



Article

A Tale of Two Realities: Gendered Workspace during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Taipei

Chyi-Rong Tsai

Department of Sociology, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX 78712, USA; crtsai@utexas.edu

Abstract: This study examines how heterosexual couples in Taipei used space when both were working from home. I interviewed 29 heterosexual couples on how they arranged working space at home and how these spatial arrangements influenced their working experiences and career development. I found that space was gendered: men tended to work in a preferable space at home compared to their partners. However, a preferable space was not always defined by its physical setting, such as a room. Interviews revealed that women tended to move around to accommodate their family members' needs when they worked from home, having unstable and interrupted working environments. Their experiences revealed that women's family roles, such as mother, daughter, and wife, are prioritized at home, resulting in constant interruptions. On the contrary, men's roles as workers were prioritized and protected when they worked from home. Gender superseded and transformed the physical space and reproduced gender inequality at work for people who work from home. This study suggests the need to consider the impact of gender norms before treating remote work as a pro-work–family policy.

Keywords: remote work; gender inequality; gender and space; work–family conflict; work–family balance



Citation: Tsai, Chyi-Rong. 2024. A Tale of Two Realities: Gendered Workspace during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Taipei. *Social Sciences* 13: 204. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13040204>

Academic Editor: Jerry A. Jacobs

Received: 15 September 2023

Revised: 31 March 2024

Accepted: 3 April 2024

Published: 6 April 2024



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1. Introduction

1.1. Remote Work and Gender Inequality

Remote work has been proposed to be an efficient way to facilitate flexibility in integrating home activities with paid work to reconcile the severe work–family conflicts in industrial countries (Correll et al. 2014; Kaduk et al. 2019; Lui and Chang 2020; Mas and Pallais 2017). Nevertheless, researchers have raised concerns that remote work, especially working from home, might reinforce traditional gender roles and exacerbate gender inequality (Anderson and Kelliher 2020; Brescoll et al. 2013; Cannito and Scavarda 2020; Chung and Van Der Horst 2018; Dunatchik et al. 2021; Glass and Noonan 2016; Hardill and Green 2003; Lott and Chung 2016; Lyttelton et al. 2020, 2022, 2023).

While remote work has increased men's involvement in housework and childcare, research has shown that gender inequality at home endures. Studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic indicate that although fathers increased their contributions to childcare responsibilities and housework (Carlson et al. 2022; Frize et al. 2021; Rodríguez Sánchez et al. 2021; Shockley et al. 2021), mothers also increased time spent on housework and childcare. As a result, the preexisting gender gap persisted or even increased (Dunatchik et al. 2021; Lyttelton et al. 2020, 2022, 2023; Yavorsky et al. 2021). Remote work blurs the boundaries between work and home, which disproportionately increases women's need to multitask and the frequency work interruptions. Working from home reduces the quality of a mother's work and increases their stress relative to fathers (Cannito and Scavarda 2020; Lyttelton et al. 2020; Offer and Schneider 2011; Rodríguez Sánchez et al. 2021).

Regarding paid work, Glass (2004) indicates that mothers with young children experience stagnated wage growth when working from home. Although remote work has been advocated to help mothers reconcile work and family, it inadvertently contributes to the

motherhood penalty, such that there are lower wages for mothers compared to women without children. Besides its influence on the gender wage gap, research shows that women often sacrifice investment in paid work in order to juggle the balance between mothers and workers when working from home, while men devote the time they saved from commuting to work (Cannito and Scavarda 2020).

Adding to the debate, remote work requires that workers have an appropriate working space and equipment at home. Such a conducive work environment is usually inaccessible for women, especially mothers. Little of the literature has focused on domestic space allocation for remote working couples. One exception is Waismel-Manor et al. (2021), who demonstrated that men claim the independent room when they work from home, thus having a physical separation between house chores and childcare. By contrast, women work in the middle of the house, having to do both at the same time. Their findings are in line with the gendered logic in organizational space: that private and spacious offices are allocated to masculine or managerial roles, and small, open spaces to feminine roles, such as nurses and secretaries (Paliadelis 2013; Spain 1993; Wasserman 2012). The open working space for women often lacks privacy and is visible to others, which dictates how the female body must be managed through gendered norms (Hirst and Schwabenland 2018).

However, the spatial allocation delineated by Waismel-Manor et al. (2021) is based on a typical Western context, where the nuclear family is the major family type and there is often a study room in the house, which may not be applicable to other social contexts with multi-generational families or more populated places. Living with other family members might influence gender dynamics in different ways. On the one hand, the presence of other family members might intensify the social norms of gender roles. On the other hand, other family members might share the housework and, especially, childcare responsibilities. The help could contribute to a better environment for working mothers to work from home. This research explores how heterosexual couples arrange workspace at home in Taipei, where multi-generational families are common, and the presence of a study room in the house is rare. This study aims to investigate the spatial allocation among couples working from home. Many of them lived with other family members and received assistance from them. By doing so, this study contributes to existing findings by revealing a different, yet still gendered, spatial allocation among couples, and how this allocation disadvantages women, irrespective of whether they claim an independent room for work.

1.2. Gender Inequality in Taiwan

Taiwan has experienced “compressed modernity” (Chang 2011) a process in which economic, political and/or cultural changes occur rapidly and extensively. As a result, the traditional cultural heritage in Confucianism characterized by hierarchy and rigid gendered marital roles (Slote and De Vos 1998; Tsuya and Bumpass 2004) coexists with modern egalitarian ideologies.

The traditional gender beliefs reflect on domestic division of labor. In Taiwan, working women spend over three times the amount of time on average doing housework compared to working men in 2016. In addition, mothers are seen as primary caregivers of children. Therefore, a high proportion of women leave the labor market after bearing children (Chen and Yi 2005). The profoundly gendered expectations of women are exemplified by the M-shaped curve of women’s labor force participation: their labor force participation rate peaks prior to marriage, followed by a decline after getting married, and further drops during pregnancy and/or childbirth. However, it later rises again when approximately half of those who had previously left the workforce return to work (Lui and Chang 2020).

However, among East Asian countries which are under the cultural umbrella of Confucianism, Taiwan has a smaller wage gap, a more egalitarian labor distribution, and more egalitarian attitudes (Tompkins 2011). Economically, married women’s labor force participation has been higher in Taiwan compared to its counterpart in Japan. Yu (2009) argues that the smaller size of organizations, the significant demand for labor after World War II, and the availability of childcare assistance from kin networks all contribute to

Taiwanese married women finding it easier to return to full-time jobs compared to Japanese women. Therefore, achieving a work–family balance is an important issue for Taiwanese women. Gender wage gaps are also lower in Taiwan than in Japan and Korea (Chang and England 2011). Combining this with increased access to higher education, women have relatively higher bargaining power in the family (Qian and Sayer 2016).

Politically, Tompkins (2011) claimed that Taiwan has relatively high levels of female representation in the government compared to Japan and South Korea for the early adoption of a gender quota system. Accompanied by flourishing activity in women’s and feminist groups, Taiwan successfully revised the family laws to demolish the patriarchal practices in family and enacted the Gender Equality in Employment Law to enhance women’s rights and status. These factors facilitated a more egalitarian attitude about gender in Taiwan compared to Japan and South Korea.

In Taiwan, where multiple social norms coexist, the COVID-19 pandemic has ushered in another swift change in work arrangements. How would the gender dynamics, exemplified by space allocation, change when work is brought back into the home? This study identified a static gendered pattern of spatial allocation of remote work: women tended to occupy less preferable workspaces when working from home compared to their male partners. The workspace of women was less preferable for its physical settings and because it was frequently subject to interruptions from other family members, regardless of their location at home. The experiences of physical space were shaped by social expectations of gender roles, thereby being comparative and subjective. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that the divergent remote work experiences highlight a tale of two realities: remote work benefiting specific populations while hindering others’ productivity. Most of the literature about how remote work influences gender inequality is based on Western contexts, with an emphasis on the nuclear family. This study contributes by (1) illustrating how gender inequality originating at home extended to work through the lens of space and (2) enriching the literature with East Asian contexts to explore how the presence of other family members would influence gender expectations and norms.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Sampling Strategy and Participants

This research asks how heterosexual couples in Taiwan arranged their space when they worked from home together. I sampled heterosexual couples who had the experience of working from home at the same time, either long-term or short-term. I used snowball sampling to recruit interviewees. I posted flyers on social media publicly. Six people contacted me through the flyer. The other six entry points are those who saw the flyer but were not eligible. However, they introduced people they knew were eligible to me, and some introduced more than one interviewee. Six other individuals, although they did not have the experience of remote working with their partners, introduced their acquaintances to me, which constituted six entry points of my snowball sample. They recommended another participants and eventually I recruited 23 interviewees through snowballing. Although snowball sampling sacrifices representativeness, the in-depth interviews and observations allowed me to observe gender dynamics in how couples allocated work spaces. I conducted 29 in-depth interviews of people in 19 households in Taipei¹. Taipei is a crowded city with high housing costs, with an average apartment costing around 30 times the annual household income (compared to around 20 for Paris, 15 for London, and 10 for New York City) (Cost of Living 2024). Living space in Taipei is not only expensive but also scarce, so it is rare for couples to have a space dedicated to work. Therefore, Taipei presents an extreme case in regard to understanding how people transform the existing space into a working space, how that space is allocated between genders, and how the experience of space might differ by gender.

I followed Small (2009) and applied case logic to see my sample as a set of 29 cases rather than a sample of $n = 29$. Adopting the case logic, I recruited interviewees based on their contribution to our understanding of space allocation and the gender division of labor.

For example, the relative resources hypothesis (Blood and Wolfe 1960) suggests that men contribute less to housework because they usually make more money than their wives, which gives them more bargaining power in negotiating housework. I therefore recruited couples with wives who make more money than husbands and even included a couple with a husband who was unemployed during the pandemic. The theoretical generalizability of this study relies mainly on the heterogeneity of the sample, which includes variations such as marital status, living arrangements, wife and husband's income, and so on. The characteristics of interviewees are shown in Table 1.

Most of the interviewees were married, except for seven who were cohabiting. All interviewees lived with their partners. Some of the couples lived with their parents or roommates who were not their family members. Continuing to live with parents after adulthood or after marriage is common in Taiwan and other Asian countries. Many couples would live close to their parents even when moving out after marriage. This type of living arrangement makes it easy for grandparents to care for the grandchildren during working hours. Dual-income families in Taiwan often rely on their kin network for childcare (Chen 2000; Hermalin and Yang 2004).

The criterion of having the experience of working from home restricted the sample to non-working-class positions since not everyone had the privilege to work from home, especially while there was no lockdown in Taiwan. According to the Minister of Labor of Taiwan, only 24% of workers were eligible to work remotely fully or partially. They were mostly in managerial positions or were professionals. Among those, individuals working in the tech industry, the IT section of other industries, or in companies with more than 500 employees were more likely to be eligible to work remotely (104 Labor Bank 2023; Minister of Labor 2024). The individuals in my sample shared common demographic features with the broader population of Taiwanese workers who were able to work from home. For example, half of my respondents worked in the tech industry or the IT section in other industries. Every participant earned more than the median income of the city and the majority of them worked in the tech industry or a multinational corporation. All interviewees had completed college education. Sample diversity was pursued by considering various living arrangements. Some of the interviewees lived in rented, compact apartments, while others owned more spacious houses or apartments. Another significant aspect of sample variation that shaped the gendered dynamics was whether participants lived with family members or roommates. Co-habiting with family members could potentially reinforce gendered family roles, whereas sharing living spaces with roommates of a similar age might encourage a more egalitarian environment for space allocation. The presence of children also played a critical role in the gendered processes, given that motherhood and fatherhood are highly gendered. Approximately half of the interviewees had at least one child during their remote work period, and a few of them were pregnant at the time. This facilitated comparisons between those with and without children regarding how childcare influenced their use of space.

Table 1. Interviewees' demographics and working space at home.

Name	Age	Gender	Annual Income (10,000 NTD)	Education	Relationship	Children	Working Space at Home	Residence	Layout
Hazel George	29 28	F M	NA 150–180	MA BA	cohabitated	0	her bedroom with George computer room	rent/another roommate	3B Apt
Stacy Cheng	28 27	F M	100 150	BA BA	married	0	living room/couch study room	owned	3B Apt
Amelia Bond	28 34	F M	100 75	BA MA	married	0	study room living room with no one coming	owned by husband's parents/with husband's parents	5 story duplex
Cathy Jimmy	28 31	F M	70–90 80–100	BA BA	cohabitated	0	bed > living room/bedroom desk > living room/bedroom	rent	studio > 1B
Kevin *	33	M	90	PhD	married	0	his study room her study room	owned	4B Apt
Sunny *	NA	F	80	BA	cohabitated	0	living room bedroom	owned/with one tenant	3B Apt
Anna Blue	27	F M	60–70 130–150	BA BA	cohabitated	0	bedroom bedroom	rent/with 3 other roommates	4B Apt
Hannah *	29	M	70–90	BA	married	pregnancy	bedroom living room	owned by husband's parents/with husband's parents	4B Apt
Joyce *	31	M	100	MA	married	pregnancy	dining room on dining table > living room on camping chair and table computer room, dining room on dining table	rent > rent (in the same building with wife's parents)	2B Apt > 2B Apt
Belle Jack	NA 39	M F	NA 100	NA BA	married	1	study room, living room//living room in husband's parents' house study room, living room//living room in husband's parents' house	rent	3B Apt

Table 1. Cont.

Name	Age	Gender	Annual Income (10,000 NTD)	Education	Relationship	Children	Working Space at Home	Residence	Layout
Winter *	40	F	40	BA	married	1	the whole household study room/bathroom	owned	studio
Yvonne *	38	F	70–80	MA	married	1	living room (parents' house)//main bedroom (in which the kids sleep) study room (parents' house)//balcony	owned	3B Apt
Clair *	30	F	60	MA	married	2	her brother's room her room	owned/with wife's parents	
Ken	32	M	70–100	BA	married	1	bedroom bedroom> guest room (COVID)	owned/with husband's parents and younger sister	4B Apt
Mia	32	F	65–70	MA					
Emma	50	F	100	BA	married	1	study room study room	owned	3B Apt
William	65	M	70–80	MA					
Callie		F	80–100	MA	married	1	dining room, dining table > her brother's room dining room, dining table, wardrobe > her room	owned	2B Apt
Leo	42	M	150	MA					
Jolin *	47	F	40	BA	married	3	bedroom, balcony, public staircase, community public space living room	owned by husband's mother	3B Apt
Amber *	57	F	200	PhD	married	2	bedroom, study room, her office (independent) bedroom, study room	dorm from wife's job	3B Apt
Jennifer *	55	F	150	BA	married	1	living room, bedroom in bed bedroom on the desk	owned by husband's mother/ with husband's mother	3B Apt

Note: table shows working space at home. * Signifies people not being interviewed. The space they worked at home was getting from their partner's interview. >Signifies the change before and after they move; // Signifies that two spaces were both used.

2.2. Data Collection and Analysis

The interviews were conducted during the summer of 2022 when the omicron variants of COVID-19 were sweeping Taiwan. The interviews were around one hour in length. 16 of them were conducted through online meeting software with the camera off; others were conducted in person, at interviewees' homes or offices. All were audibly and digitally recorded. We would talk by phone instead of having a video meeting per interviewee preference. This was usually what they did during the work meetings: camera off with only voices.

Conducting interviews through phone simulated workers' remote work scenario not only in form but also in their motivations for working remotely during the pandemic. Interviewees with little children especially preferred to conduct the interview remotely due to concerns that having contact with others might bring risks to their kids who were not old enough to be vaccinated. These precautionary actions and the concerns about COVID-19 to many of them were their reasons to work from home at the time. I found later in the interviews that parents opted to work remotely when they had the choice for the same reason.

This study employed a flexible coding approach (Deterding and Waters 2021) to analyze field notes and interview transcripts using the Atlas.ti coding software. Interviews were conducted in Mandarin, recorded, and transcribed by the author. The analysis was performed from an abductive analytical perspective (Timmermans and Tavory 2012). First, the data were coded for overarching topics guided by important themes from the literature and the interview questions. Second, analytic codes were applied to relevant subsections of the indexed data, and the codebook was refined to identify patterns and meaning in coded data. Consistent with the methodological principles of abductive analysis, analytic memos were generated throughout the research process, and compared with the original data to refine the findings and theoretical contribution.

3. Results

3.1. Ethnographic Description of Teleworking Couples in Taipei

As the busiest metropolitan area in Taiwan, the average living space is limited like in other big metropolises around the world. The average living area in Taipei was 409 square feet in 2020 and the apartment space is usually cramped in Taipei. A home office is not a usual setup in apartments in Taipei. In my sample of generally educated and affluent couples who had the privilege of working remotely, only 8 out of 19 households had a study room at home. Some of the study rooms, like the literature has pointed out, were mainly used by men. For example, Hazel and George are a cohabiting couple who split a three-bedroom apartment with one roommate. They had two rooms and they used one as a bedroom and another one as a computer room. The computer room was mainly used by George because "he spent a lot of time playing video games" (Hazel). Therefore, when the pandemic happened and they both started working from home, Hazel used her table in their bedroom with the bed in the background.

While gender inequality manifests in the form of a study room/home office for some interviewees, I found it challenging to establish a pattern of gender disparity in physical space because only a few households have a dedicated study room. Even when such spaces exist, they are often shared by the entire family and serve multiple functions. For multiple families in my sample, their only spare room doubles as both a study and a guest room. Oftentimes, there is no appropriate working environment at home due to both limited living space and infrequent remote work arrangements apart from the conditions of the pandemic in Taiwan. Consequently, I delved into the physical space as well as the subjective experience of space used to examine the gender dynamics of space at home, further elaborated upon in the next section.

Another family arrangement that appeared frequently for my interviewees is that grandparents played a vital role in childcare. This echoes what the literature has pointed out: many married couples still live with or live close to their parents after they get married

(Biddlecom et al. 2002; Frankenberg et al. 2002; Hermalin and Yang 2004). Different from the Western context, elderly people in Asian countries that follow the Confucius tradition of filial piety do not typically prefer living alone to living with their adult children (Pong and Chen 2010).

This has three implications for the spatial experiences of couples working remotely. First of all, the presence of other family members can influence the gender norms within the household. With the shifting gender values in Taiwan over time, the older generation may uphold more conservative gender values, impacting the gender dynamics at home. Secondly, having grandparents at home complicates the task of arranging additional workspace for couples due to more people sharing the space than nuclear families.

Thirdly, this type of living arrangement facilitates the grandparents' ability to care for young grandchildren while their daughters or daughters-in-law are at work (Yu 2009). This is attributed to the lack of public support for childcare in Taiwan (Chiu and Wei 2011). With the high female labor participation rates, relatives—primarily grandmothers—and nannies constitute major sources of childcare assistance for Taiwan's dual-earner families. According to Wang (2014), in 2010, grandparents were the temporary primary caregivers for approximately 33% of Taiwanese children under the age of three. The multigenerational support for childcare shows in my sample. Among ten couples with children in my sample, six relied on their parents to watch their children while they worked from home during the pandemic. Two couples even relocated or commuted to their parent's house to work remotely for childcare purposes. On the one hand, parental assistance alleviated the burden for remote-working couples; on the other hand, their interactions with remote-working couples reinforced the notion of mothers as primary caregivers, as will be elaborated on in later sections.

3.2. A Preferable Space

I was surprised to find that there was not a consistent pattern of space allocation between men and women in my sample. Contrary to previous studies (Waismel-Manor et al. 2021), where men typically worked in independent rooms while their wives worked in open spaces, only 3 couples out of the 19 couples in my sample followed this pattern. Instead, most of my respondents either shared the same space with their partner or had their own room to work in. In three cases, the wife received the independent room to work in while the husband worked in the living room. This inconsistency between my findings and the literature might be related either to the relative lack of dedicated workspace at home in most Taipei apartments or to the fact that remote work had not been available to many interviewees before the pandemic (See Table 1). Although the distribution of physical space among my sample did not follow expected gender patterns, gender norms continued to shape how working parents in these spaces were treated.

Upon further exploration of their experiences of remote work and preferences of space, I discovered greater nuances in how space and the experience of that space are perceived in relation to gender. Sheer size or the independence of the space were not the only characteristics that distinguish space. I found a gendered pattern of men tending to work in spaces that had a lesser impact of disruption and were more conducive to work. I named them "the preferable space" to capture the relative, subjective, and dynamic aspects of the space. This subjective aspect of space challenges what we think of as "equal" in terms of space allocation. Even when the physical space men worked in seemed less ideal physically, the space where men worked was preferable in many aspects. To be specific, preferable space can be defined through physical conditions and whether it is interruptible.

One important aspect is that the preferable space has more conducive physical settings, just as the case of Cathy and Jimmy shows. Cathy and Jimmy, a cohabitating couple, lived together in a 250-square-foot studio before moving to a one-bedroom apartment. In the studio, where space was limited to a desk and a bed, Jimmy got the desk while Cathy worked from the bed. However, using a small bed stray as a working surface in bed caused

Cathy long-term backache and insomnia at the time. Despite recognizing the negative physical impact, they did not switch working spots. When asked about it, Cathy explained

“We didn’t consider switching spots because he has long legs. He couldn’t stay in bed like I did because I was tiny. I could work on the bed using a bed tray, but he couldn’t do it. We tried, but he flipped the tray when he stretched his legs. I was like, ‘Poor him, let’s not do this to him.’” (Cathy)

Between the desk and the bed, the desk was the preferable space due to the negative impact on the body while working from the bed. Although Cathy initially attributed the arrangement to her inability to sit upright like an office worker and her tendency to fidget, she no longer worked from the bed after moving to the one-bedroom apartment. This choice demonstrates her true preference for a working space. Cathy compromised by working in bed to accommodate Jimmy’s comfort:

“At that time, I felt that moving was the only solution because that space couldn’t be used in other ways. No matter what, it would be painful to one person. (sigh) And because normally, as I mentioned earlier, I usually have a poor sitting posture. Even when I worked in the office, I often had backaches. So I thought that it is what it is. I had the backache already. I just felt that we needed to at least keep one person healthy. That’s why we didn’t swap sites at the time and decided to move in the future”. (Cathy)

While space was a significant factor affecting Cathy’s working experiences and her life at the time, Jimmy did not refer to space as a problem of working from home. When I asked how they decided who got to use the desk and who worked in the bed, Jimmy just simply replied, “Cathy just let me use the desk”.

Cathy and Jimmy ended up moving to a one-bedroom apartment when the lease expired. They alternated between using a formal workspace in the bedroom and a sofa with a height-adjustable desk every two weeks to avoid the potential backache caused by prolonged sitting on the sofa. Cathy’s insomnia immediately recovered when she no longer worked in bed. Nevertheless, Jimmy would have the desk after he set up the extended monitor in the bedroom. In the end, Cathy, who had already suffered from backache from the former working environment, would continue to work on the couch in the living room, a less preferable space compared to the desk in the bedroom.

While Cathy and Jimmy represented an extreme example of limited space at home, they were not an exception for men getting a preferable space at home. This pattern of men obtaining a preferable space to work at home is prevalent in my sample. While one might posit that the preferable space for men was a manifestation of cultural emphasis on men’s jobs, Stacy and Cheng’s case demonstrates that the space allocation was not contingent upon job contents, income, or house ownership.

Stacy and Cheng were a newlywed couple who lived in their three-bedroom condo bought by Stacy’s parents in Taipei. Unlike most young couples in Taipei, Stacy and Cheng had a relatively spacious home setup to work. They had a home office which had been used as Cheng’s office before the pandemic. Cheng, employed as a salesperson for games, did not have an office place at his company. During the pandemic, Cheng’s work was mostly halted because he could not promote the games outside; thus, he lost his regular income. In contrast, Stacy, a product manager, transitioned to work from home. However, despite her more official work in terms of income and contents, Stacy worked on the sofa because she “doesn’t like to sit in front of the desk”. Meanwhile, Cheng continued using the home office to trade stocks and cryptocurrencies. This resonates with Aliya Rao’s findings (2020) on the gender dynamics within married couples dealing with unemployment. She found that unemployed men often occupy an official space at home dedicated to job searching. This dedicated space for men buffers the tension of incompatibility of the cultural scripts of a masculine breadwinner and feminine homemaker. However, while families set up their homes to facilitate men’s job searches, little space is left for women. Traditionally gendered conceptualizations of work—as a requirement for

men but optional for women—are exemplified in the use of space, even in marriages that have not adhered to gender-traditional roles. Women received the less preferable spaces at home despite the work content. In this case, Stacy worked in a less preferable space despite her parents having bought the apartment for them. While the specific reasons behind these decisions may be personal and based on individual preferences, when considered collectively, they contributed to a pattern that creates less favorable conditions for women working from home.

These less favorable conditions for space had an impact on women's experiences working from home and their preferences regarding remote work or working in the office. They created an invisible barrier hindering women's ability to fully benefit from flexible working policies, even when such benefits were offered fairly by companies. How the space affected women's preference for working from home is shown in the case of Amelia and Bond.

Amelia and Bond were a newlywed couple living with Bond's parents in a four-floor house. Amelia worked in the computer room, which was an independent room, and her husband, Bond, worked in the living room. Although an independent room is often assumed to be the better space for work, it was not in this case because there was no air conditioner in the room and Bond's father often went into the computer room to use the printer. In fact, before Bond began working from home, Amelia moved around the house to find a suitable workplace: "I didn't have a fixed office space. I would move around, sometimes staying in the living room on the first floor, sometimes using the desk on the second floor, and sometimes staying in the computer room". Bond claimed the desk on the second floor after he worked from home later than Amelia did, while Amelia stayed in the small, hot room. When asked about her preference for working from home or in the office, Amelia answered that she preferred to work in the office because it is cooler in the office with the air conditioner.

Regardless of factors such as house ownership, job contents, income, or space availability, I identified a gendered pattern of space allocation, one where men tended to have a preferable space to work at home compared to their partners. A preferable workspace is one that offers favorable conditions for work, such as a desk that allows for a comfortable setting or an environment with appropriate temperature control. The scenario with both couples working from home in this study occurred during the pandemic, and most of my interviewees were sent home suddenly and were expecting to go back to the office at any time. Amidst this chaotic and temporary situation, a gendered pattern emerged where women frequently made accommodations for their partners and compromised their own needs and preferences. This pattern of women making accommodations and thus ending up with the less preferable space to work at home was particularly pronounced among couples with children. In the next section, I will delve into the critical factor shaping a preferable working space—whether a worker can concentrate on their tasks without interruptions. I will demonstrate how the presence of children reinforced traditional gender roles associated with motherhood and fatherhood. The expectation of gender roles made the space in which women stayed vulnerable to interpolation regardless of the objective physical conditions of the space. Eventually, men had a preferable space to work at home.

3.3. An Interruptible Working Environment

What made a space a preferable space to work at home? Besides the physical settings, a space where a worker could focus on work and remain undisturbed would be considered a preferable space. The literature from Western contexts demonstrates that an independent space would be preferable for working at home due to its ability to physically separate work and family (Waismel-Manor et al. 2021). Nevertheless, women in my sample found it challenging to find an undisturbed physical workspace regardless of whether they had an independent space or not.

The different social expectations of gender, instead of walls and doors, determined whether the space was able to remain undisturbed. Besides the role of worker, other social

roles of women such as mother, wife, or daughter, frequently infiltrated the physical space and caused interruptions. Conversely, men experienced fewer disruptions from family members or household responsibilities while working from home.

Jolin is a social worker with three children. She lived with her husband, three children, and her mother-in-law in a three-bedroom condo in Taipei. This was not a spacious condo for a five-person household; however, when the pandemic hit, she was able to work in the bedroom while her husband worked in the living room because the desk in the bedroom had always been used by her. Although Jolin got to work in an independent working space with a door, she brought her work to the balcony, the public stairs of their condo building, or the public patio during the sultry summer in Taipei because her children liked to roll on the bed where they all slept together. In particular, her youngest child, who was in preschool, had much energy and wanted Jolin to play with him. He barged into the room or knocked on Jolin's door when she worked in the room. The kids, who wanted attention, made Jolin's room with walls and doors interruptible.

On the other hand, Jolin's husband's presence in the living room transformed the physically open space into a secluded workspace. Her husband worked undisturbed in the open living room while Jolin worked on the adjacent balcony, keeping an eye on their son as he rode his bike. Despite having two other adults at home, the children sought only their mother's attention. They hesitated to approach their father because he lacked patience and would express irritation when he got interrupted at work. In an effort to encourage the children to seek their father's assistance more often, Jolin developed a strategy. She created an Excel spreadsheet and tracked the number of times the kids called out for "mom". Once the count reached a specific threshold, such as thirty times a day, the kids were no longer allowed to call for mom and had to turn to their father instead.

Jolin's husband took it for granted that she would be solely responsible for caring for their three children, with the eldest being eleven years old. He assumed that childcare was primarily the mother's role, while his duty was to work and assist their son with technical aspects of remote schooling. He did not need to express it explicitly to stir the belief of gender equality which Jolin cares about a lot; his impatience when interrupted conveyed the message, causing the children to instinctively avoid bothering him.

Jolin's case illustrates that having an independent physical space did not guarantee an independent and uninterrupted working environment, particularly for mothers. Gender equality in Taiwan has improved greatly in regard to family laws, Employment Laws, and the political arena, including high levels of female representation and a female president (Tompkins 2011). According to a national survey, people generally believe in gender equality where men and women are equally competent at work and should share equal responsibilities for housework (Executive Yuan 2023). Jolin explicitly claimed that sharing housework equally was important to her and she has made an agreement with her husband about it. However, in practice, at home, these gender ideologies were difficult to fulfill. The multiple social roles women often carried, such as being wives, daughters, and mothers, superseded their physical space and caused interruption of their work when they were working from home. On the contrary, when men were working, they only worked. They experienced fewer disruptions from other family members or house chores while working from home. Consequently, men were perceived primarily as workers and were able to enjoy a relatively independent work environment, even when they did not have a physically separate space for working from home.

Women's susceptibility to interruptions from other family members, as they assumed traditional social roles assigned to women, is illustrated in Emma's experience of working from home. Emma and her husband lived with Emma's parents and their 15-month-old son and four-year-old son in a five-story house combined with two duplexes. Emma and her husband each worked from a separate room. When they worked, Emma's father supervised the four-year-old son with his online courses and Emma's mother took care of the 15-month-old baby. When they set up their workspaces at home, Emma was assigned to the side of the duplex where her four-year-old son was located. This was because he was

old enough to cry for his mother, causing occasional disruptions. Emma often had to pause her work to reprimand or call to him upstairs, requesting her son to be quiet.

Meanwhile, her husband, a designer whose job was less directly impacted by sounds or temporary absences, worked in the other duplex where Emma's mother and their baby son stayed. Unlike Emma, who was consistently interrupted and expected to step in whenever their child became unruly, her husband faced minimal interruptions from the baby. It was not because the baby was easier to care for, but rather because Emma's mother would not disturb him. Her mother would cross the duplex to seek help from Emma. Although Emma worked in an independent room and had parents helping with the kids, she still expressed difficulty around working from home:

“My parents called me from time to time when I worked, but I was working. I couldn't really leave...they often came to me because I was at home, so I felt like I didn't really have a boundary between work and life...I had to remind them frequently that I was working. I needed to be very clear at the beginning. I usually just closed and locked the door to prevent them from coming in suddenly”.

(Emma)

Despite Emma's work requiring frequent communication, her parents called her for assistance with the kids, but not her husband. Consequently, she had to lock the door to minimize interruptions. While working from home, Emma had to juggle the roles of a mother, daughter, and worker, while her husband was primarily viewed as a worker. The rest of the family left her husband undisturbed, whereas they intruded on Emma's time and space, prompting her to lock the door to safeguard her work time when necessary. This case shows how gender roles are culturally and socially constructed through interactions (Cunningham 2001). Scholars have found that the gender gap in domestic labor is larger for couples living with other family members than for couples who live by themselves (Lu and Yi 2005).

Among the various social roles assigned to women, motherhood holds a significant influence in perpetuating gender scripts, which shape the gendered pattern of space. While people often attribute it to children's natural tendencies, the cases of Jolin and Emma reveal that it is the societal value of the mother as the primary caregiver that facilitates easy access for children to go for their mothers when in need. Jolin's husband displayed grumpiness when the children approached him, and Emma was situated in a room close to her son to cater to his requests whenever needed. Through these arrangements, children were encouraged or accustomed to seeking their mother's attention instead of their father's, even when both parents were present at home.

The belief that the mother is the primary caregiver then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy that appears difficult to break, as shown in Mia and Ken's story. Mia, a mother of a two-year-old girl, Lily, and a visual designer, initially worked in the living room with her husband Ken when the pandemic struck. She later moved to the guest room by herself which later became a home office for her after being quarantined there due to contracting COVID-19. Like many mothers who worked from home, having an independent room did not prevent Mia from being interrupted by her daughter, which was reflected in the interview. Just a few minutes into the interview, Lily entered the room and asked for Mia. Mia tried to negotiate with Lily, suggesting she play with Ken for a bit, but Mia relented. Mia ended up surrendering to Lily throughout the interview.

After Lily entered the room, the sense of chaos seemed almost tangible through the phone. Mia was navigating a dual conversation: one minute she was sharing her experience with me, and the next minute she was using another voice to talk with Lily. Mia eventually convinced Lily to go to the park with Ken, and her voice faded from the phone momentarily. However, it was not long before Lily returned home, seeking Mia's presence once again. Again, Mia had to alternate between sharing her experience with me and engaging with Lily. In order to talk without disruption in the interview, Mia again lured Lily to play the piano with Ken. During the one-hour interview, Mia continued to be interrupted, even with Ken and her parents-in-law present at home. Although Ken was home and aware

that Mia was in an interview and needed space, he did little. Lily only longed for her mother's attention.

Why did the kids only ask for their mothers? Ken and Mia attributed it to Lily's personality that she was just clingy to her mother. With the naturalization of the behavior, Ken felt like there was nothing he could do to shoulder the main responsibility of taking care of Lily and thus improve Mia's working situation at home. By naturalizing social settings with biological factors or individual preferences, the gendered division of labor is sustained and reproduced (Hawkesworth 2013; Kane and Schippers 1996; Lorber 1993).

However, the social construction of this gendered dynamic was shown in Mia's daily routine when Lily was two years old: A typical weekday for Mia started at six or seven in the morning as she prepared milk for Lily. Mia started to work at eight, an hour earlier than her firm's usual start time of nine, in order to finish work by five p.m. and take care of Lily. To attend the morning team meeting, Mia put Lily to sleep by feeding her and stayed in the bed with her while working on her laptop because Lily slept better with Mia being around. Mia stayed in bed until ten, until Lily woke up upon hearing the sound of the meeting and sat beside Mia while reading or playing with toys. Lily's attention span would typically last no longer than three or four minutes, so Mia continuously distracted her with different toys to continue to be attending the meeting. After the meeting, Mia would proceed to prepare lunch for both Lily and herself around eleven. She then had lunch with Lily, cleaned up, and went back to work when the lunch break ended at two p.m. Throughout the entire morning when Mia woke up early to work and watch Lily, and fed Lily two meals by herself, the other family members including Ken were sleeping. It was not until in the afternoon when Mia's mother-in-law took over to watch Lily that Mia could focus on her work. Later, Mia would get off work around five p.m. when Lily knocked on her door and took over the primary responsibility of being with Lily again. Ken, the father, was never the primary caregiver during the whole day.

It is not difficult to imagine why Lily relied on Mia the most, as Mia was attentive to her most of the time. Mia had been constantly available to her when she took six months of parental leave after Lily was born. After Mia returned to work in the office, Lily stayed at home with her grandparents. Although Mia and Ken thought that Lily's attachment to her mother was simply a result of her personality and typical child behavior, they also acknowledged that Lily was only craving for Mia when she knew that Mia's home. When Mia was not at home, Lily was content and at ease with Ken's mother.

Several gendered logics intertwined and intensified with each other, creating an inescapable trap for working mothers. After working from home with Lily for a few months during the pandemic, Mia took the parental leave again because she was exhausted by the dual burdens of work and childcare. Nevertheless, the parental leave made it more difficult for Mia to return to work because Lily became accustomed to having her constant presence. Ever since Lily turned three years old, she no longer slept much during the day and required constant attention and time with playmates. As a result, Mia found it increasingly challenging to work from home. To resolve this, Mia had to take on the risk of contracting COVID and go to a café to work if she needed to focus. Mia had the independent space at home, unlike Ken who worked in their bedroom; however, she was the one who left home and kept changing working sites because of her child.

Women's work was judged to be more interruptible when they worked from home with their partners. The gender expectations associated with being a mother, daughter, and wife often overshadowed women's role as workers, frequently pulling them away from their work when they were at home. The physical barriers of walls and doors did not adequately safeguard women's time and personal space within the home. Conversely, men's work was prioritized when they worked from home regardless of the physical space. They experienced fewer interruptions even in open spaces. This stark contrast in the experience of space underscores the significant disparity between men and women, especially mothers, in remote work, revealing a tale of two realities of remote work.

3.4. *A Tale of Two Realities*

Remote work has been touted as a practice to save commuting time, improve worker productivity, and enhance work–family balance. Overall, interviewees expressed their preference for remote work or hybrid work after the pandemic. Jimmy and Stacy, the young couple we met in the former section, both preferred to work remotely despite the difficulties they had faced from the limited home space:

“I prefer to work from home because I don’t have to commute and I also don’t need to spend time grooming. Additionally, in terms of life planning, because housing prices in Taipei are too high, if we were to move to other counties or cities, remote work would also provide us with some flexibility”. (Jimmy)

Stacy also preferred to work remotely, but for different reasons:

“I love to work remotely because I can do so much at home. I feel like I utilize my time more efficiently. . . Sometimes when I finish work early, I clean the house or do the groceries. I think it is great! If I were in the office, I would be stuck there until six before I could leave”. (Stacy)

It was surprising to hear this from Stacy, especially considering her previous struggles with back pain and insomnia due to remote work. Apparently, in an ideal scenario where everyone has a suitable place to work from home, remote work appealed to some respondents. Amber’s perspective on remote work also highlights the complexity of its reality:

“I could work from home, given the age of my children. If my children were younger, I wouldn’t want to work from home. I would want to come to the office because I need some privacy. I prefer to work from home because there is not much of interruption for me now. I think for women, the age of their children and whether they have a child is the key.

For me, the biggest motivation for working from home is [no need to] commute. I think that saves me a lot of time and hustle, especially for the energy. I spend too much time on public transportation doing nothing. I could only scroll on my phone. I think I waste a lot of time commuting, so commuting is always my big concern. I think that is a real waste”. (Amber)

When discussing the reality of remote work, numerous factors come into play. The experience of remote work could vary depending on the circumstances. Through interviews, I observed a stark cleavage in the experiences of remote work between individuals who meet these conditions and those who do not. I coin this distinction as “the two realities of remote work”. This paper uses the two realities to contrast the cleavage between what we hope for remote work, and the reality of remote work. The reality of remote work is plural and complicated, intertwined by various social positions. The first reality of the tale is what we hope for remote work—saving commuting time and allowing workers to decide the best work scenario for them. Anna, a technical writer who started her current job during the pandemic, analyzed the benefits of working remotely:

“I preferred to work remotely because I saved a lot of time commuting. . . In my current job, I don’t really feel that online discussions for collaboration are less efficient compared to face-to-face interactions. So, once again, I don’t see a real necessity for in-person meetings. Moreover, when it comes to remote work, I personally feel less likely to be disrupted. As we communicate through asynchronous messages, I have the opportunity to think clearly about what I want to discuss, and the purpose of my message, and I can convey the information clearly once”. (Anna)

However, Anna was an exception in my sample, as she did not get a less preferable space to work from home compared to her partner. Anna was living with four other roommates, including her boyfriend Blue, who shared a room with her in a four-bedroom apartment. Anna and Blue skillfully set up their desks, each facing one of the walls in their bedroom, ensuring that neither would appear in the other’s background. Because

they just moved from a smaller studio to this new apartment, the limited space at this home was not a problem for Anna and Blue. They furnished and arranged the space according to their needs, each having a desk in the room. When either of them needed to attend a meeting, the other would go to the living room. They were a cohabitating couple, but they were also roommates with each other and three other people, with whom they shared the space and the house chores. At this stage of their relationship, the gendered expectations of husband–wife or mother–father roles had not yet been imposed on them. Anna was able to discuss and allocate the space with her boyfriend before they moved into the new apartment and had a satisfactory space to work. She was also able to arrange the house chores equally with her boyfriend and other roommates so that she was not buried with house chores. Sharing the apartment with other friends, Anna and Blue were like independent individuals rather than any gender roles.

In other cases, gender was a salient influence on whether an individual could meet workable conditions at home. The social expectations of gender shaped men’s and women’s experience of the physical space. The impact of gendered social roles was particularly pronounced in the contrasting experiences of working from home during the pandemic for dual-income parents. Fathers, interestingly, similar to couples without children, lived the bright and sanguine reality of remote work. Leo, a father of a two-year-old boy, shared his joy in recalling his experience of working from home with his family:

“When our child was between one to two years old, both my wife and I were at home. My wife took parental leave when he turned one. The period from one to two years old is crucial for rapid growth and significant changes in children. Usually, parents choose to send their children to a babysitter or daycare during this period because both parents can’t take parental leave together. Then they miss out on being involved in their child’s growth. So, being able to be home with my son brought me a great sense of happiness, personally. I got to witness him constantly growing, which brought me a lot of joy”. (Leo)

Ken, a father of a two-year-old daughter, also pointed out the differences before and after he started to work from home:

“Before I had children, I often worked overtime, and since I went to the office, I would return home late. . . Usually, when I left in the morning, my daughter was either just waking up or still asleep, and by the time I returned, she was already about to sleep. That was the situation before. Now that when I stay at home, even though my working hours are the same, my daughter gets to see me more often and I can interact with her”. (Ken)

Previously, Ken’s long working hours with commuting time made it difficult for him to spend time with his daughter during the weekdays. Now, he is able to save time from commuting. The additional time fathers spent at home allowed them to align with the most common feature of the “new” fatherhood: presence (Cannito and Scavarda 2020; Dermott and Millar 2015). Unlike mothers, fathers have more flexibility in their relationship with their children, making it easier for them to comply with the model of ‘good fatherhood’ with minimum adjustments to their work time (Miller 2011). Working from home facilitated the work–family balance as suggested by the literature, but only for men (Cannito and Scavarda 2020). Their spouses, on the other hand, illustrated a very different reality of remote work.

While the interview with Leo was filled with the happiness of becoming a father, frustration and anxiety brimmed over the phone during the interview with Leo’s spouse, Callie. Callie sighed as she recalled her experience of working from home:

“I felt like there wasn’t any advantage [of working from home]. The only advantage was that I wouldn’t catch COVID at home; however, the disadvantage was that I couldn’t do anything well. I had to take care of the kid and work, and it’s not really possible to do both together”. (Callie)

Instead of achieving a sense of work–family balance through remote work, Callie found herself feeling the need to take parental leave after experiencing the challenges of working from home with her son, Henry. Henry constantly asked for her. This difficulty was reflected in the interview. Henry’s sounds were present in the background throughout Callie’s conversation. Leo attempted to take Henry out of the room once then relented. In order to distract Henry from Callie, Leo stayed in the room during the interview for a while. Henry, Leo, and Callie’s mother’s voices were audible in the background intermittently, urging Callie to go back to Henry. As challenging as it was for Callie to conduct a one hour interview, one must consider the additional challenges faced by Callie to work even when she had an independent space at home. Consequently, Callie found it challenging to strike a balance between work and family working from home. In contrast, Leo’s interview was smooth and free from disruptions, mirroring his contentment and satisfaction with working from home.

Just as Callie’s parental leave ended, the Omicron variant surged in Taiwan, resulting in the postponement of Henry’s preschool enrollment. In order to continue working from home, Callie and Leo decided to commute to her parents’ place with Henry every day, relying on her parents to take care of Henry while they attended to their remote work responsibilities. Remote work is supposed to save commute time, but Callie and Henry ended up commuting in order to work remotely. Although that was a temporary solution for Callie’s conundrum, the multiple interruptions from Henry and other family members during the interview showed the tension of an irreconcilable conflict between work and family for Callie, and only for Callie.

Callie was not the only woman who put her career on hold to care for their children. Mia, Ken’s spouse, negotiated with her supervisor to take parental leave after working from home with Lily for four months.

“I told my supervisor that I was not content with what I produced at work after I worked from home. I felt too tired to work and take care of my daughter at the same time. My supervisor was like, ‘I think your work was fine. . .or, let me make an arrangement for you to come in two days or three days a week, and work remotely on the other days’, but I didn’t want to. I wanted a time for me to just rest.” (Mia)

These women are professional white-collar workers who are valued in their firms and the job market. Mia’s supervisor was hesitant about her taking parental leave and even suggested a flexible work times and space arrangements to accommodate her. However, working from home did not represent a solution without her role as a worker being protected at home because women are expected to be a mother, not a worker at home. Although remote work is supposed to suit a flexible working policy that allows workers to balance work and life, women end up being caught up with their multiple roles, leading them to leave the labor market.

The reason why these fathers could enjoy working from home with their children was because their wives were the primary caregivers who took the children away from them when they needed to focus on work. Although fathers were at home and spent more time with their children, the time they spent was separate from their work responsibilities. Consequently, while fathers cherished the precious opportunity to witness their children’s once-and-only growth, mothers struggled to juggle multiple responsibilities when working from home.

As a result of having to take on multiple roles when working from home, women, especially mothers, expressed frustration and anxiety due to the constant interruptions by their children when they talked about their experience of working from home. “It was basically impossible for me to work from home when kids were also at home”, Jolin sighed. Jolin, the social worker who already attempted through whatever means she could to provide stimulating and engaging activities for her children while working, noticed her decreasing working quality and was worried that she might get fired if the situation did not change. Her only hope lay in the reopening of the school.

Motherhood penalty, which refers to the fact that women are getting lower wages for being mothers (Anderson et al. 2003; Correll et al. 2007; Glass 2004; Yu and Kuo 2017), is crucial to gender inequality in the workplace because men are not penalized for being fathers. While the literature mostly focuses on wage, my findings show that mothers with young children, who are aimed to benefit from the remote work policy, were especially ineligible for these benefits.

This study shows that gender norms and beliefs remain rigid regardless of the material changes, such as a remote working policy. In the end, women, especially mothers with young children, live a separate reality from the tale of remote work. Gender inequality was reproduced through the practice that was supposed to bring changes.

4. Discussion

The literature that concerns remote work policy-reinforced gender inequalities is predominantly based on Western contexts (Chung et al. 2022; Dunatchik et al. 2021; Glass 2004; Glass and Noonan 2016). My findings add to the concern by contending that men working from home are generally better than women in shielding themselves from the intrusion of unpaid care work through the spatial arrangements at home. When working from home, women tended to have less preferable space to accommodate their family's needs and to be interrupted during work. Men, in contrast, derived a relatively stable, undisturbed, and preferable working environment at home. The experiences of household space were largely shaped by the traditional gender role expectations, thus perpetuating gender inequality at work when work was conducted at home. This finding indicates that the allocation of space, just like the division of domestic work, is a product not only of rational decision-making such as time availability or relative resources, but also of gendered expectations about household responsibilities (Bianchi et al. 2000; Fauser 2019; Kalleberg and Rosenfeld 1990).

Remote work turns out to become a tale of two realities: The first reality is lived by those fortunate enough to have conducive home environments for work, characterized by minimal interruptions. For instance, individuals without children can leverage the autonomy provided by remote work to enhance productivity and achieve a better work–life balance. Remote work also improves men's work–family balance by enabling them to spend more time with their families without compromising their work commitments. The second reality, however, paints a stark contrast for those unable to meet these conditions. Women, especially mothers with young children, struggle to work when they are home. For them, remote work exacerbates the challenges of achieving work–family balance, particularly during the pandemic when young children were at home.

This second reality highlights a long line of feminist arguments suggesting childbearing and childcare as pivotal factors contributing to gender inequality in contemporary industrialized societies where most mothers are employed (Anderson et al. 2002, 2003; Avellar and Smock 2003; Budig and Hodges 2010; Correll et al. 2007; England et al. 2016; Gough and Noonan 2013; Ishizuka 2021; Kahn et al. 2014; Yu and Kuo 2017). While remote work has been regarded as a policy favoring workers' productivity and autonomy, the second reality of remote work unveils an alternative manifestation of the motherhood penalty that mothers are hindered from harnessing the benefits of remote work and instead are entrenched in its difficulties, as working from home with children becomes a formidable task.

The gendered spatial pattern shows that gendered beliefs and behaviors often extend beyond physical confines. By highlighting how gendered norms and behaviors were actively maintained by spouses at a time when they could be dismantled, this study demonstrates the persistence of gendered beliefs that exceed physical settings and reproduce gender inequality at work in spite of the flexible working policy implanted.

5. Conclusions

5.1. Conclusions

There existed a gendered pattern of space use that favored men and disadvantaged women that superseded physical space settings. Women used a less preferable space at home to work. Even when women managed to secure a separate room for work, they remained on call, ready to attend to their children's needs at any moment. In the sample, most couples with pre-school-aged children relied on their parents' help during the working hours. However, even with grandparents taking care of the children, many mothers were still interrupted during work. In fact, other family members, including adults and little children, mainly sought assistance from women but kept house chores, crying babies, and active toddlers from men so that they could work at home, perpetuating traditional gender beliefs that regard men as breadwinners and women as primary housekeepers and caregivers. Therefore, the spaces where men worked, whether an independent study room, an open dining room, or a living room, were effectively transformed into transparent home offices, shielding men from household disruptions and allowing them to work without interruptions. This space use demonstrates a tale of two realities of remote work that benefited men in general but hindered women's, especially mothers', careers in practice.

5.2. Limitations

This study does possess certain limitations. First of all, this study examines the experiences of heterosexual couples in Taipei who worked from home together to explore the interrelationship between gender and space. It is noteworthy that Taiwan was never under strict lockdown, and remote work practices were often influenced by the government's alert level announcements or required quarantines due to COVID. Many interviewees only worked from home with their partner intermittently for a few months. The temporary and transient situations of the pandemic may have resulted in a completely different spatial setting compared to long-term and stable work-from-home arrangements. Nevertheless, this study shows that the gendered logic and the following gender inequality emerged even after a short exposure to working from home.

Another important factor that underscored the gender dynamics in this study was that many of the interviewees' children were at home. Although some children were at home due to the pandemic, many of them were at home because they were not old enough to attend preschool. Many young children were watched at home before the pandemic. In Taiwan, parents rely on their kin network or a private nanny for childcare instead of institutional care (Yu 2009, p. 103). For school-aged children, although the interruptions from children being at home were particularly salient during the pandemic, remote-working mothers might still encounter work interruptions if the traditional gender norms persist. Children may be ill and need to stay home, they may be sent home from school for various reasons, or a nanny may take leave. Despite grandparents offering significant assistance with childcare in Taiwan, they too might fall sick. If working mothers, and especially remote-working mothers, are automatically considered the primary caregivers whenever children require care, they are likely to continue experiencing work interruptions when these inevitable issues emerge, even when they have relatively independent school-age children. That is to say, although the pandemic exacerbated the tension for mothers working from home, the story is expected to hold in the "normal" scenario.

Understanding the experiences of working from home with children unveiled the gender logic of who is considered the caregiver when it is needed. However, whether remote work would foster women's work-family balance when their children are not home still needs to be studied. These arguments need to be carefully examined, considering the extreme circumstances of closed childcare and schools during the pandemic. In addition to childcare, elderly care also becomes an important concern for the trend of population aging in many industrial countries. Given that women spend two to ten times more time on unpaid care work than men, the care responsibility of elderly family members might

also affect women's experience when they work from home with or without the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Last but not least, this paper relied on a relatively small sample to obtain data in depth. The observations are subject to verification with larger and more random samples. However, the finding would not have emerged had this qualitative study not been conducted first. Future research that draws on a larger sample to examine the space allocation between genders to generalize the argument to a broader population is needed.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Texas at Austin (protocol code STUDY00002979) in August 2022.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are not available due to privacy restrictions from IRB.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Note

¹ In this paper, Taipei refers to the Taipei–Keelung metropolitan area, which is known as “Greater Taipei”. It includes Taipei City and the nearby cities of New Taipei City and Keelung City. Like most metropolitan areas, people both commute and move within the metropolitan and cross the municipal boundary of the city on a daily basis. Therefore, sampling from people who live in the Taipei–Keelung metropolitan area will capture the experience of people in Taipei. All of the interviewees work and live within the Taipei–Keelung metropolitan area.

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