

When Contexts Collapse: How Ubiquitous Video Cameras in the Home During COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdowns Transformed Family Representation

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***Abstract:** Utilising interviews from a range of caregivers and teachers alongside textual analysis of circulating and non-circulating videos made by children during the COVID-19 quarantine, this article examines the collaborative, experimental models of media making that emerged at this unique time. Children’s media-making practices during quarantine provided a window into and between personal dwelling spaces and private details, disrupting conventions of family self-representation while forcing a confrontation with the capitalist imperative to separate work and private life and for parents to produce, share, and monetize personal media content. This transformation in home mode media is bound up in making visible the incommensurability of home life and office labour, and the insistence of care (for each other) over careful production (of family and professional images).*

A BBC clip from 2017 shows Professor Robert Kelly interviewed live from his home about South Korean politics. Wearing a suit and tie and a serious expression, a map of the world hanging behind his head, he could almost have been mistaken for someone sitting in a newsroom recording studio. However, the controlled look of a formal satellite video is soon undone by a bespeckled, pigtailed toddler in a bright yellow shirt opening the door and dancing up to him at his desk. Moments later, a baby in a circular, wheeled walker contraption rolls into the room. These interruptions are dramatically punctuated when the children’s mother frantically slides through the door, almost losing her balance as she quickly tries to remove them from the room while remaining in a crouched position, so as not to be caught on camera. The look on Kelly’s face, as he tries his best to answer the reporter’s questions earnestly, conveys his attempt to maintain composure, but he is clearly dismayed by the disruption to his carefully curated professional interview setting. He smiles, but it is more of a grimace, as he asks the interviewer to pardon him. But even the off-camera interviewer cannot suppress a laugh at the surprise crash—“I think one of your children has just walked in!”, he chuckles. The camera reveals the four family members in the frame: the map of the world now a backdrop to a family circus.

Since its initial recording, the video has been viewed over fifty-five million times and has entered meme status, as it is now commonly referred to as “BBC dad”. It ranks with other now classic funny family video sensations on YouTube, such as “Charlie Bit My Finger” and “David After Dentist”. But more than most internet memes, this cultural moment was mimetically reproduced in everyday life, as remote work with children at home during COVID quarantine left many parents feeling like, as one headline put it, “we are all BBC Dad” (Hollister).

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Figure 1: Images of Robert Kelley’s BBC interview family interruption. Screenshot.

In fact, during the spring of 2020 and 2021, when many parents were working from home due to COVID-19-related lockdowns, incidents like what occurred in the “BBC Dad” video became so commonplace that they were not even remarkable anymore. As podcasters recorded from their bathrooms and professors “Zoomed” lectures from their closets to access quiet and separation from family, interruptions stopped being funny anomalies and instead became variations on a theme of colliding home and work life. Videoconference participants and streaming video viewers acclimated to seeing things like the swish of a cat across a keyboard, or hearing the intrusion of background noises like construction, pets, and family members. It was no longer unusual to see children and animals emerge from the background of a television meteorologist’s green screen weather map or lifted into view by reporter parents during newscasts filmed at home. Shutdowns exacerbated the potential for what Alice Marwick and dana boyd have termed “context collapse”, in which otherwise disparate spaces bleed into each other (114). In this case, the professional and domestic. While it is difficult to ascertain the impact this may have had on attitudes or labour practices within respective workplaces, what is clear is that the pervasive image of the disrupted working parent (both on actual video-conferencing calls and in popular media) impacted perceptions of the challenges to dividing work and home responsibilities (Taber et al. 454).

The rolling “shelter-in-place” lockdowns precipitated by the COVID-19 global pandemic further shifted home media practices as a diffuse and expansive use of screen technologies for professional, educational, and personal connection emerged. The resulting uses of video during this period pushed up against the fourth wall of a video frame that often separates work and domestic life. The interruptions and distractions during parental online work meetings, paired with the proliferation of media made by children (from their use of screens for school to grabbing and using a parent’s smartphone camera), provided a window into and between personal dwelling spaces and private details, disrupting conventions of family self-representation while forcing a confrontation with the capitalist imperative to separate work and private life and for parents to

produce, share, and monetise personal media content. The transformation in home mode media is bound up in making visible the incommensurability of home life and office labour, and the insistence of attention and, in many cases, *care* over the careful production of professional images.

While professional disruptions became more commonplace, what is remarkable is that they were caught on video, and in many cases, recorded and circulated. The interruptions themselves then move from one-off incidents to public events that not only enter the hard drives and clouds of video held by the corporations, universities, news media, and other institutions that hosted and recorded the video conference in the first place, but in many cases, become a family home media artifact. Here, the disruption enters a liminal space between institutional artifact and what Richard Chalfen has called home mode media (in which the subjects and signs included are produced for an already invested spectator). The domestic sphere announces itself within the space of work, and even into the institutional historical memory of that work. At the same time, the recording can also be utilised to commemorate and return to the memories of the conflicting social and emotional needs of those on screen (Van Dijck). Video recordings made at home during the COVID-19 lockdowns can serve as artifacts that capture the intermingling of work and play, care, attention, and distraction, while also serving as a historical trace of how individuals and families endured the conditions of lockdown. If we can imagine all the videos made in homes during this period as a cloud of digital obscura existing for future commemoration, we are poised to ask whose lives will be made visible, and in what ways through home recordings. In what ways will they reflect the racial, economic, and health inequities of the time?

This article identifies and describes trends in home media recording practices that emerged during the COVID-19 lockdown periods in the United States. I draw examples and insights from conversations with a range of caregivers and educators who were working remotely during the COVID-19 quarantine in the United States. I spoke primarily with parents who had children in elementary school who were too young to be independent in their remote schooling and fully entertain themselves, and teachers who worked with children in that age range. I recruited teacher and parent participants in this research by casting a wide net across social media channels, asking for general experiences about children's media practice and use during the height of the COVID-19 spread. I received twenty-eight responses and interviewed those whose stories and media artifacts illustrated recurrent themes, with attention to geographic, racial, ethnic, religious, and gender diversity. This was by no means a large-scale or representative study; rather, it was an initial qualitative inquiry using mixed methods of open survey and interviews to identify a collection of themes and experiences gathered through storytelling and video artifact sharing.

Framing Family Representation

Until quite recently in media history, family life had been primarily framed by and directed by adults, with children's recordings as notable anomalies. Industrialised nations have seen smartphones transform self and family representations move from the private sphere to become more public and dispersed through handheld digital recording and sharing technologies.

Home movies have historically focused on discrete framings of everyday life, skewing toward more positive snippets of representation, often from male perspectives (Czach; Chalfen;

Cuevas; Zimmerman). This was particularly true of mid-twentieth-century post-war film reels, in which the limited time for recording and the cost to do so and process the images placed significant barriers for most to capture everyday life. What's more, filming remained the province of adults who had the resources and mobility to purchase and process the film, typically middle- and upper-class men. As Maija Howe has described, instruction manuals advertised directly to these makers, offering a pedagogy of home movie production that assumed a unidirectional control of what Marianne Hirsch has termed "the familial gaze". Even as home movie media evolved into home videos recorded onto tape, the relative technical complexity and costs involved placed limits on recording time, locations, and, certainly, the circulation of video media. The convergent timing of smartphones with digital video storage and sharing capacities, met with the rise of Web 2.0 video-sharing platforms like YouTube, radically altered the possibilities for self-representation. What's more, the relative affordability and ease of use of digital video recording and editing helped to transform what was once predominantly a hobby of "amateurs" to the realm of "producers"—a field in which anyone can make a video, with the added potential of monetisation and market success through shares and views on online platforms (Bruns; Caplan and Gillespie). It was the dual affordances of mobility (filming can easily take place anywhere) and extended data storage that caused a radical shift in what could fall under the rubric of a "home movie", to the point of making it an almost anachronistic term (Berliner).

Once the cameras turned on across a household, families found themselves in a closed circuit of screens in which the possibilities for curating private life were disrupted by children using these and other video technologies in the home as tools for self-expression, connection, distraction, and play. From secretly recording videos on parents' phones for them to discover later, to documenting their lives for their teachers and classmates while inevitably revealing intimate details of their home, to injecting themselves into the intentionally framed media of adults in the household, children helped to usher in a transformation in home mode media making practice and its signification. While slogans like "stay home, save lives" proliferated, the place of home was simultaneously instantiated and redefined. Travel plans were cancelled, nomadic lifestyles were upended, and movement between different households became extremely complicated, as many feared getting infected and spreading the virus. Many people found themselves stuck in one domicile; whether that be their permanent address or an extended stay at a hotel, that place became home, however temporary. Screen technologies, video-sharing and conferencing applications were rapidly adopted, as educators and employers sought ways to connect for remote work and schooling. Many K-12 schools distributed tablets and Wi-Fi hotspots to their students while companies and organisations bought technological accessories and professional video conferencing accounts for their workers.¹ Whereas most adults in industrialised countries may have already had access to video recording and file sharing through mobile phones, quarantine and the remote virtual schooling that soon followed helped to put screens with media recording and streaming capabilities into the hands of those who had previously only been given occasional time and access—children. And when kids were not making media, they were often caught on video, while interrupting meetings and other controlled mediated spaces. While outward facing representation of home life during lockdown became more robust and textured, the home itself was likely experienced by its inhabitants as more confining and limiting than ever.

As Anthony McIntyre, Diane Negra, and Eleanor O'Leary argue, the collapse of the home and professional contexts has been fruitful towards destabilising male authority by locating the

formerly mobile male professional worker and his related accoutrements in the space of the domestic: the “predominance of children and animals in interruption videos calls attention [then] to the permeability of the once secure status, profession and gender boundaries” (14). There is a breakdown of the presentation of male authority and distance from care work in the private sphere, as the symbolic and material signifiers transform to expose male professionals to the “spasmodic toil” of care work. Interruptions by children who are seeking care, make visible the relentlessness of caregiving, further shifting our expectations for professional timekeeping, and making visible ways mothers have been habituated and expected to be interrupted and distracted in general (Modleski; McIntyre et al.; Combe and Willard). In the “BBC Dad” video, the mother’s labour is precisely what facilitates the father’s professional sequestering in the first place. While the meme trains the viewer to focus on the father’s interview interruption, we are simultaneously witnessing the mother’s caregiving, which, without the children’s barging in, would have remained invisible—literally behind the scenes. Care work and being cared for becomes hyper-visible through the home mode screen, causing friction with professional etiquette and comportment and gendered and racialised respectability politics.

According to Elizabeth Patton, the home has long been a space already bound up in market logics and wage-based labour. She argues, “the notion of the home as a space that exists solely in the private sphere is a myth because the social meaning of the home and its market value in relation to the public sphere are intricately linked” (Patton 4). And, in 2020, when professional class workers began working from home, it was already at a time when technological interfaces and screens (such as in smart home technology and social media) were already charged with meaning (McIntyre et al. 5). For media scholars like Haidee Wasson, the technological domicile has always existed in what she calls the “electric domestic” (12), and, as Lynn Spiegel has famously argued, even technologies that encourage passive consumption, like the television set, have shaped domestic space and gender roles and assigned responsibilities, and family interactions in general. Yet, while video recording devices and video sharing technologies have been accessible and widely available for decades, and wage labour and technologies have always shaped domestic logics and practices, the lockdown period simultaneously (re)codified the home as a site of media production while making publicness (whether through school or work) imperative, ultimately shaping both public discourse and archives about colliding sites of domestic and wage labour. What’s more, and indeed central to this discussion, is that the proliferation of cameras during this period transformed home as a site of media representation. As Mar Hicks has argued, computer technologies (such as video conferencing) often “heighten inequalities not by accident but specifically because they are designed to protect the interests of the powerful actors who control them” (153). Disruptions during video meetings that are experienced by many users as accidents of household management call attention to the ways in which the platform has been designed to be used by a particular kind of user—one who has access to privacy and quiet. In other words, video disruption is not a bug, it is a feature that is the result of the platform not having been designed with the realities of overlapping domestic, professional, and educational contexts in mind.

The following discussion foregrounds how the use of camera streaming and recording technologies in the home during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, by multiple members of a household—both adults and children—illuminates and further imbricates public and private spheres. As these spheres became more indistinguishable, the social and economic inequalities that have been baked into educational, corporate, and governmental institutions became ever more

apparent. Video windows into each other's homes made it impossible to ignore the disparities in access to resources, while the recorded media made in homes captured many of the stressors placed on having to perform as functional parents, employees, and students during this period. In the discussion of practices that follows, I aim to elucidate how children collaborating with their parents, altering their workflows, turning the camera on their parents' activities, and refusing the camera altogether reflects forms of resistance to expected parent-child hierarchies and divisions between school, work, and home that were unique to this period and that have lingering impacts on homes, schools, and workplaces.

Disrupted Conventions of (Family) Self-Representation

In the case of Ellen A., a professor who used Zoom to teach her classes, meet with colleagues, and give academic presentations, a disruption from one of her children during an extremely important Zoom speaking engagement that served as a milestone moment in her career underscored what Melissa Gregg has called “the presence bleed”, as Ellen had to negotiate a range of affective responses that would normally have been easier to keep separate (2):

Because I am a professor, a lot of people assumed flexible work from home would be easier for me because we don't have set hours like other kinds of careers. But there is a lot of pressure in the academy to keep our home life separate from our professional lives, especially for female faculty. In the fall of 2021, my first sole-authored manuscript was about to release, and a university had invited me to give a talk over Zoom. I was so excited. My partner was watching our two boys, both 7, and I was tucked into my small workspace in our bedroom. About twenty minutes into my talk, in full research and professor mode, one of my sons burst in with his iPad, asking me for the password, along with the sound of my partner's voice calling to him to come back from the background. The illusion of separation between mom and professor dissolved. (Ellen A.)



Figure 2: Ellen A. in a Zoom interview, being interrupted by her son. Screenshot.

Despite her feelings of tension in the moment and anger she initially felt towards her partner for not preventing their child from entering the room, she came to see the resulting video much differently in hindsight. Where in the moment of filming she experienced an unwanted problem, as time passed, she came to appreciate the moment as the epitome of the chaos of

quarantining while working and schooling young children. Like many parents, trying to create the illusion of a work and life divide was simply untenable (Hesse). What was once seen as a disruption from a disobedient child became an artefact of her son's innocent love and need for her. Her willingness to accept him in the frame and to incorporate his presence in this milestone professional moment made him necessarily a major part of the milestone. During the following year, she repurposed the clip of the interruption in the annual birthday video she made for her twins. She circulated it to friends and family through social media, and it remains in the cloud and part of her family's digital memory album.

Other parents spoke of the delight made possible in otherwise stressful circumstances. The disruption was a form of comedy that punctured the seriousness of on-camera work mode. For some, the interruptions became coproduced moments both for the Zoom audience and familial posterity:

While I was recording my Zoom lectures for my courses during the pandemic, my kids would interrupt my recording at least 60% of the time. They would bring the dog for me to pet, for example, or barge into the room with a magician's hat to show me a magic trick, while recording. Zoom does not have a function to edit the recording, so I would have to start all over again! There were occasions when I had almost finished the lecture, and then the kids would come in, and interrupt the whole thing three or four minutes before it's completely done. Now I have at least two dozen Zoom recordings on my desktop in which I was interrupted! They're amazing fun memories to share with the kids when they're grown up. (Samir K.)

As Samir's quote indexes, context collapse, experienced perhaps as stress in the first instance, was later reminisced about as exemplifying life during the pandemic. For these families, the child in the Zoom meeting was the space where the professional and familial entwined and some of the only evidence they have of the ways in which these seemingly disparate spheres were mutually disruptive during lockdown. Included in this "family" media is not just representation of the family ruckus, but the split-screen viewer's reactions to it. In the family's historical record, the reactions become part of codes of meaning. In this way, the disrupted work video simultaneously becomes the cherished home media artifact, despite its simultaneous trace in the employer or other institutional archives. The (virtual) presence of other professionals and signs and symbols from the workplace on these calls further cements the workplace and home life as inextricable.

Collaborative Experimental Modes

While adult and child collaborative video-making is not a new phenomenon, the intensive sharing of time and space during lockdown brought about the necessary boredom paired with increased frequency of use of digital media technologies in the home that created the conditions for play and experimentation to occur (Keating). While some such videos can be found online through social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram, it appears that many more live on individual iCloud accounts, hard drives, and photo and video accounts, and will survive within family archives unless they become intentionally made public.



Figure 3: Jonas S. and his son playing with video filters. Screenshot.

Jonas S., a university professor who recorded lectures for his students during quarantine, also used his computer to entertain and connect with his two young children. When he noticed his older child playing on his partner's work laptop (even memorising her password and using it to order over \$1000 worth of merchandise on Amazon.com), he turned computer use into an opportunity for collaborative media-making. In particular, the two played with Photobooth filters. In the image above, the older child has morphed his head and that of his father's into a cyclone swirl, mixing their pale skin and blonde curls with Jason's dark brown ones. Figure 2 is one of many that has become emblematic of their family's Covid work-life experience:

He *really* liked the twirl effect and we have 100s of photos of us together but also some videos. Video making was never really something that we did together before, but it became our thing for a while. Like every hour of every day that I was working. For a few months. Now he just steals our phones and takes 100s of photos of his favorite tchotchke that day. (Jonas S.)

Aaima M., a mother of two who was working remotely as a student advisor while simultaneously overseeing her children's remote elementary schooling during the 2020–21 academic year, also regularly engaged with her children in collaborative video play. One of the ways she harnessed their desire to invade her screen was by setting up a camera to record the three of them attempting to co-work at their dining room table. She edited the video at double speed, which deliberately emphasises their fidgeting, moving around the room, and popping into one another's videoconferencing cameras. For most of the video, her kindergartner sits on one side of her, facing his iPad in his Spiderman costume; the 8-year-old child is on her other side, peering into his online classroom via laptop, as he makes an array of faces at the camera recording the three of them, even pulling up his shirt and sticking his tongue out at one point. Aaima moves

between them and her own screen. In moments, she helps record the younger child with his iPad; in others, her own laptop faces the camera as she attempts to concentrate. We see her move her coffee mug like a caffeinated puppet across the frame. The word “MOM” can still be read despite the blur. The trio is at once attentive to their screens and showing their awareness of the camera recording them; for all three, there is a look back at the camera that performs a nod to the complex choreography of work and life. The sped-up action turns a scene that could be perceived as intense and possibly stressful into comic and playful. Two years later, this video is an artifact that Aaima and her family purposely turn to help them remember the intense, challenging period of their quarantine:

I recorded that video on my iPhone using the time-lapse, and I just had it set up at the end of the table. It was about 30 minutes, which was on a time-lapse that was only a few seconds. I did not edit it at all. To me, the artifact played the role of I needed to document what my day felt like so that I could remember it later. I feel so strongly that our bodies hide trauma, and I knew that I would hide that and I needed to just capture how it felt to do so much at our kitchen table, and the significance of what that space is for my family and to be in such a chaotic way with Covid and with getting both of my kids through their classes in school and working full-time and making sure they have food when they needed it. I know that if I dig hard enough, my mind will remember, but I needed my heart to remember to and when I watch that video, I just weep every time. I cry because I see how strong we all had to be [...] and I specifically used the mom cup in the video. (Aaima M.)



Figure 4: Aaima M. in a time-lapsed video of her time working alongside her children. Screenshot.

Experimental video collaboration is a mode of play during lockdown that simultaneously captured the unique brand of chaos that ensued for most working families as a result of parents and children working alongside each other in pandemic conditions. The videos themselves reflect a sense of time warp and of changing ways of seeing within the household during lockdown, and in their making, offered forms of expression and potentially even catharsis. Moreover, they provide shared video documents for the family to engage with each other as pieces for the family archive.

Children Seeing Through Screens

Whether it was visiting friends and family through FaceTime video or attending online school, appearing on camera became a staple for the quarantined tech-equipped children. Furthermore, if not already in their technical skill sets, the basics of operating video cameras became imperative to successfully participating in online education. Students in remote classes would not only be part of a full online Zoom classroom, but also participate in breakout rooms, submit video recordings as assignments, and be asked to roam their dwellings with cameras as part of course-related activities. For children participating in home-school programmes such as Outschool.com, an organisation that provides a range of online workshop activities, or for virtual camps that were organised by museums, children's theatre programmes, and more, using cameras for creativity and fun became routine. Continuing to use cameras for entertainment purposes was a natural outgrowth of these practices. Many parents described their children secretly taking their smartphones and using them to make videos, often using documentary modes or simple stop-motion animation. As one father of two elementary school-aged children described,

Our kids became so comfortable behind a camera that they would often steal our phones and start taking videos of each other doing thing or us doing things around the house and asking questions. They thought it was the funniest thing ever. Anything from prepping meals in the kitchen to getting ready in the bathroom. (Noah P.)

Children documenting their family life on screen during lockdown is a way in which family roles were further subverted and represented as such in the remaining videos. In many cases, the technologies used by children were precisely the ones that had been assigned to their parents for professional reasons, and many parents used their personal smartphones for work reasons during this time as well. In this way, whether they were aware of it or not, children shooting with their parents' video technologies were hijacking the tools of work and symbols of parental distraction from caregiving. By forcing their parental subjects to be seen through these same technologies and then to have the resulting video archive represent their perspectives as they saw their parents, children subverted the familial gaze that is normally focused on them (Hirsch), while disrupting the intended uses of work-oriented digital video technologies in the "COVID home". Also, their videos often captured domestic labour of adults in the home in ways that may not otherwise have made its way into the familial media archives. With children at the forefront of home media production, families captured not just details of their own home lives during COVID-19, but a record of the increasingly blurred boundaries between domestic and professional labour, which may be valuable to the historical record in general, as the place and space of office work in the US (particularly in cities) transforms in general.

Screens Off-Refusal

What I have described to this point likely reads as a celebratory account of family media-making during what was an extremely challenging time. And while these practices may reflect a spirit of joy in the retelling, it is a subtle form of violence to allow that to be the dominant impression. What I have described are videos that have been made within well-resourced, media-literate, English-speaking families with citizenship status, in which the parents had professional class employment.

However, this is only a slice of the story of the representation of the COVID-19 lockdown family. A widely reported incident, offered up by many broadcast media outlets as a humorous episode, was footage from an elementary school class that was meeting over Zoom in which a mother walks into the room behind her child to get her clothing out of the closet and was caught in the process of getting dressed. A 14-second video of the moment was posted to Twitter and retweeted 5.5 million times, even making international news (Tempesta). Such an accidental invasion of privacy, at least in the first instance, was a common symptom of ubiquitous cameras in the home. Children and adults in smaller lockdown homes had fewer options of spaces to work and learn and were more likely to have private moments that could not to be experienced as joy but rather vulnerability and, possibly, ridicule.

It is important to consider the ways in which socio-economic status bore down on how the collision of school/work and home were represented and archived, and how this discrepancy was often racialised and weaponised against already marginalised populations. Several teachers at schools that serve students from lower socio-economic backgrounds reported that their students kept their cameras off during class, as a protective measure.

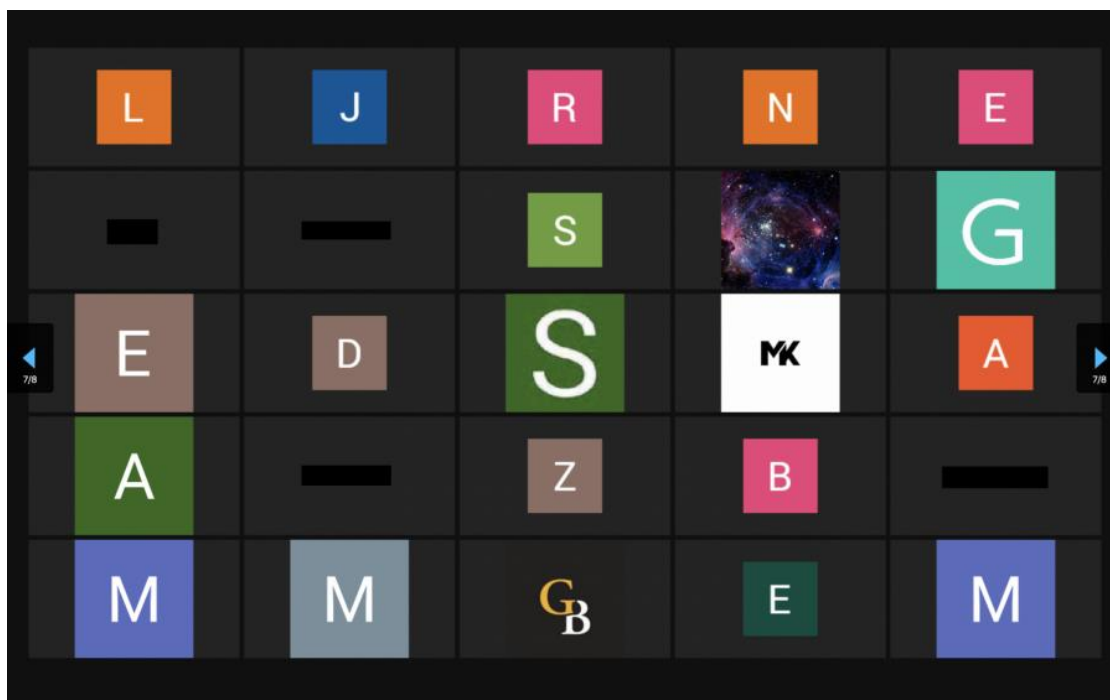


Figure 5: An example of a classroom Zoom screen with all participants' cameras turned off. Screenshot.

As Avery N., one New York City public elementary school teacher explained:

I know that many of my colleagues reported students in upper grades didn't turn their cameras on the entire time they were in quarantine. Many students with special needs with IEPs [Individualized Education Programs] also had very different experiences. Many of their needs were not met since particular challenges made online learning a nightmare for them and their families. Still, other students in shelters or homes they felt uncomfortable sharing felt isolated, shamed and unable to connect.

Annika R., a public middle school teacher in Washington State, emphasised the ways in which students resisted the gaze of their teachers, peers, and other people who may have been able to view their Zoom classroom:

My experience with remote/distance teaching is that the vast majority of my students kept their cameras off entirely. A few would turn them on if we had smaller groups, but generally, about 90% kept their screens black and would not unmute their mics. I had a lot of one-on-one conversations with students about why they did this. I always had my video on, so we talked about why they would never turn theirs on. Most did not elaborate past that it made them very uncomfortable. A few noted that they didn't like their classmates looking at them—they didn't want to show their faces and were anxious about the possibility of their image being shared (as screenshots and then put on social media). Most didn't have their own space; they were sharing a room. It was chaotic, loud, and they didn't want others seeing their living space. The other reason many didn't turn on their cameras was because they were not really participating in class. They would log in, then leave their computers (walk away, go back to sleep, etc.). This was most obvious when class ended and a handful of students stayed in the meeting—not to talk, but because they had no idea class had ended. Most of my students did not have an adult at home, and many were responsible for younger siblings.

Among these students, Zoom was experienced as an intrusion into their private spheres, and a potential form of abjection. In such instances, the contextual collapse of school and home amplifies the burden of participating in the politics of respectability which assumes a normative student who appears groomed, prepared, and engaged. It also doubles down on the forms of self and peer surveillance that accompany the hypervisibility engendered by default through videoconferencing (Della Ratta). These norms are generally assumed within schools; the Zoom classroom revealed what teachers and administrators might be missing about the challenges to that norming for students coming from under-resourced households. In turning off their Zoom cameras, students actively resisted these expectations, keeping their private spheres from the gaze and judgement of others. In a moment of time where all digital video is subject to wide and even viral circulation, a student's lack of video participation can be read as a form of resistance to media exposure. This is evidenced by the viral, global spread of the naked adult video in the student's Zoom room, with the risk that it entails of exposure of their living conditions, and of potential ridicule.

Conclusion

COVID-19 lockdowns and the pressure that specific conditions placed on integrating home and work generated a transformation in representational practices. Many families now have playful experimental media artifacts that capture the mood and type of interactions during their time in lockdown, and videos made by children that add complexity of perspective and reflect a potentially wider distribution of the familial gaze. Still, others may have videos that depict the ways in which professional work at home and domestic labour were incommensurable and incompatible. Altogether, the myth of a neat work–life divide is undercut by the pervasive blending of the two, resulting in media artefacts in which work and life are mutually infused. Or, in some cases, participating in the production of these artefacts has been outright refused.

The circulation and “memeification” of the “BBC Dad” video and the naked parent video show that the media technology used by families during this time (and otherwise) is always in proximity not only to the institutions that may be running the servers they are using at home, but also the market itself. Self-recording or video conferencing generally operate in the same domain as digital commerce, monetisable videos, and other forms of commoditised images (Berliner). As broadcast media increasingly relies on self-produced media for its own (profit-generating) content, the private sphere is always on the verge of being public, institutionalised, and memorialised beyond the private domain. As such, it is important to consider how making home life visible has different stakes and consequences for different people, with people at the social and economic margins with more to lose. “BBC Dad” becomes a cute cultural reference, while the naked mom video becomes a shorthand for the failures of multiple systems. In this way, these circulated videos double down on existing racial and class-based stereotypes and further codify expectations of race and gendered labour, while at first glance, at least in the case of “BBC Dad”, appearing to subvert them. Memorialising one’s family’s conditions during COVID-19, or otherwise, was not a universal goal or benefit. Questions remain about how personal and institutional records of video images of this period will be utilised towards personal and collective memory and what media production practices will persist. What will remain in our collective (proverbial) media archive and what will we remember about what life was like before and during this historic period? How will COVID-19 home media artefacts circulate and recirculate and in what ways? What will happen to the media that does not circulate? Home media from this period gestures to several simultaneous social transformations in domestic, educational, and professional life. It will undoubtedly continue to have a lot to teach scholars about the impact of the global pandemic on media practices in the years to come.

Note

¹ By March 2020, most elementary and secondary schools and local educational agencies across the United States closed schools in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. By the middle of April 2020, forty-eight states, four US territories, the District of Columbia, and the Department of Defense Education Activity ordered or recommended school building closures for the rest of the school year, affecting at least 50.8 million public school students. From there, the affected states began pivoting to alternative modes of education, including remote instruction, both synchronous

(with instruction happening live) or asynchronous (with pre-recorded and/or interactions with physical learning materials happening without screens). According to the National Survey of Public Education’s Response to COVID-19 carried out by the American Institutes for Research 46% of local educational agencies used online learning as their primary means of delivering instruction. Over the course of the 2020–2021 school year, some schools eventually transitioned from remote-only instruction to some hybrid approach involving a combination of remote and in-person learning, or to full-time in-person learning. In May 2021, nearly 80% of students were still being offered a remote-only option for receiving instruction. At their peak in the US, closures would impact more than fifty-five million school children, who would be stuck at home for months or longer (Zota and Granovskiy). Household Pulse Survey results conducted by the US Census Bureau confirm that the most socioeconomically disadvantaged households did not use online educational resources for distance learning at the same rates as higher-income households (Zota and Granovskiy; McElrath). This disparity in technology access and use is often left out of popular narratives about schooling-in-place during COVID lockdowns.

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