay and minimal mental health support, made the pandemic remote work experience specifically difficult because they managed typical labor struggles while also continuing to fulfill their role with unprecedented high standards.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

Throughout this study, I argued that remote work was not liberating, but instead, amplified the longstanding precarity and intensification of news work. As Odell (2023) notes, "the computer chip didn't free us. It coerced us to produce at its speed." Ultimately, this study suggests that while work from home was a feasible alternative to centralized office work during the pandemic, it necessitated deliberate boundaries to prevent over-extension from intensification and compromised news workers' access to colleague networks and community immersion.

In addressing the first research question with regards to technology use during remote work, this research aligns with existing research to confirm a profound digital reliance in U.S. news production. Technological reliance became essential as newsrooms shifted from in-person collaboration to digital platforms, such as Slack and Zoom. While these platforms provided the infrastructure support needed for remote work, they also expanded worker monitoring, elevated productivity expectations, and blurred the boundaries between the personal and professional. News workers described navigating these often new-to-them platforms while managing intensified workloads, which resulted in them feeling a loss of control over their time due to the availability presence from the platforms. Surprisingly, news workers were not concerned with nor interested in discussions about their CMS, indicating their roles did not extend into publishing and archiving news stories or that CMS was so integrated into their routines that it is unremarkable compared to the integration of so many newer platforms during the pandemic.

The second research question focused on news worker socialization within news production. This study offered novel insights that expand Breed's (1955) foundational work on socialization, which has seen limited contextual updates despite shifts in technology and cultural norms in news production. Overall, the findings underscore how remote work disrupted the

mechanisms of professional and cultural integration in journalism, leading to gaps in training, diminished collaboration, and challenges in building both internal and external relationships. The exploration of news workers' social experiences during remote work uncovered several key themes, such as socialization pathways from student to in-office work, on-boarding and training challenges, the loss of informal learning, barriers to communities and source engagements, all of which contributed to the erosion of newsroom and professional culture. Participants recounted feeling professionally and emotionally disconnected from colleagues and communities with limited, if any, opportunities for the in-person interactions that were historically integral to the newsroom. Isolation furthered a sense of precarity and amplified the "always-available" culture that digital work provides. This shift raises broader concerns about the sustainability of journalistic norms and practices in remote work environments and how well freshly graduated prospective hires are prepared for the ongoing challenges of remote news work.

Regarding the third research question, which explored work-life balance, this research contributed to a growing field of news labor studies. While much of the current research examines journalism's crisis responses, such as addressing workplace harassment (Holton et. al., 2023), this study shifts the focus to the subtle, yet significant, challenges of maintaining work-life balance. Findings indicate that while work-life balance was largely a personal responsibility, ideal balances varied widely amongst individual news workers. Work-life boundaries became more challenging to define, further complicating the differences between personal and professional identities for news workers. These findings suggest that remote news work paradoxically encouraged schedule flexibility and individual empowerment while also amplifying a sense of isolation and surveillance. This paradox ultimately shaped how the news workers described their views on their job and labor more generally. This suggests an "ideal"

balance is subjective and non-standardized, with self-fulfillment derived from both work and personal life proportional to each individual news worker.

Finally, in exploring the impact of place and temporality of remote work, this study contributed to Usher (2019, 2021) and Gieryn's (2000) frameworks. Findings revealed that news workers felt unsupported in their domestic workplaces, often creating functional offices independently from professional support. Those that relocated or began a new job reported feeling more intensely disconnected or disadvantaged from workplace culture and socialization opportunities. Many noted that working from home blurred the boundaries between personal and professional life, which led to longer work hours more often than not. This study also deepened the discussion of internalized worker control under neoliberalism, where the flexibility of working from home often came with the cost of self-exploitation and work intensification. While many appreciated the ability to manage personal tasks within the workday (e.g., finishing laundry), this flexibility often led to working across waking hours rather than a set 9am to 5pm shift.

With the hindsight at the time of this writing in the Fall of 2024, remote work required by the pandemic may not be temporary, but rather a signal of enduring changes to journalistic labor in the future. The insights presented in this thesis indicate the adaptation to remote work could be symbolic of broader labor trends in the industry, where flexibility is a double-edged sword: offering freedom from traditional office power structures, but imposing new forms of surveillance and internalized regulation. News workers are increasingly expected to balance personal autonomy with professional demands that permeate into their everyday home environments, underscoring a shift in how "place" and "labor" are conceptualized within the

journalism industry broadly. This should also inform undergraduate collegiate expectations and curriculum so prospective news workers are better prepared to enter the workforce.

Theoretical and Practical Contributions

This thesis contributes to scholarly explorations both theoretically and practically in a variety of ways that are aligned with each section: labor, socialization, temporality and place, and what makes news work unique during pandemic remote work. The following summarizes the influence on each topic.

Theoretically, this thesis contributes to Labor Process Theory (LPT) (Braverman, 1974) and the concept of internalized labor control, or an inner panopticon (Jackson et al., 2009). These findings uncovered remote news work during the pandemic did not liberate news workers from managerial oversight, but instead intensified labor and feelings of isolation or alienation. Expectations of "professionalism" acted as the vehicle to shift managerial oversight into an internalized, self-regulated panopticon, reflecting on Braverman's (1974) alienation through technology. Additionally, the work intensification findings contribute to Neff's (2012) notion that precarity is accompanied by future or prospective professional opportunities by adding that precarity also surfaces during immediate crisis since professional aspirational goals diminish in favor of survival mechanisms to simply retain one's employment. Practically, this thesis suggests news organizations should consider labor policies that prioritize worker autonomy without sacrificing their well-being. Flexible hybrid work models may be the most efficient at ensuring news workers retain their daily flexibility while also providing opportunities for mentorship and collaboration.

Theoretically, this study's findings extend Breed's (1955) concept of newsroom socialization since these findings demonstrate that digital technologies contribute to relational labor fragmentation. While digital platforms maintained task-based interactions for news work, they did not replicate the informal socialization for on-boarding, off-boarding, and general information sharing. Contributing to Bourdieu's (1984) framework, this study also found the remote work setting altered the traditional flow of social capital and shifted daily routines. Overall, theoretically these findings suggest that digitally mediated workplace interactions created isolated or siloed networks rather than cohesive teams. Practically, these findings suggest newsrooms could consider investing in digital tools and effort to facilitate informal socialization interactions beyond Zoom happy hours, such as virtual lounges, office hours, and team-building activities (e.g., building legos). Finally, mentorship and teaching programs should be reinvented for remote work contexts to ensure new hires and early-career news workers receive necessary socialization into the organization and profession that fosters a sense of belonging to reduce negative mental health experiences associated with burnout.

This thesis theoretically emphasized Gieryn's (2000) framework of place as a socially constructed agent, which contributed to Lefevre's (1976) definition of place as a "social product." The decentralization and domestication of news work blurred the boundaries between domestic and professional spaces, transforming news worker homes into sites of labor. This also extends media domestication theory by surfacing how spatial and temporal expectations required news workers to make a centralized space in their home for labor. Findings also support Shapiro's (2018) concept of temporal labor control through a breaking news or "just-in-time" philosophy that exhausts work-life balances and heightens time discipline. Practically, offering home office support, such as ergonomic furniture, could help delineate between personal and

professional spaces. Finally, flexible scheduling policies should prioritize task success rather than rigid hours to alleviate time discipline and reduce burnout.

Lastly, this study holistically contributes to the ongoing discourse of journalism as labor, or the labor turn. This study conceptualizes news workers as unique white-collor professionals whose labor is distinct because of its value to public service, which expands on Konieczna's (2018) perspective on journalism as a public good. Given the unique labor of news workers, news organizations in the U.S. should consider offering mental health support tailored to the unique challenges of reporting to reduce psychological harm.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study provided a snapshot of remote work within the unique context of the coronavirus pandemic, which introduced unusual constraints and stresses. This context undoubtably differs from remote news work experiences in non-crisis, temporary WFH situations, or in hybrid models. Consequently, future news work research should focus on the evolving or adapting nature of digital workplaces where remote work (WFA and WFH) are choices rather than requirements.

The most obvious limitation to this research, a limitation typical to qualitative work generally, is that this research may not be representative of all remote news work experience. This study, like all others, is dependent on its sample. This sample is bounded in time, particularly shortly after the pandemic began and again after coronavirus vaccines were more readily available. The method is situated in informal, virtual video conference conversations, and thus tone was distinguished, but much of the physical body language was often obscured. To build on the findings of this research, it's essential for future studies to explore diversity in

remote labor models, examine long-term (e.g., longitudinal) intents compared to actual impacts, and identify practical newsroom applications. Additionally, “editor” and “reporter” titles were the most represented in this study, suggesting further exploration into the perspectives on higher or lead management roles.

Exploring diversity in remote labor models could better understand how newsroom dynamics shift when remote work is optional and how these conditions compare to pandemic-driven constraints. Future research could also compare multiple case studies, selecting from news organizations based on various amounts of employees, business models (e.g., nonprofit, for-profit, community, subscription, etc.), and workplace policies (e.g., remote, hybrid, in-person). This future research direction could be productive in better understanding on how hybrid arrangements impact job satisfaction, schedule flexibility, socialization, productivity, and professional identity, if at all. While this research included all cardinal regions of the U.S. in both rural and urban news environments, a case study comparison of the U.S. to that of another country would be noteworthy.

Examining longitudinal impacts can assess how prolonged reliance on digital tools shaped news workers’ social networks, collaboration capacities, and their experiences with professional isolation, if any. One such important area of study could benefit from examining the political and economic market constraints that existed pre- and post-pandemic since this directly impacted how the ongoing health and social crisis was described during interview sessions.

Identifying practical newsroom throughput could address how newsrooms balance digital reliance with sustainable workloads, which may include a broader exploration of workplace policies that promote worker autonomy and discourage managerial monitoring in relation to quantitative productivity metrics. Given that digital platforms have already become critical to

remote newsroom workflows, further research could explore how, if at all, news workers perceived and used digital advancements, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), in the workplace with regards to labor intensification, job security, and worker autonomy.

A final consideration for future research concerns the impact of remote work on mental health, particularly as news workers continue to experience isolation, intensification, precarity, and blurred boundaries between work and home. Exploring how prolonged remote work impacts news workers' mental well-being, productivity, and job satisfaction will be essential to better understanding and preparing for the evolving landscape of digital news labor.

Concluding Thoughts

While several years have passed since data collection, news workers remain challenged by the lasting legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic in news production processes, namely cultural shifts in work-life balance, temporal flexibility, and digital integration expectations. The pandemic provided a moment of transition, innovation and regression, and examples of clinging to the previous routines regardless of news worker needs. In other words, it provided an opportunity to explore how news workers experienced their everyday working conditions from a new, ongoing crisis perspective.

Within academic research, this study contributes a qualitative exploration to the growing body of journalistic labor literature, including internalized worker control as well as literature on place and temporality, with regards to how remote work driven by the COVID-19 pandemic transformed the experiences of news workers in the U.S. At the time of this writing, too little attention has been paid to the confluence of place and remote work, leaving the onus of responsibility to the news workers to figure it out individually, further integrating the neoliberal

ideal of individuality. This research endeavor aimed to initiate and inspire further studies into this topic.

The findings of this study carry significant implications for the future of journalistic labor practices and the understanding of journalism as a public service. Remote work, while initially a response to a crisis, has become integral to the digital transformation of news production. This shift challenges the traditional boundaries of a newsroom and invites questions about strategies that balance business needs (e.g., profits generally), worker autonomy, and technological innovation.

Moreover, this study contributes to the literature highlighting the critical tension between journalism's role as a public service and neoliberal capitalist pressures that shape industry-wide labor practices. Remote work introduces a model that capitalizes on flexibility (e.g., conducting an interview virtually and saving on travel expenses), but also risks diminishing the social value of news production by isolating news workers from collaborative, pro-community, idea-sharing environments. Better understanding these dynamics is imperative for news organizations and policymakers as we navigate a post-pandemic media landscape.

In conclusion, this thesis has provided a theoretically grounded analysis of how remote work required from a pandemic crisis redefined the labor of news production. By applying Braverman's LPT and Gieryn's sociology of place, this study highlighted how news workers internalized self-exploitative practices through digital access and self-surveillance. These frameworks revealed how newsroom workspaces, traditionally a center of professional collective identity and labor cohesion, became dispersed and recontextualized within the individual news workers' homes. Newsrooms, as social spaces, have historically provided the spatial context for a shared professional culture. As newsrooms evolved into remote spaces, the journalism

community addressed and explored how this eroded workplace culture, reduced work quality, and impacted news workers' mental health.

As newsrooms become increasingly decentralized, there is a need for nuanced strategies that support news worker autonomy and collective well-being. To meet these needs, news organizations and academic programs alike are called to re-examine remote work policies and professionalism standards. Rather than remote structures imposing labor intensification and encouraging hyper-individualism, the journalism community should prioritize a renewed focus on collaboration, ethical labor practices, and sustainable productivity strategies. The findings emphasize how critical it is to create and maintain work environments, both physical and digital, that balance productivity with mental health, social capital, and inclusivity. Ultimately, this study advocates for a deliberate, community-wide commitment to designing a professional culture that honor journalism's democratic tenets, upholds the well-being of it's labor force, and urges journalistic stakeholders (e.g., industry professionals, academics) to intentionally coordinate a future where the news industry's adaptability is not generated at the expense of its news workers.

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Figures

Table 1:

Participant Number	Date Conducted	Role	Tax Structure	Regional Location
2	7/29/2021	Editor	Non-profit	South
5	7/30/2021	Editor	For Profit	East
7	7/29/2021	Reporter	For Profit	Midwest
9	7/30/2021	Community Organizer	Non-profit	Midwest
12	8/9/2021	Director	For Profit	Midwest
17	7/27/2021	Editor	Non-profit	South
19	8/19/2021	Correspondent	Non-profit	South
23	8/19/2021	Producer	Non-profit	West
26	8/9/2021	Reporter	Non-profit	West
36	8/4/2021	Editor	Non-profit	Midwest
44	1/3/2022	Digital Strategist	For Profit	West
45	9/3/2021	Reporter	For Profit	West
48	9/1/2021	Editor	For Profit	South
54	9/10/2021	Reporter	For Profit	East

57	1/12/2021	Reporter	Non-Profit	NA / Remote
67	1/11/2022	Editor	Non-Profit	South
70	1/12/2022	Reporter	For Profit	Midwest
71	1/11/2022	Reporter	Non-Profit	Midwest
72	2/1/2022	Editor	Non-Profit	Midwest
74	1/14/2022	Reporter	Non-Profit	East
80	1/6/2022	Producer	Non-Profit	West
82	1/18/2022	Reporter	Non-Profit	NA / Remote
89	1/13/2022	Reporter	For Profit	East
105	2/1/2022	Producer	For Profit	West
108	1/28/2022	Reporter	For Profit	West
112	1/21/2022	Reporter	For Profit	Midwest
118	1/21/2022	Editor	For Profit	East
120	1/24/2022	Reporter	For Profit	Midwest
124	1/26/2022	Editor	For Profit	West
140	3/24/2022	Editor	For Profit	South

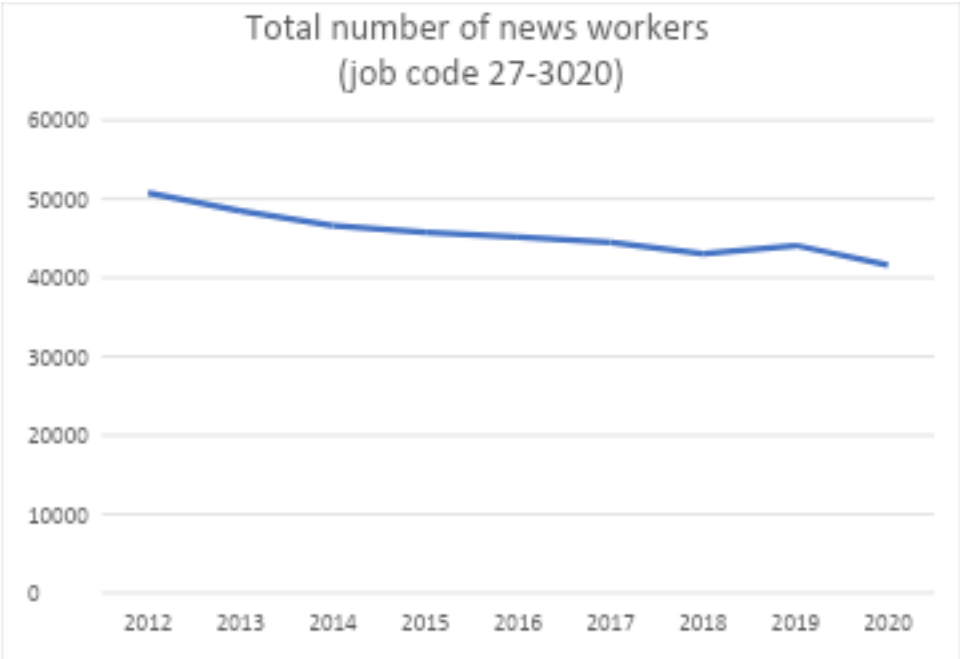

Figure 1: Total number of news works (job code 27-3020) from the Bureau of Labor Statistics from 2012 through 2020, the most recent data available at the time of this writing.

Appendix A

Intro

- How was the last two years of remote work?
    - Have you ever worked remotely before the pandemic?
    - Have you ever been in person in an office outside of the student newsroom?
- What was your time frame for moving into remote work because of the pandemic?
    - How would you feel if your current news organization said, "All right, we're returning to office, everyone come in"?
    - When you have envisioned going back into work, is there anything in particular that surprised you about what you were excited to be back at doing?
    - When/If you do return, is there a plan that individuals can return when they feel comfortable doing so or is it going to be a full-office return?
- When you make the transition back to the hybrid space, will you have sort of a coming home party per se or like a back to work event?
- Is there anything that you feel like you've done very well at and were very successful with regarding the transition in this past year of remote work as a supervisor and editor?
- Since the pandemic has changed so many routines, can you share with me how it has influenced your work routine, including the hybrid model or even more extending out of that?

Technology

- Would you mind sharing with me what form of analytics you use?
    - Were some of these decisions made based on an analytics platform or some form of audience data information?
    - How you describe analytics, like if it's more like freedom building, like now you know you have the space to go in these directions, for example, or maybe it's more constraining in that it's kind of a barrier or a guidance to direct you where you should be going.
    - How, if at all, do metrics affect your mental health?
- Are there any other sort of technologies that are required?
    - What are the conversations on [Slack/Teams/etc.]? Can you describe what some of those are like?
    - Do you feel like there is any sort of pressure to respond in a certain time frame within Slack?
- Were you provided with the technology (e.g., given a work computer)?
    - Do you use tech to engage in non-work related activities?
    - Is there any other thing that's really apparent and just more present in face-to-face or in-person communication that you can't gain through technology?
- In your opinion, did tech help or hinder your work when you were home from the pandemic?
- Did slack and zoom replace a hybrid workplace or replace being together?

<u>Place</u>

- Do you commute or travel a lot for your current role?

- Your workspace now, the place that you're doing work, is that frequently where you were living?
    - Have you come up with strategies to physically separate your work? Did you need to?
    - Do you only work in one particular spot, like every single day, and is that sort of sectioned off from other parts of what you would consider more life-related activities?
    - Have you grown attached to a particular space that you work from at home?
- What was it like to be in the newsroom for the first time?
    - Are there any challenges that go along with being in in the newsroom for work?
        - Was that a primary reason, or at least close to the top of the list for one of your reasons to move was to expand for a workspace?
        - Did your home office space help or hinder you during remote work?
        - When you were in-person, did you have any challenges with your previous space?
        - Do you know why the newsroom renovated?
        - When you were moving workspaces, what were some of the primary criteria that you were looking for in a new workspace?
        - Did you move close to or farther from downtown?

<u>Social</u>

- What was your initial motivation for becoming a [role]?
- Have you had any mentors in other stages of your career that were remote for you?

- Were you their first remote new hire?
- What type of training were you provided?
    - What was the on- and off-boarding process like? What did they do well and what could be improved?
    - What was it like to be a new member at your organization and remote the whole time?
        - Do you feel trusted by your coworkers?
        - Did being remote influence how readily you trusted your new coworkers?
    - Have you heard from any of your supervisees any feedback on things that you have done well, or that could be improved as an organization moving forward in future distributed work situations?
        - Can you describe your relationship with your supervisors/editors?
        - Do you have that comfort with your supervisor, your boss?
- Have you reached out to coworkers or colleagues for IT information or help?
- Did you come up with any successful strategies for collaborating?

<u>Support and Work-Life Balance</u>

- Do you multi-task between work and non-work?
- How has remote work, especially compared to in-person, influenced your work-life balance?
- Is there anything that your news organization offers you to support your wellbeing?
    - In what ways does working in your workspace increase or decrease your happiness and wellbeing?

    - Have you done anything or have you started new habits or something to help take care of yourself during remote work?
    - Do you feel like you have the support that you need to succeed while you're working from home?
    - What type of support, if any, have you received from supervisors and coworkers?
    - Are there any support structures or structures of care that you wish were available to you?
- How do you feel about work in general? When you think about working, what comes to mind?
- Did the pace of labor change at all during the pandemic?

<u>Outro</u>

- Do you wish more people knew about the work that you've been doing during the pandemic?
    - And if so, what would you want to highlight for them to know?
- What do you think is unique about remote work within the journalism industry?
- What are you optimistic about for the future of journalism?
- Is there anything that you would like to discuss that I haven't asked yet? Or that we really didn't get to earlier that you want to talk about more?