ORIGINAL RESEARCH

The freedom trap: digital nomads and the use of disciplining practices to manage work/leisure boundaries

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Abstract

The digital nomad idea of freedom is often a generalised and subjective notion of freedom that imagines a lifestyle and future where the tensions between work and leisure melt away. This paper finds that in practice, digital nomadism is not always experienced as autonomous and free but is a way of living that requires high levels of discipline and self-discipline. The research suggests that digital nomads often overlook the role of disciplining practices when first starting out, and do not foresee how working in sites of leisure and tourism might make managing a balance between work and non-work problematic. Longitudinal ethnographic fieldwork examines the extent of these disciplining practices and reveals that they are utilised to keep work and leisure time separate.

Keywords Discipline · Time use · Work/leisure boundaries · Neoliberalism · Longitudinal research · Anthropology

1 Introduction

The term 'digital nomad' is still being defined and this paper does not attempt a full definition. However, journalistic and scholarly sources often define digital nomads as young, work-oriented professionals who reject outwardly imposed structures of traditional office work—such as the 9 to 5—and place value on autonomy, flexibility and the ability to travel and work where they please (e.g. Hart 2015; Spinks 2015; Müller 2016; Reichenberger 2017; Schlagwein 2018a; Thompson 2018a). Sites of tourism that offer lower living costs than cities in the Global North, particularly Chiang Mai in Thailand, Bali in Indonesia and more recently Medellín in Columbia, are the clichéd and most blogged about digital nomad centres (Hart 2015; Spinks 2015).

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Online resources such as Nomad List (nomadlist.com) rate many more cities and locations across the world and they can even be filtered and ranked based on internet speed, quality of life and cost of living. Services like these offer digital nomads an ever-changing menu of locations and backdrops.

A nuanced but important distinction noted by some scholars is that whereas business travellers travel for limited periods of time because of their work, digital nomads attempt to gain freedom by travelling whilst working (Müller 2016, p. 346; Reichenberger 2017, p. 15). This raises interesting questions about the boundaries between generalised concepts of work, leisure and freedom. This research shows that digital nomads attempt to challenge these work/leisure boundaries in the pursuit of freedom, but in doing so face unforeseen challenges. 'Digital nomad' is not the only term for this emerging and subjective category of worker. Whilst the term may have both hopeful and derogatory connotations, terms such as 'location-independent' and 'remote worker' are sometimes used as more neutral alternatives. Conversely, pejorative terms like 'digital gonad' and 'digital bromad' are circulated in critiques of the digital nomad lifestyle on social media and in online blogs (e.g. Reddit 2018; Wallace 2020).

As the term is contested, digital nomadism is often more easily defined by what it is not. In this study, self-described digital nomads, ex-pats and local populations where the digital nomad research was being conducted (e.g. Chiang Mai) were shown a simple diagram showing two intersecting rating scales: high/low mobility and work/nonwork (Fig. 1). They were invited to plot themselves on the diagram, and also to discuss where categories, stereotypes or groups might sit. This activity generated many discussions; however, four key themes clearly emerged. First, digital nomads rejected the label 'tourist'. Second, Western ex-pats living in digital nomad hotspots differentiated themselves from digital nomads, whom they described as transient. Third, Thai locals were mostly unaware of the digital nomad term and simply used the term 'farang', which roughly translates as 'Westerner' or 'foreigner'. Finally, most digital nomads subjectively rated themselves as highly mobile and work focused.

1.1 The freedom/discipline paradox

Putting aside the ongoing task of definition, this research presents data on digital nomads encountered in coworking spaces in Thailand, who all have three qualities in common. All self-identified as digital nomads, all were travelling while they worked (or attempted to work) and none were permanently settling in the countries they were visiting. More noteworthy, and often overlooked in definitions of digital nomadism, is that everyone in this study demonstrated a growing preoccupation with disciplining and self-disciplining practices. This paper explores the nature of this preoccupation, what it might mean, and why these practices only revealed themselves over time.

For example, one digital nomad who publicly blogged about digital nomad burnout (Applebee 2017) reflected back on his experience a few years later. He
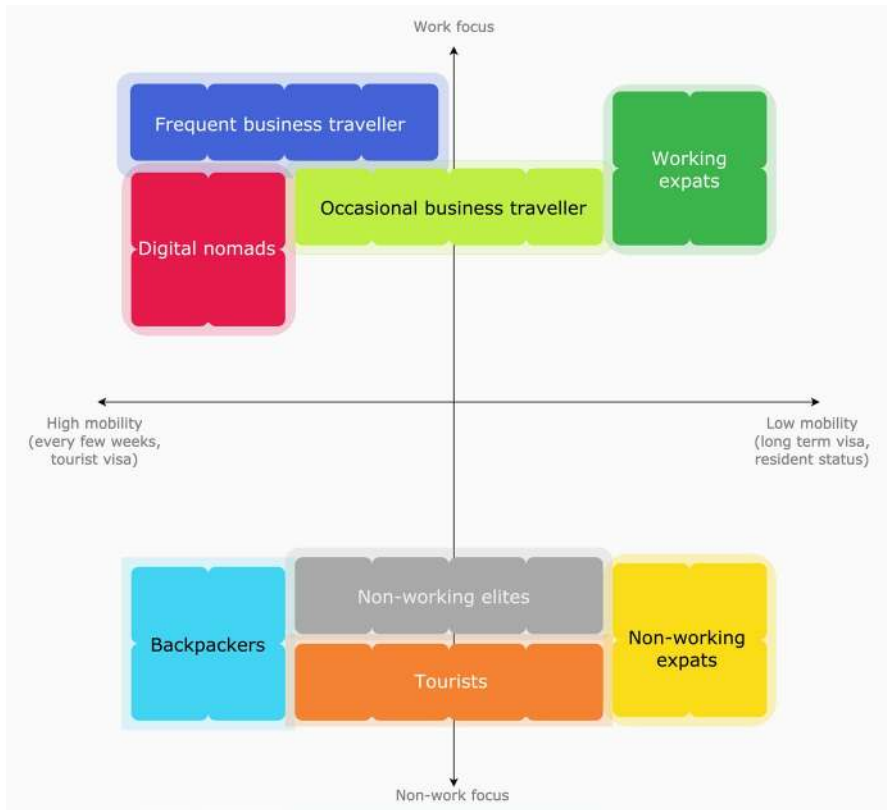
Fig. 1 Two intersecting rating scales: high/low mobility and work/nonwork. The diagram shows that most self-described digital nomads subjectively rated themselves as highly mobile and work focused. The positioning of other categories on this diagram also came out of subjective discussions and should be considered as such. Diagram: Dave Cook and Tony Simonovsky

explained that it was only when he noticed himself engaging in highly disciplined time-management strategies that he realised that things were going wrong:

> When I was a nomad, I was switched on 24/7. I told everyone else, and myself, that this was OK. I didn't have a concept of free time until I found myself scheduling four-hour meetings in my diary titled: downtime. It is insane. I look back at this period in my life and wonder why it took so long to burn out. (Interview with Sam Applebee, social entrepreneur and former digital nomad, September 2019)

For many digital nomads, how freedom is experienced is often very different to how they first imagined it to be. This paper explores the nuances behind this paradoxical tension between discipline and freedom.

1.2 Freedom and the digital nomad imagination

Digital nomads rarely start out worrying about burnout. Digital nomadism is profoundly influenced by the language of imagination, possibility and techno-utopianism. Indeed, a remarkably prescient prediction of the technologies that would enable the lifestyle was described by Makimoto and Manners (1997, p. 35). This prediction came at least a decade before the technological and communication infrastructures became widely enough available to make the lifestyle practical. Genealogies of how digital nomadism emerged are scarce and subjective (Gilbert 2013; Schlagwein 2018b) and idealised accounts have since dominated the public image of digital nomads. As a result, by the mid 2010s the trope of happy millennials travelling the world, working with laptops on far-flung beaches, became the dominant utopian narrative presented in the media (Hart 2015; Spinks 2015).

The media routinely report that the main motivational push behind digital nomadism is a desire to escape the coercive, disciplining structures of the contemporary workplace, especially 9 to 5 obligations, presenteeism, micromanagement and the daily commute (e.g. Ferris 2007; Hart 2015; Spinks 2015) and this has also been noted in research on digital nomads (Reichenberger 2017, p. 1; Nash et al. 2018, p. 207). Academics are now beginning to note that the digital nomad dream is also often expressed as a desire to gain a symbolic or generalised feeling of freedom, autonomy and self-determination (Müller 2016, p. 345; Reichenberger 2017, p. 2; Thompson 2018a, p. 23).

For digital nomads 'true freedom' is often framed in two ways. The first framing is hypermobile freedom: precisely, the ability to frequently change location. Accordingly, Ina Reichenberger suggests three categories of digital nomadism on an ascending scale of mobility, and this builds on the idea that frequent travel confers cultural capital on to digital nomads (Bourdieu 1985). Level one denotes those with the capacity to be mobile workers via digital technology but who are primarily static. Level two denotes people who have a home base but travel and work intermittently. Level three denotes those who travel and work constantly, with no home base (Reichenberger 2017, p. 8). In her paper Reichenberger states that her sample focuses on 'digital nomads on the second or third level' because she is studying the 'role of travel and its relation to work' (Reichenberger 2017, p. 8). Whilst I accept this focus and classification in the context of her research, there were some informants in the study I present here who aspired to work but were not yet working. Therefore, in this paper the digital nomad definition is expanded to include those who are highly mobile, are working, and also those attempting to work. This latter category is very important because digital nomad conferences, meet-ups, mail lists, Facebook groups and even coworking spaces are frequently populated by people in the process of trying to imagine, plan or set up a digital nomad lifestyle.

Nonetheless, Reichenberger's categories are helpful because deeply embedded value judgements, notions of digital nomad authenticity, and questions about how successfully mobile (and global) a person might be, often surface in ethnographic accounts. For example, minimalism, and even the ability to glide through airports with carry-on luggage, are examples of how concepts of freedom and mobility become hybridised (Nash et al. 2018, pp. 209–10).The second framing is the belief

that freedom is attained when the boundaries between work and leisure merge and freedom is experienced holistically, whether one is working or at leisure (Reichenberger 2017, p. 8).

These descriptions of imagined digital nomad freedoms are so widely circulated and reproduced that they have become accepted as common sense. As a result, these portrayals are significant and have become firmly embedded in digital nomad culture. Indeed, the role of the imagination as a social practice and active force in shaping culture and modernity has a scholarly history that stretches back more than forty years (see Anderson 1983; Appadurai 1996; Gaonkar 2002; Sneath, Holbraad and Pedersen 2009; Taylor 2002). Although the digital nomad imagination is important, and articles, blogs, self-help books, social media and conferences feed digital nomad culture, they only tell part of the story.

1.3 Digital nomadism and the importance of discipline in everyday life

Despite this awareness that freedom is central to the experience of digital nomadism, there have not yet been any studies that explore how these valorised concepts of freedom, autonomy and self-determination become practised in the everyday lives of digital nomads. This research paper sets out to remedy this by exploring what happens when digital nomads attempt to transform these ideals into everyday practice.

This research finds that in practice digital nomadism is not always experienced as autonomous and free but is a way of living that requires high levels of engagement with various levels of discipline. It examines how digital nomads practise and experience these different types of discipline over time. This paper also highlights the importance of longitudinal ethnographic research when investigating long-term travel and lifestyle changes that occur and adapt over time. For example, disciplining practices were rarely mentioned in initial interviews with aspiring digital nomads and only emerged gradually over four years of fieldwork.

The following studies on digital nomadism mention concepts related to discipline and productivity. Müller suggests that despite a preoccupation with travel, digital nomads privilege work over leisure and 'labour productivity is an important feature in the lifestyle of digital nomads' (Müller 2016, p. 345). Reichenberger also tangentially touches on the need for self-discipline when she describes professional freedom as the ability to:

> select and structure work-related tasks in a self-imposed manner… driven by the desire to create a more flexible and tailored life outside of externally imposed structures (e.g. specific working times, restricted free time, geographical dependence) (Reichenberger 2017, pp. 8–9)

Nash et al. make a similar analysis by defining freedom as being in opposition to 'regular routine' and forms of outwardly imposed corporate discipline (Nash et al. 2018, p. 211). They also highlight that productivity 'is a critical issue' for digital nomads and that discipline and control over time-use are tightly linked to attempts to 'balance their travel and professional productivity' (Nash et al. 2018, pp. 213–14). Despite identifying productivity and discipline practices as tools that help structure

work routines, none of these studies examine how these discipline practices emerge and become embedded in the digital nomad experience over a number of years.

1.4 Towards a definition of digital nomad discipline

In attending to the importance of discipline in digital nomad practices, two main definitions of discipline are used in this paper: external-discipline and self-discipline.[1] Examples of externally imposed discipline include set project deadlines and set working hours. Externally imposed discipline can be broken down into two further sub-categories. The first category is a form of external-discipline that is voluntarily entered into, negotiated or even welcomed. For example, a digital nomad might find deadlines helpful as a goal-setting mechanism for motivational purposes. This is referred to as 'volitional participation'. A second and quite different category is a form of externally imposed discipline that is more forcefully imposed, which might be more commonly experienced in some stereotypical 9 to 5 company cultures. Official warnings for arriving late or missing a deadline are such examples, and this type of discipline is referred to as 'forceful imposition'.

The second definition is self-discipline. Self-discipline is regularly practised and discussed by digital nomads who habitually conceptualise it as an expression of individual self-determination and freedom. For example, phrases such as 'own it', 'the buck stops with me' or 'it is all down to me' were frequently used by digital nomads in this study. Furthermore, self-discipline is usually positioned as directly opposed to outwardly imposed discipline. This positive framing of self-discipline perhaps explains why digital nomads often worry that they are not self-disciplined enough—and why this concern is often a central topic in digital nomad blogs. Yet where does digital nomad self-discipline originate, and is it entirely self-determined?

Following in the footsteps of Foucault, scholars of the contemporary workplace have become increasingly interested in where discipline, agency and power originate. Foucault argued that institutional power 'seeps into the very grain of individuals' (Foucault 1979, p. 28). More recently Judy Wajcman has argued that Silicon Valley might be considered an institution that sets time (Wajcman 2018b) and that discipline and effort are increasingly required to find time for leisure, relaxation or downtime.

This research paper explores questions about how time and discipline are interrelated, are relative and how they evolve over time. This interest is not new—scholars have previously examined how different historical periods, cultures and institutions have impacted the ways in which time and discipline are framed and experienced. For example, social historian E.P. Thompson has argued that the concept of time-discipline has continually altered over history (Thompson 1967). Three different examples of time-discipline demonstrate how the meaning and value of time can be changed and controlled by different social structures and contexts. First, E.P. Thompson described agricultural time, which was mainly

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[1] When the term discipline is used on its own it is referring to the concept of discipline generally, including its two main definitions and all their subcategories.

governed by the natural rhythms of sunrise, sunset and seasons (Thompson 1967, p. 56). Second, there was artisanal time where skilled potters worked with little supervision at their own pace and rhythm (Thompson 1967, p. 75). Finally, there was industrial time-discipline, which was strictly and externally controlled by the factory clocks and bells (Thompson 1967, pp. 58–97). All these different versions of time-discipline are relevant to digital nomads. However, it is the rejection of coercive and outwardly imposed time-discipline that is so central to digital nomad escape narratives and dreams of freedom. This research also adds to the growing literature on digitally mediated time-discipline and work.

1.5 Digital nomads, discipline and the neoliberal self

The very concept of self-discipline is also highly relevant to discourses on neoliberalism, in particular the idea that the burden of disciplining and personal responsibility is shifting (and should shift) from the institution or the state to the individual. David Harvey writes that under neoliberalism a 'personal responsibility system is substituted for social protections (pensions, healthcare, protections against injury) that were formerly an obligation of employers or the state' (Harvey 2007, p. 168). Similar concerns are noted in studies that describe digital nomadism as a form of flexible precarious work in the gig economy (Sutherland and Jarrahi 2017, pp. 97:7; Thompson 2018a, p. 5). Indeed, elsewhere Beverly Yuen Thompson has correctly pointed out that digital nomadism 'is more of an adaptation to neoliberal impacts than a challenge to the system' (Thompson 2018b). Nicolas Rose takes the personal responsibility argument further and explains that this shift of responsibility changes people's very identities:

> individuals had to be activated to engage their own energies in the management of their lives and the improvement of their conditions. Unemployed persons were to become job seekers; refugees were to become asylum seekers… more generally, we were all to become seekers after something: self-realization, self-promotion, maximization of our health, our bodies and our lifestyles through consumption. (Rose 2017, p. 4)

Digital nomads tacitly accept this idea of personal responsibility, and whilst they are attempting to become 'successful digital nomads', they buy into a very particular notion of entrepreneurial freedom which makes them personally responsible. Ulrich Bröckling explains that this culture of personal responsibility means that entrepreneurs—and those that aspire to be entrepreneurial—must 'own' everything that happens to them:

> Forcing people to become individuals also means they end up having to blame themselves for failing. Someone who is obliged to 'conceive himself or herself as the center of action…', cannot avoid viewing defeats as bad planning on their part. (Bröckling and Black 2016, p. 5)

Given this cultural context of entrepreneurialism—which unquestioningly valorises personal responsibility—it is hardly surprising that digital nomads create identities that require they present themselves as self-contained mobile businesses (Gershon 2014, 2017; Bröckling and Black 2016; Cook 2018). Anthropologist Ilana Gershon has explored the practice of personal branding in Silicon Valley and finds that workers are increasingly forced to think of themselves as a business or as the 'CEO of Me Inc.' and that as a business they must have a unique brand, a marketing strategy and sales skills (Peters 1997; Gershon 2017). Gershon writes: 'under neoliberal capitalism one owns oneself as though one is a business, a collection of skills, assets, and alliances that must be continually maintained and enhanced' (Gershon 2014, p. 288). Indeed, digital nomads also undertake self-branding and marketing practices in addition to their primary work tasks (Sutherland and Jarrahi 2017, pp. 97:10). It is little wonder then that digital nomads also find themselves in charge of their routines and disciplining practices—and rarely ever question these additional burdens when they are starting out.

1.6 Discipline and the management of work/leisure boundaries

This paper explores the role that these twin concepts of external-discipline and self-discipline play in the lives of digital nomads and finds, paradoxically, that digital nomads put disciplining practices in place in order to separate work and leisure, not to merge them. Work conducted by other anthropologists has also pointed out that the work/home distinction remained relevant after early digital technologies were adopted (Nippert-Eng 1996), and that this distinction still influenced how time is managed and spent. As Stefana Broadbent pointed out fifteen years later, 'The separation between workplace and home, derived from the generalization of the organizational models of industrial capitalisms, continues to imply a strong correlation between attention, time and productivity' (Broadbent 2012, p. 131).

The simultaneous erosion of the boundaries between work and leisure, and the paradox that considerable effort is required to separate them (if one is to maintain a work/life balance), has been investigated in more recent studies on the use and impacts of mobile digital devices (Mazmanian et al. 2013; Cousins and Robey 2015; Nelson et al. 2017; Mazmanian 2018). Cousins and Robey clearly described the problem digital nomads might face when they suggested, 'as work continues to become detached from specific times and places, the management of work-life boundaries will become increasingly important' (Cousins and Robey 2015, p. 61). Melissa Mazmanian has gone further and proposed that this type of digital labour is increasing in intensity and frequency: 'Hence, the weight of terms such as "detox" to describe short stints away from technologies of connectivity. Separation takes work, planning, and new forms of communication' (Mazmanian 2018, p. 3). In the findings section of this paper evidence is presented that shows that digital nomads draw upon significant reserves of creativity, time, effort, work and discipline to maintain a semblance of work/life balance. Digital nomads may appear to reject the traditional office with its impositions, but other bureaucracies and forms of labour quickly emerge. These forms of digital labour partially explain Mazmanian's framing of

the contemporary worker as a worker/smartphone hybrid (Mazmanian 2018, p. 3). Indeed, this paper explores the hybridised, embedded and sometimes coercive time-management technologies that digital nomads carry in their pockets and their backpacks and often end up embodying and practising.

Furthermore, Judy Wajcman's research into the influence that Silicon Valley exerts on contemporary perceptions of time builds on the above concepts of the worker/smartphone hybrid. Building on E.P. Thompson's concept of industrial time-discipline, she writes:

> The Protestant work ethic is alive and well and nowhere more evident than in Silicon Valley. Here, the quest of optimizing time has become an overriding principle, with Moore's law of acceleration seemingly elevated to an ideal to be applied to every aspect of life. Reading, listening, eating, dating, and—as ever—working: there is apparently no activity that cannot be made better by being made faster. (Wajcman 2018c, p. 2)

She argues that the very design and engineering of Silicon Valley technologies, from smartphones to calendar applications that contemporary workers (including digital nomads) carry and use, have in-built affordances that 'may be restructuring our sense of time' and urge their users on a quest for never-ending productivity, scheduling and self-discipline (Wajcman 2018c, p. 3). In this context the task of managing work/life balance becomes increasingly onerous, fraught and complex. As we will also see in the findings sections, this language of productivity and discipline is both tacitly and explicitly acknowledged by digital nomads. It is explicitly evident in how they use calendar applications and is tacitly expressed in the usage of time-discipline strategies. This language is not only embedded in their daily work practices, it is even performed on conference stages (Fig. 2).

Smartphones and calendars have briefly been mentioned above as digital technologies that have built-in affordances. If one follows the logic that Silicon Valley could be framed as a form of institutional power, these calendars, smartphones and their affordances might be seen as Silicon Valley values seeping 'into the very grain of individuals' (Foucault 1979, p. 28). Some scholars go further and argue that it is not only digital devices and apps that are involved in the process of transferring values from institutions to individuals, but that this is happening with entire technology and knowledge ecosystems. Jarrahi et al. (2019, pp. 1–2), for example, have suggested that digital nomads provide evidence that entire 'personal knowledge ecologies' are being transferred from organisations and on to individuals.

Here we can see that boundaries between work, leisure and travel, and also between individuals and institutions, are being challenged and sometimes completely upended. Digital nomads are at the centre of these discourses, not least because they are attracted to sites of tourism, and then attempt to work in them. The initial utopian narrative is that they are dissolving these traditional boundaries. The findings sections in this paper critically and empirically evaluate these attempts to blend work and leisure.
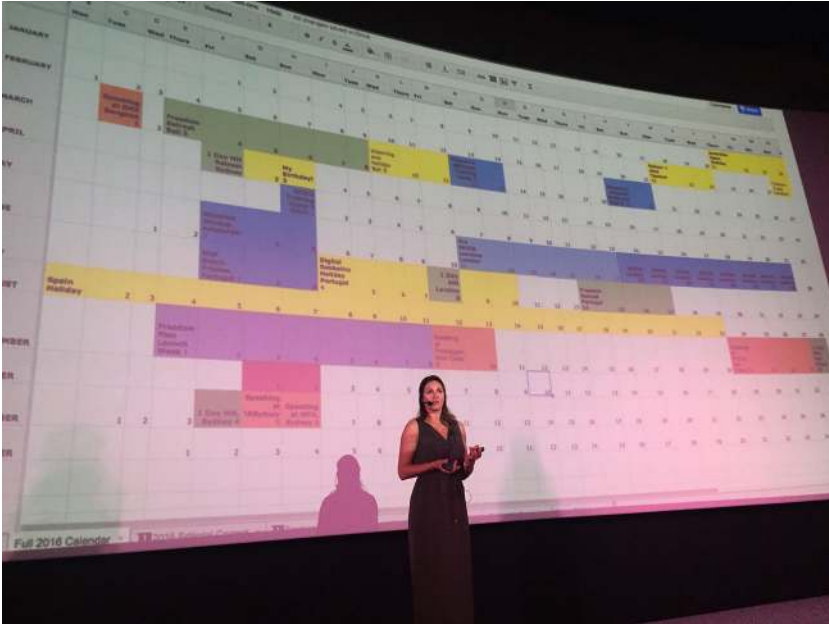
Fig. 2 Natalie Sissons, The Suitcase Entrepreneur sharing productivity strategies and time planning at the DNX conference, Bangkok, 2016. Photo: Dave Cook

2 Method

There are currently no published studies that have tracked digital nomads for more than a few months. This study tracked sixteen digital nomads over a four-year period and offers a longitudinal perspective. To date, most research into digital nomadism has been based on literature reviews (Müller 2016), online content analysis and semi-structured in-depth interviews (Reichenberger 2017, p. 4), analysis of digital nomad online forums (Nash et al. 2018, pp. 208–9) or a combination of semi-structured in-depth interviews and forum analysis (Sutherland and Jarrahi 2017). There are limitations to basing research solely on interviews. For example, during initial interviews it was common for research informants[2] to talk excitedly about gaining a generalised sense of freedom, or about the romance of travel, and they never discussed how daily routines might be managed and disciplined.

More immersive research methods, which combined participant observation with in-depth interviewing, were used by Beverly Yuen Thompson (Thompson 2018a, pp. 6–9). Thompson's combination of interviews and participant observation at a conference and a ten-day retreat uncovered some of the less romantic and precarious contexts of digital nomadism; however, the timespan of Thompson's research still occurred within a single month. The importance of disciplining practices often

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[2] Anthropologists call research participants, informants.

emerged over months—and sometimes years—and would have been missed if research had been conducted over a shorter period.

In this study the passing of time was required to contextualize and reveal the nuances behind common traits of research informants to romanticise their descriptions of digital nomad living or to narrate idealised future states. For example, during a recent research interview, one informant, who had quit the digital nomad lifestyle a couple of years previously, explained how his initial self-assessment of his digital nomad life was unreliable:

> It is a big decision to pack yourself up and work on the road. So, when you leap you want to tell everyone it is the best idea ever, even if it is not. It takes a lot of time and effort to sell yourself the digital nomad dream and make yourself do it. And I never foresaw any of the issues I might experience after time on the road. When things go wrong and you are away from home, you can not admit it to yourself, let alone to other people. That would be admitting that the whole thing was broken. And no one wants to admit that everything is fucked. (Informant 4 and former digital nomad, August 2019)

The above account demonstrates that as time passes and people's locations change, so do their outlooks and subjectivities (Manderscheid 2014, pp. 188–9). In the above example we can see that even internal dialogues may not be reliable. Other studies of long-term travel have used longitudinal and ethnographic research methods. For example, Anthony D'Andrea's multi-sited ethnography of global counterculture nomads involved investigations of practices over time: 'Through travel, interview and follow-up correspondence, the analyst is able to plot individual trajectories, thus identifying nodes, timings and criteria implied in practices of movement and rest' (D'Andrea 2006, p. 115). Previous studies of 'grey nomads' (older adults travelling around Australia in campervans) published in this journal have also utilised in-depth ethnographic research techniques requiring a longitudinal approach that gathers data from 'the same day-to-day rituals or routines as the research participants' (Darley et al. 2017, p. 384).

As there have been no published studies that have tracked digital nomads over more than a few months, this paper uses longitudinal ethnographic research and participant observation to reveal how disciplining practices and the management of work/leisure boundaries emerged and evolved over several years. The aim of ethnographic research is to reduce artificial encounters like interviews and surveys, and to gather data by being present with people in their everyday lives rather than via direct elicitation. Therefore, insights about different types of discipline practices arose naturally through observations of daily practice, of how coworking spaces were used and of how different work and communication activities occurred over days, weeks, months and years. At the start of this research I never expected to be writing about the disciplining practices of digital nomads. Likewise, the digital nomads on this study were equally surprised to discover disciplining strategies becoming such a central part of their everyday lives.

Fieldwork was conducted between December 2015 and August 2019 with sixteen informants. Data collection methods included at least three (often more) semi-structured interviews with each informant over four years. Participant observation

was conducted within four coworking spaces in Thailand (two in Chiang Mai and two on different Thai islands). All of these coworking spaces were located in sites of tourism. However, the numbers of digital nomads, and the availability of work-related and entrepreneurial activities, were higher in the urban context of Chiang Mai. On the two Thai islands, observed digital nomad activity was almost entirely focused around coworking spaces. Twenty-seven additional semi-structured interviews were conducted with self-described digital nomads encountered at coworking spaces, digital nomad meet-ups and conferences. These interviewees were not tracked over time as some naturally dropped out of the study. Interviews were also conducted with well-known nomads, bloggers and staff at coworking spaces. I was able to interview some of these participants periodically over a number of years. However, none of these participants were tracked over a four-year period, so they did not meet the longitudinal criteria set for them to be counted as official research informants. Interview data from discussions with these occasional participants were often able to shed light on, or corroborate, emerging research findings.

Most of the sixteen informants fit the stereotype of educated millennials under thirty-five and this sampling reflects the type of nomads featured in previous academic studies on digital nomads (Reichenberger 2017, p. 6; Thompson 2018a, pp. 6–9). However, one informant did not have a university-level degree, and one couple were older, in their late forties. This variance is appropriate because digital nomadism continues to be talked about in mainstream media, and its demographic appeal is spreading. Most initial research interviews were conducted in coworking spaces and twelve out of sixteen participants were initially encountered and recruited in coworking spaces. One focus, and also limitation, of this study is that it mostly concentrates on digital nomads who use coworking spaces. I acknowledge that many digital nomads do not use coworking spaces and, as a consequence, were beyond the scope of this study (Table 1).

The digital nomads in this study came predominantly from the Global North, and the majority of informants were from the United States, continental Europe and the UK, with one from Australia and one from South Korea. Six were freelancers, five were business owners and four were working for employers (two were full time and two were part time). The freelancers tended to have a clearly defined skill (translator, graphic designer or software developer) and several years' experience in using these skills. The prevalence of these skills confirms a prediction by Makimoto and Manners that future digital nomads were most likely to be 'knowledge workers' who would be able to share the products of their labour digitally (Makimoto and Manners 1997, p. 15). Overall, job types mirror occupations identified in previous academic studies of digital nomads (Reichenberger 2017, p. 6; Thompson 2018a, pp. 6–9). One key difference from other research papers is that four informants in this study were not actively earning money and were in the process of developing a location-independent skill or business. It is crucial to include non-earning nomads as they represent a large number of aspiring nomads frequently encountered at meet-ups, events, conferences and coworking spaces.

Even though four informants were not generating income, all informants can be distinguished from tourists because they primarily frame and manage their time around daily work practices or are in the process of setting up a business. Informants

Table 1 Informant characteristics

No	Age[a] (Gender)	Nationality	Type of worker (domain)	Main disciplining context[b]	Disciplining practices	Duration[c] (Frequency)
1	22 (M)	UK	Aspiring entrepreneur and freelancer (various)	Externally disciplined	External deadlines, handwritten task lists	3 years (continual)
2	24 (M)	Greece	Aspiring entrepreneur and employee (software developer, gaming)	Self-disciplined	Non digital time management processes, intuitive, works when required, socially mediated	3 years (occasional)
3	24 (M)	Croatia	Aspiring entrepreneur and employee (software developer, gaming)	Self-disciplined	Non digital time management processes, intuitive, works when required, socially mediated	3 months (finite)
4	25 (M)	UK	Entrepreneur (copywriting)	Self-disciplined	Intuitive, works when required, app mediated time management	3 months (finite)
5	25 (F)	Germany	Aspiring freelancer (not defined)	No data	Socially mediated set working hours, non-earning, in setting up stage	3 years (intermittent)
6	25 (M)	USA	Freelancer (graphic design)	Externally disciplined	External deadline, app mediated time management	2 years (occasional)
7	26 (M)	Germany	Employee (app developer)	Externally disciplined	External deadlines, set working hours, socially mediated	3 years (intermittent)
8	28 (F)	Germany	Freelancer (translation)	Externally disciplined	External deadline, set working hours	6 months finite
9	29 (M)	USA/China	Entrepreneur (e-commerce)	Self-disciplined	Non digital time management processes, app mediated time management, set working hours	4 years + (continual)
10	30 (F)	South Korea	Freelancer (translation)	Externally disciplined	External deadlines, set working hours, occasionally nocturnal	2 years (intermittent)
11	32 (M)	Australia	Entrepreneur (app developer, travel)	Self-disciplined	Intuitive, works when required, app mediated time management	3 years (intermittent)
12	34 (M)	Germany	Employee (journalist)	Externally disciplined	Intuitive, works when required	2 years (intermittent)
13	34(M)	UK	Entrepreneur (app development)	Self-disciplined	Set working hours, occasional app mediated time management	4 years + (continual)
14	40 (F)	USA	Aspiring entrepreneur (wellness)	Self-disciplined	Intuitive, works when required, non-earning, in setting up stage	1 year (finite)
15	45 (M)	USA	Aspiring entrepreneur and freelancer (medical)	Self-disciplined	Socially mediated, set working hours, occasional app mediated time management	6 months (finite)
16	48 (F)	USA	Aspiring entrepreneur and freelancer (medical)	Self-disciplined	Socially mediated, set working hours, occasional app mediated time management	6 months (finite)

[a] Age in December 2015

[b] This column describes the main disciplining context. However, informants still needed to engage with a range of external and self-disciplining practices

[c] Length of time living as a digital nomad as of September 2019

also distinguished themselves from ex-pats who had applied for long-term visas or resident status in Thailand. They viewed these ex-pats as location dependent and consequently did not view them as authentically nomadic (Reichenberger 2017, p. 8).

Digital nomads in this study used laptops and smartphones and utilised ICTs (information communication technologies) and affordable air travel. All informants were travelling on non-resident tourist visas and were from what Thompson calls 'strong passport countries' (Thompson 2018a, p. 7). As a result, all were able to move effortlessly across borders. Digital devices, technologies and ICTs were combined to undertake daily work and to communicate across time zones with clients, staff, colleagues and others within their community of practice. Digital technology in the form of software applications and phone apps was used to undertake work, to help structure the working day and to facilitate focus and productivity. Non-digital project management processes or self-help practices were also discussed and used. This paper considers how these spaces, infrastructures, technologies, processes and time-uses are utilised to impose discipline and asks: why are these practices so crucial to digital nomads?

3 Findings

3.1 Mobility is both solution and problem

Mobility itself sets the context and need for different types of disciplining practices. The very act of being a nomadic worker, specifically the necessity that an individual must frequently change work location, routines and spaces and then set this all up again in a new location, requires labour and effort. The entire process requires individuals to develop highly disciplined practices over time, although at first a need for discipline may be obscured by feelings of excitement and novelty.

Indeed, every time a person moves location, routines are disrupted and uprooted, and strategies are needed to re-establish smooth-running routines. Informant 10 explained:

> Every time I arrive in a new place, it takes me a few days to settle. I sometimes stay in a hostel so I can meet new people, then I'll find a place that's more settled and private, so I can choose to work from my room if I want to. If I'm returning to a place like Chiang Mai, I already know where to eat, get groceries, where the best cafes and coworking spaces are, and which Facebook groups are the most responsive. So, I can get into some kind of routine in a few days. But I need a week, sometimes more, if I land somewhere completely new. (Informant 10, 2017)

All informants reported that a change of location was disruptive to their routines. This disruption—caused by moving from one place and attempting to settle in another place—has been noted in other studies on digital nomads (Sutherland and Jarrahi 2017, p. 97:6; Nash et al. 2018, p. 211). Some informants could kick-start a routine in a new location after a day or two but for most this took at least three

days and involved finding satisfactory places to sleep, eat and buy food and evaluating cafes and coworking spaces. These practices are evidence of Sutherland and Jarrahi's theory of 'making place', which proposes: 'Digital nomads find or make spaces which support their essential work practices and also leverage local resources and infrastructures for work' (Sutherland and Jarrahi 2017, p. 97:13). Analogous place-making practices have been noted in remote workers at home, who often work through a set of rituals in order to shift from an at-home persona into a work persona (Nippert-Eng 1996). These place-making rituals demonstrate that mobile workers must organise themselves to ameliorate and manage disruption. These rituals also reveal why digital nomads must be more disciplined than other location-dependent workers and—crucially—more disciplined than their former location-dependent selves. In addition, they must hybridise internally generated self-disciplining practices with forms of externally generated discipline produced by workspaces, infrastructures, devices, time rules, apps and processes. Further examples are explored in the following sections.

3.2 Device choice and discipline

Disciplining practices were evident in every aspect of daily life, including the choice of device for work tasks. All informants owned and used a laptop computer and smartphone, but the main device used for work in the coworking space was the laptop computer. Hinting at the simplest of self-discipline practices, Informant 8 explained:

> There are too many social media apps on my phone. I have access to the same social media on my laptop, but they are easier to control and silence there. My phone is my window on to what friends and family are doing back home. If I get my phone out, I can easily get distracted for an hour, or it can kill my productivity for a whole day. (Informant 8, 2016)

The choice of laptop for work tasks is unsurprising; it has a larger screen and is designed for work tasks. More intriguing is that choice of device is framed in a way that delineates between work and nonwork. This is particularly the case in the context of coworking spaces. The phone is often associated with sociality, leisure, family, friends and distraction. The last four years of research conducted in coworking spaces have consistently shown mobile phone usage for voice calls to be infrequent and taboo. Digital nomads working in coworking spaces were expected to leave the main working space to make voice calls and all coworking spaces encountered in this research had private rooms or spaces for voice calls, or VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol). If someone took a call in the coworking space, they would quickly move to an outside space away from the main work area, where focused work was not conducted. In contrast, it is often acceptable to engage in a spoken phone conversation in offices in the Global North. This finding builds on previous research that shows synchronous voice calls require high levels of attention (Broadbent 2012, pp. 131–2) and also provides some reasoning behind the stereotype that millennials hate making phone calls (Buchanan 2017).

The distinction between laptops (for focused work tasks) and smartphones (distracting and associated with nonwork) is not new. However, the insight that voice calls, even if they are work related, are taboo in coworking spaces, frames the laptop as a silent, disciplining, work-related device, and the smartphone as potentially disruptive, noisy and non-work related.

3.3 Coworking and coliving spaces as externally regulating disciplining spaces

The laptop does not act alone as a disciplining strategy and digital nomads often combine laptop usage with coworking spaces to create a sharp delineation between work and distracting non-work tasks. As Informant 9 explained:

> Sometimes it seems a little bit silly to commute from my Airbnb, pack up my laptop, keyboard, laptop stand, mouse, mouse mat, walk fifteen minutes to the coworking space and then set it all up again! But the days I work from the Airbnb all day feel horrible and locked in. I may lose time by going to the coworking space, but I get access to an ergonomic chair, a proper desk, I get out for the day and it's nice to be around other people that are working. (Informant 9, 2019)

This practice echoes the analysis made by some scholars that spaces and resources often need to be combined to provide productive environments. Nash et al. explain:

> Many participants from the forums feel that nomadicity allows them to have experiences outside of a regular routine and gain freedom from the corporate world, but it also requires them to find or assemble their workspace themselves rather than relying on the stable office environment provided by an organization. (Nash et al. 2018, p. 211)

Informants frequently referred to problems encountered due to working in sites of tourism. Most explained that although the idea of living and working in these places was initially exciting, in practice it could be irritating and distracting. In this respect, the coworking space serves not only to replace the functions of a serviced office but also to create a protected work environment in locations primarily designed for leisure (Fig. 3).

Some of these work/leisure culture clashes were visible and comedic. Informant 8 explained why she left a coworking space on one Thai island because it was situated too close to a naturist and 'hippy' beach. She said, 'I could never be a hippy, I'm not a workaholic, but I could never hang around the beach all day doing nothing apart from getting stoned.' The hippies were equally bemused by the presence of this coworking space, the manager explained: 'We're slap bang in the middle of hippy central, and they hate us because of the high prices; one guy wandered in the other day and called us an overpriced cybercafé, but who the hell says cybercafé today?' This account adds colour to Müller's analysis that 'Although the dropout and the digital nomad share an interest in designing a self-determined life, the value of labour productivity is an important feature in the lifestyle of digital nomads' (Müller 2016, p. 345).

Fig. 3 Just another office? This might look like a normal office but the combination of laptops, seating configurations, the absence of smartphones help create disciplined, protected spaces in sites of tourism

Most informants used coworking spaces to try and instil a working routine in sync with local daylight hours. 'Try' is the key word here; despite a desire to stay in sync with daylight and office hours in their current physical location, many failed in these synchronic endeavours. Sometimes this was due to a high workload forcing informants to work long unsociable hours but it was also because most informants needed to work across times zones. Coworking spaces had both practical and metaphorical disciplining functions for digital nomads. They combine interior layouts with technologies that enable focused work. They also serve as a reminder that structured work routines can be helpful. Some informants reported that they would go to the coworking space even when they were not busy; one aspiring digital nomad commented that he used coworking spaces when he felt 'a little lost and needed the familiarity of a daily routine' (Informant 4, 2016). More recently another informant made a detailed assessment of coworking spaces based on four years' experience:

> On days I don't have motivation, going into the coworking space forces me to step up, and seeing people working and being busy is helpful. It's so important to have a nice desk, and ergonomic chair, good lighting, plugs in the right places and access to good coffee. (Informant 9, 2019)

Several informants confided that although they were glad to escape from their old jobs, they missed some of the disciplining routines, evoking David Graeber's analysis that it is possible to simultaneously loathe and find comfort in the rules and bureaucracies that surround us (Graeber 2016, p. 149). One informant confessed to feeling a 'separation anxiety' from their old job. Again, normative work practices

cast a shadow that can be hard to avoid—particularly during periods of self-doubt—and these re-enactments are more likely to occur if someone has a long history of working in an office. As one informant wearily explained after a year travelling:

> My parents lived their whole lives by the rules of 9 to 5. It's hard to forget that history and sometimes I feel guilty and weird if I don't have enough structure. Who knows where that comes from (Informant 8, 2018)

So although digital nomads attempt to create personalised work routines, the gravitational pull and institutional power of what some informants call 'the traditional office', or the 'rules of 9 to 5', can be hard to escape. Going into the coworking space every day can be a grounding and disciplining performance. One informant explained, 'I'm not always working when I go in, but it makes me feel more grounded, sometimes it's a matter of "fake it until you make it", but it took me a few years to work this out' (Informant 1, 2019). Work practices that appear to blend self-imposed routines with the aid of external infrastructures (e.g. coworking spaces), whilst paradoxically rejecting the 'rules of 9 to 5', demonstrate that the work routines and the need for structure are not so easily evaded.

How digital nomads in this study used coworking spaces produced interesting disciplining topographies which suggest an additional paradoxical tension between privacy and community. Although the experience of being in a space with other workers was described as familiar and reassuring, direct interaction was often avoided. Despite all coworking spaces on this study being open plan, an analysis of seating choice showed that coworking space members nearly always avoided a desk which directly faced other members (see Fig. 4).

Over time it was possible to see invisible virtual cubicle walls being erected. This is why walking up to someone and asking if they were ready for a meeting without an asynchronous digital announcement (e.g. via Slack) was off-limits, or in the words of one informant, like 'barging into someone's office and pulling them through a time-zone' (Informant 12, 2017). This last example shows how laptops and coworking spaces were strategically combined to create forcefields that protected highly disciplined spaces. These strategies suggest that it might also be helpful to externalise the disciplining burden from the self and on to external objects (laptops) and infrastructures (coworking spaces). Given this analysis the distinction between external-discipline and self-discipline is not always so clear.

3.4 Discipline, time zones and the battle to create daily rhythms

Digital nomads often fail to implement regular work patterns because of a requirement to work across time zones. Informant 11, who ran an app business, explained how he needed to communicate with coworkers in Australia:

> I often Skype at 4 am to talk to my developers in Sydney and when the shit hits the fan, and I have to pull a two-hour Skype at the crack of dawn, and that puts my entire week out of whack—that's why I don't always make it into the coworking space. (Informant 11, 2016)
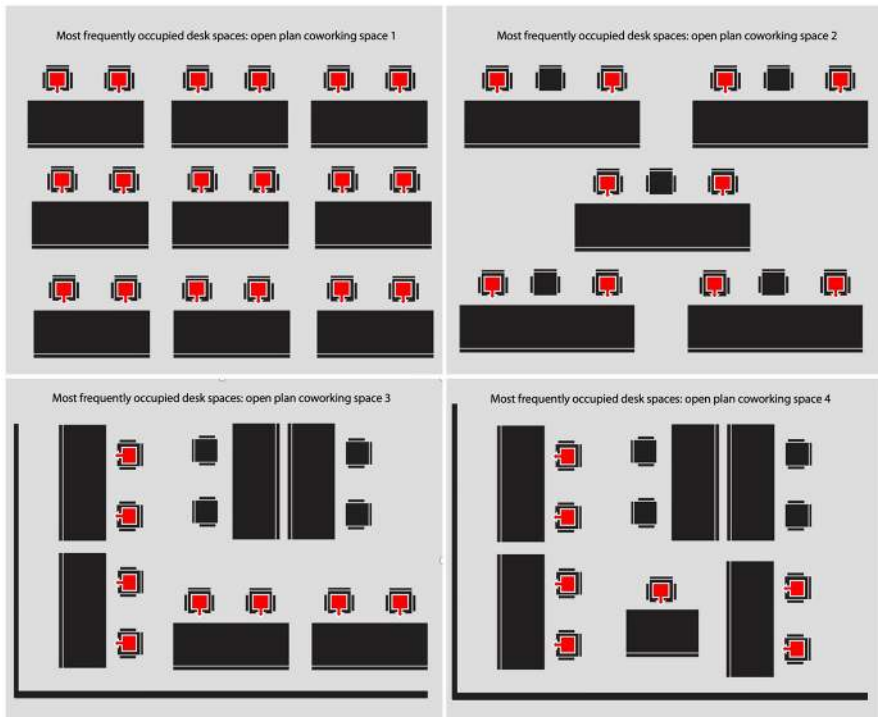
Fig. 4 Four coworking space layouts. Red boxes show the most frequently used desks. Seats directly facing other desk spaces were avoided

Work outside the coworking space, although not initially visible to the researcher, provides additional evidence that a failure to manage work demands can quickly upset daily routines. More than half of the informants in this study were working and interacting with people in Europe, which, depending on the exact location and time of year, is between five and seven hours behind local Thai time. Skype calls with Europe often needed to happen between 8 and 10 pm Thai time. One graphic designer often had to speak to clients in New York at 10 pm and explained, 'it interrupts my evening and wrecks my social life' (Informant 6). Likewise, Informant 9 needed to email, Skype and occasionally make voice calls throughout the night because his warehouse was in California and he often needed to deal with complaints about missed orders. Informant 8 explained how time zones influenced her choice of workspace: 'Sometimes I feel that my apartment is more of an office than the coworking space. It's nice to be able to go to the beach, but sometimes it's hard to feel like you are completely off duty.' These time zone anxieties have been mentioned in other digital nomad studies (Nash et al. 2018, p. 214).

Some research informants stayed in the coworking space to conduct out-of-hours work and—as we have seen—others would sometimes work from their

sleeping accommodation. As a result, the choice of sleeping accommodation needed to be conducive to out-of-hours work tasks, to provide privacy and silence, engender a sense of digital nomad community and filter out types of people who might be distracting (Nash et al. 2018. pp. 211–2).

Several informants explained that the choice of sleeping accommodation was also crucial in imposing a sense of discipline and delineating between being at work and being on holiday. One informant who was a business owner and ran an online store explained:

> When I first arrived here, I stayed in a small guesthouse with nice bungalows and a pool. It was a tourist place and was OK for a couple of days, but I often have to work out of hours, and seeing families with kids screaming by the pool, well, you don't want to hear that when you are working. It's important to admit to yourself that you are not on holiday, that's why I moved from a tourist place to the coliving space. Everyone else there is working as well and understands that I'm working too. (Informant 9, 2016)

The above quote was from an interview in 2016. The coliving concept was still novel at that time and was fast becoming adopted by digital nomads, and coworking spaces were beginning to offer the option. By 2017 six out of the sixteen informants had tried out a coliving service and described the main benefits as being 'community oriented', 'being around other digital nomads' or being able to filter out the wrong types of people and 'to block out all that touristy stuff' (Informant 2, 2018). Whether digital nomads use coliving spaces or not, the need to work across time zones requires that living accommodation must function as a space for sleeping, bodily care, leisure and work. The examples shown above show that digital nomads are adaptive and are able to alter their mobilities and spatial uses over time, thereby ensuring that structured, manageable routines are maintained.

3.5 Discipline and leisure time: the leisure paradox

If coworking and coliving spaces function to filter out tourism-related distractions, digital nomads also make strongly expressed identity-based objections to leisure-oriented terms such as tourist or backpacker. Given this strong association of digital nomad identity with work, and the need to create workspaces amidst tourism-related spaces and infrastructures, three questions emerge. First, why attempt to work in sites of tourism at all? Second, what do digital nomads do for leisure? Third, how do they find time and space for leisure? A short answer to the first question is that there is a clear gap between the utopian ideal of working in paradise and the daily realities of getting stuff done, and that this gap is overlooked when digital nomads start out. Second, once the novelty of working in a tropical tourist location is quickly normalised, digital nomads simply want to hang out with friends, watch Netflix or go to the cinema. Yet it is the following response to the third question that highlighted how anxieties often increased over time. As Informant 8, a language translator, explained, 'Sometimes it's hard to stop work bleeding into every aspect of daily life. Before I travelled, I always needed to work hard to make sure I didn't spend

every evening answering work emails, and now as a digital nomad, I have to work even harder to stop this happening' (Informant 8, 2019).

The need to manage a highly disciplined distinction between work and leisure time (and space) is also essential when it comes to finding time for leisure. Once again, working across time zones erodes the delineation between work and leisure, and digital nomads must be disciplined in maintaining space for downtime in which they can watch TV shows, maintain regular evening mealtimes or socialise. Several single nomads explained that it was especially hard to enforce these routines when they were spending their evenings alone and their sleeping space was also used for work. Facebook posts and messages in coworking space Slack channels often asked if other nomads wanted to hang out and watch TV or movies. As Informant 8 explained, 'I often spend evenings on my own, so I often end up attending to work emails. But I like the social aspect of watching a movie or box set, and I'm less likely to be on my phone if I'm watching with someone else. It must be so much nicer travelling as a couple.' Digital nomads are therefore not only becoming hybridised with their smartphones (Mazmanian 2018), their entire work/nonwork spaces are becoming hybridised, and so the battle to separate and manage them intensifies.

Scholars are increasingly noticing that location-dependent remote workers and office-based workers are finding it hard to keep work at bay (Mazmanian et al. 2013; Mazmanian 2018; Wajcman 2018a). So, if office workers, who are also regulated by the presence (and needs) of friends and family, struggle to create downtime it is unsurprising this separating task is even more intense for digital nomads. Indeed, this paradoxical relationship between work and leisure shows digital nomads are spending an increasing amount of time and labour separating work and leisure, and that external help and assistance is often required to help them manage this separation.

3.6 The external regulating discipline of social interaction and community

Some coworking spaces were aware of this sense of isolation and would offer communal movie or video gaming evenings. As one coworking space owner explained, 'We're not just an office, we provide a community, and have a community manager' (Interview with coworking space manager 2018). Another commonplace event that frequently occurred during the research was the communal lunch, which was implemented to 'encourage members to move away from the screens and interact with each other' (Interview with community manager 2016). These type of community lunches were met with varying degrees of success, as one community manager told me: 'People are here to work. We try to get them to create a work/life balance, but when people work on their own, they forget to stop working' (2016). Some coworking spaces actively encouraged these types of community lunches whereas others let them lapse.

It was generally agreed that delineating between work and leisure is much harder when travelling alone and more manageable when travelling as a couple. Social interaction, even within a couple, can produce regulating and disciplining effects for

digital nomads which confirms the analysis that the workplace can play an important social function (Rosen 1988, 2000).

There were two married couples in the study and both successfully managed a clear delineation between work and leisure time. Interestingly, both couples used coworking spaces less frequently than the majority of single nomads in the study. However, due to mainly working from their rented apartment or Airbnb, they needed to be disciplined about leaving the home, ensuring they went out for meals, walks and exercise. Both couples explained that they mainly used coworking spaces as a way of breaking up the working week and to avoid becoming too isolated. On the flipside, one couple also described such spaces as too silent and restrictive. They explained:

> We work together, so we have constant spontaneous chats about work tasks. We know each other well, so we know when the other needs to focus. But it's hard to talk aloud in a coworking space. (Informants 15 and 16, 2018)

Both couples explained that they used knowledge of each other to regulate the day, ensure time for breaks and mealtimes, and for mutual motivation and discipline. They also intuitively intervened if they thought the other had been sitting or working for too long without a break, or to end the working day. This example evokes Mary Douglas's analysis that the home is a self-regulating community in which strict and predictable routines occur over time. She argues that the 'order of the day' is the 'temporal infrastructure' regulating the social rhythms of homes. She specifies the scheduling of mealtimes as an example of this (Douglas 1991, pp. 300–1). Given these examples, a form of social, rhythmic discipline—that becomes effortlessly embedded into routines—can be seen as a useful strategy for some digital nomads.

This type of social support and regulation is most effective if couples work together or have similar work routines and rhythms. A second couple on the study were less in sync. The husband was working full time for a client in his home country and the wife, who did not yet have a location-independent job, passed her days researching potential types of work that could provide an income while travelling. As a result, their daily rhythms were out of sync. Although the husband was not micromanaged, precise tasks and deadlines were agreed with his employer. This is a clear example of a helpful form of externally imposed discipline called 'volitional participation' that was mentioned in the introduction. He was consistently focused on work tasks and, as a result, leisure time was delineated. He would get up at the same time each morning and go for a run on the beach, work on his balcony during daylight hours and would stop work before dusk and the arrival of the mosquitoes. In contrast his partner explained that although she had exploratory research to occupy her, this did not fill the whole working day and she could sometimes feel bored, isolated and restless. In an attempt to improve her motivation, the couple tried attending the coworking space together, but the husband was used to working quietly at home and needed to take spontaneous work calls, so he found the coworking space restrictive and distracting. His wife, on the other hand, felt anxious as a result of being surrounded by workers when she was not yet working or earning. Although this couple were not entirely in sync with each other's work routines, the agreed tasks and deadlines between the husband and his employer had disciplining

effects for them both. His deadlines ensured their days were regulated and work time was delineated from leisure time.

Another example of social interaction facilitating a disciplined separation of work and leisure activities came from two software developers who were previously work colleagues. They were developing a new product and decided to go to a coworking space in Asia to create a prototype to show potential investors. The two had worked together for more than a year and understood each other's work rhythms. As a result, they were the only people in the coworking space to have frequent discussions, informal meetings and short collaborative working sessions. As computer coders, they were both highly skilled and used to working alone and at their own pace. This example evokes descriptions of the relaxed yet focused work experienced by artisanal workers (Thompson 1967, p. 5). Their collaborative working style and the explicit goal of creating a prototype to a fixed deadline combined to create a disciplined working atmosphere. As they both explained, 'If we are together in the coworking space, we work. We work when we are in meetings, and when we are working on individual tasks, you are motivated by seeing the other person hard at work. Also, of course, deadlines and a limited amount of money motivate us as well [laughs]' (Informants 2 and 3, 2016).

If couples and colleagues can regulate each other by intuitively understanding each other's rhythms, single nomads—what Nash et al. call 'solo workers' (Nash et al. 2018, p. 211)—frequently reported struggles to maintain a disciplined division between work and nonwork. The main problem these solo workers experienced was an obsessive need to monitor work tasks and an inability to take time to relax and unwind. As we have seen, this problem is acknowledged by some coworking spaces which encourage members to attend planned social events. With the benefit of hindsight, several informants said they did not foresee the challenges of balancing work and leisure time when they were first inspired to try out the digital nomad lifestyle. Most self-described nomads on the study either stopped the practice of travelling and working, changed the frequency of travel, or reduced how frequently they moved. Some informants speculated that digital nomad life would be more fulfilling whilst in a relationship. As one informant confessed, 'It's hard being a single digital nomad, I'd like to be a Couplepreneur, because it sucks being single and on the road' (Informant 8). Indeed, problems with self-discipline, disrupted routines and the need to spend longer in a location in order to forge meaningful social connections, were the three most frequently cited reasons behind these changes in travel patterns. This once again shows that it is often a relief when the disciplining burden is shared, distributed and externalised.

3.7 Externally imposed discipline: an increasing love of deadlines

Reichenberger argues that professional freedom is 'often driven by the desire to create a more flexible and tailored life outside of externally imposed structures' (Reichenberger 2017, p. 9). Indeed, one primary motivation for becoming a digital nomad is often framed as an escape from pointless bureaucracies, and David Graeber argues that it is this rejection of meaningless rules that forces workers to

think of their jobs as 'Bullshit Jobs' (Graeber 2018). Yet this rejection of externally imposed structures is not evenly upheld and often disappears over time. Indeed, as Graeber also argues, 'rules and regulations… hold—for many of us—a kind of covert appeal' (Graeber 2016, p. 149). As we have seen in previous examples, mutually agreed deadlines are often mentioned as helpful and motivating disciplining factors. Although most informants initially rejected bureaucracies, deadlines, micro-management, surveillance, fixed work hours and other forms of outwardly imposed time-based restrictions (Nash et al. 2018, p. 207), deadlines were often reframed as positive, organising and motivating forces. This softening of attitude towards deadlines often emerged after months on the road. Several informants were working as freelancers with specific, highly developed skills. Two were translators, one was a graphic designer and three were software developers. These informants all worked to outwardly imposed deadlines. Despite reporting feeling anxious when a deadline approached, these informants also explained that they appreciated the structure and clarity deadlines could provide. As one informant explained, 'I'd feel lost without deadlines, they're my crumb trail' (Informant 8, 2016).

In contrast, entrepreneurs and people setting up businesses were more responsible for disciplining themselves. Of the sixteen informants, just under half worked to client—or externally imposed deadlines—and slightly more than half were responsible for setting their own deadlines and putting elaborate self-imposed project management techniques in place. As one informant pointed out:

> Not all deadlines are created equal, there are deadlines and dreadlines. Deadlines can be flexible, dreadlines are fixed and they make sure you ship. (Informant 9, 2016)

Overall, this second group engaged in more elaborate time-management practices, and examples of these are described in the next section. As explored in earlier discussions about an increasingly dominant culture of autonomy and neoliberalism, attempts to become self-directed and to gain freedom often entail a shift of responsibility from outside institutions (in this case employers) to the individual, and by so doing create an additional layer of responsibility and labour (Gershon 2014, p. 288; Sutherland and Jarrahi 2017, p. 97:10). It is premature to conclude from these small numbers how this cultural context impacts the ability to sustain a digital nomad lifestyle. However, it does seem that most informants accept that the responsibility, for most aspects of life, resides with themselves (Cook 2018). This 'personal responsibility system' (Harvey 2007, p. 168) is rarely discussed explicitly, but simply accepted as 'the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world' (p. 3). Given this theoretical connection, it is little wonder that self-discipline has become a foundation of digital nomad culture. It seems that even a glimpse of freedom is only gained after digital nomads engage with a combination of externally produced discipline and internally produced self-discipline practices. In the next section, the attention, time, labour and effort involved in managing digitally mediated forms of discipline are examined.

3.8 Disciplining processes and time-management strategies

In this context of a personal responsibility system, disciplining practices were varied and included a wide variety of project management techniques, including Agile,[3] Sprints[4] and timeboxing.[5] All these techniques blended goal setting and time-management activities. As Nash et al. have observed, 'enforcing the boundary between personal and professional life involved digital nomads setting aside time to be available to their team members on chat programs, and using productivity applications to keep track of work schedules' (Nash et al. 2018, pp. 313–4).

Project management practices and blogs about focus and productivity (Digitalnomadsoul.com 2019; Völkner 2015; Wanderlustworker.com 2017) were often discussed and shared on digital nomad Facebook groups. Productivity and disciplining strategies were also embedded in the daily routines of research informants and were the focus of digital nomad conference presentations (see Fig. 2). At the time of writing, an upcoming ten-day conference called *Get Shit Done Live 2019* (Fig. 5), with the tagline 'it's like 12 months of work in 10 days', was advertised on the Chiang Mai Digital Nomads Facebook Group.

The simplest and most popular self-disciplining practice was timeboxing, also sometimes known as the Pomodoro technique (Cirillo 2006). In its simplest form timeboxing allocates fixed time periods in which planned activities take place. During these periods distractions are filtered out so that focused work can be conducted. Marcus Meurer, a prominent digital nomad, explains how part of his working day is timeboxed and is focused around prioritised tasks:

> One of the biggest challenges for Digital Nomads is staying productive and focused on the road… The trick is to stay away… from your inbox and social media channels. They are full with requests from people you have to react on [*sic*]. You get pulled away from your projects and go into the passive mode. Instead you start with the MIT (Most Important Task) into your working routine. Try to think about the MIT the evening before you go to bed. Try to set the focus on the important stuff and not the urgent stuff! When you finished that big MIT your day already feels like one of the most productive days ever. (Völkner 2015)

Informants who identified as entrepreneurs or business owners were most likely to embody these elaborate self-disciplining routines. One of the business owners on the study used a similar system which he called the popcorn technique. He explained: 'I have three popcorns and each popcorn breaks down into three kernels, and there are three tasks in each kernel. If you have a list of ten tasks it can be overwhelming' (Informant 9, 2016). When I first met this informant in 2016, he was in the early stages of setting up his business and was using the popcorn technique to

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[3] Agile is a project management technique which is often used in software development.

[4] Sprints are timeboxed iterations and are often used in Agile project management processes.

[5] Timeboxing is a project management technique which allocates fixed time periods in which planned activities take place. Timeboxing techniques be can used in business or for personal productivity.
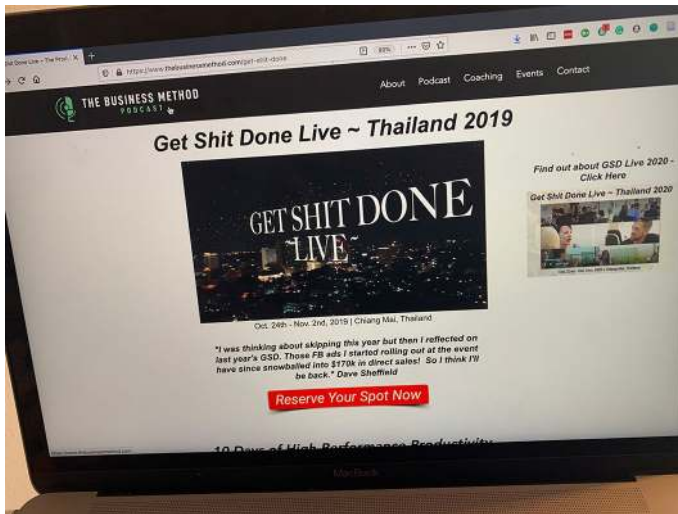
Fig. 5 The Get Shit Done conference 2019 website being shown on a laptop

manage what he described as an 'overwhelming' volume of tasks. In August 2019, more than three years later, he was still using timeboxing techniques; however, he had adapted the process, so that it was less granular and more flexible. He explained that each day started with a twenty-minute yoga practice, followed by a five-minute meditation, and then some time for focused reading dedicated to a core skill he wanted to learn. The time from 9 am until 11 am was set aside for focused tasks, when his phone was switched off or in airplane mode. This 'focused' time is similar to Marcus Meurer's MIT (Most Important Task). During this focused time, he explained, 'I might record a course, or any other task I need to move forward, I'm hyper-focused in the morning' (Informant 9, 2016). Then from 11 am until 2 pm he would communicate with his virtual assistant and respond to emails and messages.

In this account, we can see disciplining processes were being used for nonwork as well as work tasks. During the course of the study, several informants started daily meditation practices. Another informant explained, 'since we last met, my girlfriend got me into meditation, and I soon realised a five-minute morning meditation could make my day four times more productive. I wish I'd started this four years ago' (Informant 1, 2019). So while yoga, reading and meditation could all be categorised as leisure or wellness activities, for the digital nomad (whose primary preoccupation is work) they become subsumed into the drive towards increased motivation and productivity.

Many of these self-discipline techniques were non-digital. To-do lists and timeboxed tasks were often written on paper. However, technological versions of these practices were used with increasing frequency during the study. These examples indicate that combining technology use, travel and working was not necessarily liberating. Most informants reported that the longer they travelled the more they used digitally mediated disciplining tools and strategies.

3.9 Digitally mediated discipline: task prioritization, time management, scheduling and focus

Digitally mediated tools and practices were often centred around task prioritisation and time management. The most commonly used strategy was to email oneself a daily to-do list, even though this was also critiqued as an inefficient way to deal with daily tasks because it brought digital nomads into contact with distracting emails. Most informants put tasks (as well as meetings) into calendars to compile prioritised task lists. Other general-purpose tools were used for to-do lists, prioritising tasks and time management. These included creating task and to-do lists in email applications, OS level notetaking widgets (e.g. Stickies or TextEdit), word processors, or in note-taking applications such as Evernote.[6]

Business owners and those working with remote teams used more sophisticated tools such as Trello[7] and Asana,[8] and Nash et al. have recorded usage of these and similar tools (Nash et al. 2018, p. 314). Calendly[9] was, and remains, particularly popular as it was able to handle meetings across time zones and allows digital nomads to schedule time for synchronous meetings which require full attention (Broadbent 2012, pp. 113–40).

After scheduling and task prioritisation, focus, particularly staying on task, emerged as an important disciplining concern for the digital nomads in this study. The most popular dedicated productivity app was Momentum Dashboard.[10] A third of the informants reported using this over the last four years. Momentum Dashboard facilitated self-disciplining practices most important to digital nomads: setting a main focus for the day, creating prioritised to-do lists, a calming desktop wallpaper to help cut out distractions, and a daily inspirational quote, usually related to themes of focus, mindfulness or creativity (see Fig. 6).

The Focus Mode in Microsoft Word was also used for concentrated writing tasks and, as mentioned earlier, phones were frequently placed out of sight or put into airplane mode when informants were undertaking focused work.

Apps such as FocusMe, which automatically filter out distractions by blocking out websites, specific social networking sites, email or internet access, were used by some informants. Some cases were even more elaborate and extreme. After years struggling to discipline himself, one informant paid a coder on Upwork to create a program to stop him playing video games or using Facebook until he had completed half a day of focused work. He explained:

> Just using website and app blocker programmes like FocusMe wasn't enough, I could get around them. I got this coder to create a program that would really lock me out and wouldn't send me a password until I'd logged 4.5 hours of focused work. It's batshit crazy I know. (Informant 1, 2019)

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[6] Evernote is a software application designed for note taking and organizing content.

[7] Trello is a web-based task and list-making application.

[8] Asana is an application to help teams plan, track and manage work.

[9] Calendly is a calendar app that can schedule meetings across multiple time zones.

[10] Momentum Dashboard is a browser and desktop application for setting goals and managing tasks.

This account provides another instance of an increasing tension between work and leisure and also hints at a circular and reflexive tension between discipline and freedom.

3.10 Digitally mediated discipline: disruption, distraction and nonwork

Technology was also used to delineate between work and leisure time and manage distractions. The business-oriented messaging app Slack was sometimes used as a replacement for distracting social media messaging apps such as Facebook Messenger. Social networking sites such as Facebook were seen to be simultaneously useful and problematic. Facebook was often described as distracting but was also an essential work tool for some informants, who used Facebook groups to connect to communities of practice (Wenger 1998) based around specific areas of expertise such as graphic design or language translation. As one informant, a professional app designer, explained:

> Facebook Groups are very useful but can also be a big problem. There are no other app designers like me, currently here in the coworking space, so I sometimes use a specialist German-speaking Facebook Group to ask technical work-related questions. But sometimes I need to get out of the groups because there is too much communication. So sometimes I'll join a digital nomad group for a local area, and then leave it again when I leave the area: I connect and un-connect to these groups a lot, they quickly become too much. (Informant 7, 2018)

Overall, Facebook was regarded as a distraction because it drew digital nomads away from work tasks, and was usually perceived as a threat to carefully curated self-discipline practices. Although Facebook could serve some work functions, it was firmly placed in the disruptive or nonwork category.

If some technologies caused work/leisure boundary disruptions, other digital tools were used in novel ways to solve these problems. For example, Evernote was sometimes used to organise and delineate between work and leisure tasks. Several informants used Evernote's tagging and categorisation feature to organise tasks and activities under labels such as business, work, leisure, lifestyle and personal (Informants 1, 4 and 9, 2016).

The language and grammar of discipline and productivity were not only applied to work tasks. There was a final category of tools and apps used to ensure a productive and disciplined lifestyle. Mindfulness and meditation apps such as Headspace were frequently used and often recommended to other digital nomads. These apps were often part of frequent discussions about mental health and mindfulness. Self-improvement and learning apps such as Luminosity,[11] Duolingo and Blinklist[12] were often used in short, focused, timeboxed sessions. Yet again we see the language of

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[11] Luminosity is a brain-training app.

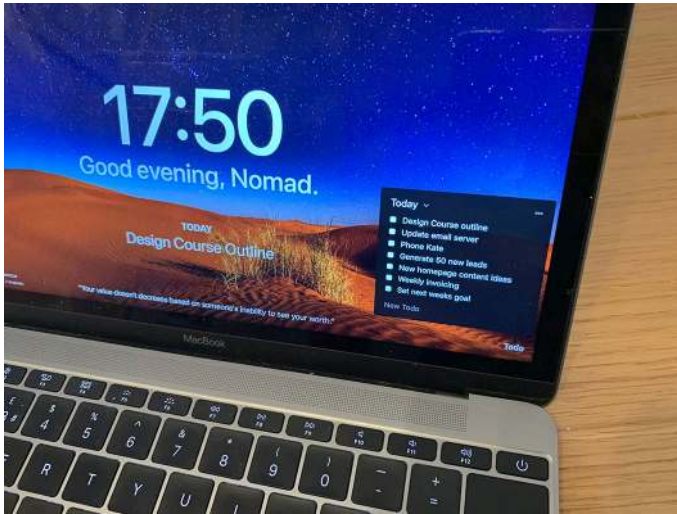[12] Blinklist condenses books, often non-fiction and education titles, into five-minute audio summaries.

Fig. 6 Momentum Dashboard combines a main focus for the day, prioritised to-do-lists, a calming desktop wallpaper to help cut out distractions, and a daily inspirational quote

discipline and productivity seeping into nonwork domains. The above examples evoke Judy Wajcman's claim that the Protestant work ethic is being increasingly applied to all aspects of contemporary life and that 'there is apparently no activity that cannot be made better by being made faster' (Wajcman 2018b, p. 9).

3.11 Digitally mediated discipline: an emerging form of status?

These examples show that all forms of digitally mediated discipline, particularly the efficient control of time, are often viewed and framed as optimistic and positive strategies. Far from being an imposition that digital nomads wish to escape from, mastery of digitally mediated discipline is embodied, valued and presented as a form of status or cultural capital (Bourdieu 1985). These forms of digitally mediated discipline are first applied to work tasks and then quickly transferred and applied to nonwork activities; we can see examples of meditation, daily physical exercise, language learning and even book reading being both timeboxed and digitally mediated. These proliferating self-disciplining practices could be seen as related to self-tracking practices which have been noted by scholars in other contexts. For example, studies on the quantified self by Nafus and Sherman (2014) explore self-tracking as a voluntary practice but the authors question where the impetus for self-tracking and control is really situated. They argue that self-tracking does not 'escape the wider biopolitics of late capitalism that rely on radical individualism to drive consumption as a dominant mode of expression and to elide structural inequalities by framing all actions in terms of personal "choice"' (2014, p. 1973). Other scholars have argued that an increasing cultural acceptance of self-discipline makes it easier for

organisations to explicitly demand that workers measure both their productivity and health through the use of wearable technologies and that a refusal to engage in these practices 'is becoming a political act' (Moore and Robinson 2016, p. 2787).

This tight and highly organised control of time is often initially practised to get work done efficiently and create more time for leisure pursuits. The paradoxical outcome is that—more and more—labour is required to delineate between work and leisure, and this labour becomes politicised because workers are increasingly made to feel guilty about trying to carve out downtime (Mazmanian et al. 2013). This occurs in both physical and digital spheres. The effort put into creating and managing this work and leisure separation is noteworthy given that digital nomads choose to work in locations associated with tourism and leisure. As we have seen, digital nomads start out attempting to collapse work/leisure distinctions so they can experience more leisure time but often end up labouring hard to compartmentalise work and leisure so that work doesn't take over completely.

When talking about digital nomad freedom, it might be instructive to propose a particular type of freedom that is tightly interrelated with efficient time use—a disciplined kind of freedom that is quite different to the kind of freedom involved in whiling away time in an unstructured or 'wasteful' way (Thompson 1967, p. 97). Perhaps this might also be seen as an upgraded expression of Max Weber's Protestant work ethic, in particular an update on a self-disciplined ascetic devotion to work (Weber and Swedberg 2009). Embracing discipline in its many forms is also a basic requirement if self-described digital nomads wish to experience a work/life balance, or indeed any sense of self-determined control and freedom over their everyday lives. Freedom, it seems, requires effort and hard work, and all this required work contrasts with the public image of digital nomadism, particularly the laptop on the beach trope so often used to convey the ideal of freedom. As Informant 6 clarified, 'it's impossible to see anything on a laptop in direct sunlight, and no one is ever going to put an expensive Macbook anywhere near sand or water!' Digital nomads might start out attempting to achieve a subjective form of freedom that successfully blends work, travel and leisure; however, it appears that they end up experiencing a different form of subjective freedom which combines work, travel and discipline.

4 Conclusions

Ina Reichenberger argued that there is a longitudinal research gap in digital nomad studies, and in particular that the 'long-term developments… and also the psychological, socio-psychological and social factors and impacts of this lifestyle' need to be studied (Reichenberger 2017, p. 15). This paper begins to engage with these gaps and, by researching the daily work practices of digital nomads over a four-year period, shows how personal trajectories develop and alter over time. This research, with sixteen informants, is exploratory and findings should be viewed as preliminary. This study also focused entirely on nomads who worked from coworking spaces. Further research is needed to study digital nomads who avoid coworking spaces and work in less visible locations such as Airbnbs or rented apartments. As the manager of one coworking space explained, 'successful entrepreneurs and

well-known nomads rarely go to coworking spaces unless they are selling something, because they get swamped with questions or hounded by the wannabees' (Interview with coworking space manager 2016). The self-disciplining practices and the way in which the boundaries between work and leisure are managed may well be different for this group and require investigation. This study was both longitudinal and multi-sited. However, all coworking spaces were in Thailand. At the time of writing I have noticed an increasing tendency for digital nomads to adapt their work and mobility strategies, with some being drawn to affordable rural locations that are nearer to their home bases. For example, Portugal and Bulgaria have become popular destinations for European digital nomads who want to be in similar time zones and be more in sync with clients and employers. These conditions may reduce the self-disciplining burden, produce more time for leisure and provide a greater sense of freedom and autonomy, so longitudinal research in these more in-sync locations needs to be conducted. Indeed, it was only by tracking research informants over a number of years, generating detailed individual trajectories, that gaps were revealed between the imagined digital nomad world of work, the lived everyday practice and subsequent adaptations. These reflexive adaptations are ongoing and require monitoring.

This research found that discipline and self-discipline practices became a preoccupation for all the informants in this study. Whilst other researchers have noted a digital nomad interest in self-determined routines and productivity (Müller 2016, p. 345; Nash et al. 2018, p. 211; Reichenberger 2017, pp. 8–9), this paper details a deeply rooted preoccupation with disciplining practices that only visibly emerged over time. All informants discussed and engaged in discipline practices with increasing frequency. Crucially, a high engagement with disciplining practices was maintained, and even intensified, when informants felt they were not disciplined enough. That these deeply rooted preoccupations with disciplining practices have persisted over time builds on academic discourses that digitally mediated time use, and an increasing preoccupation with productivity, have become firmly embedded into contemporary culture. For example, Judy Wajcman writes:

> I argue that calendaring systems are emblematic of a larger design rationale in Silicon Valley to mechanize human thought and action in order to make them more efficient and reliable. (Wajcman 2018c, p. 1)

This drive towards efficiency is clearly present in the ethnographic descriptions of calendar usage and timeboxing practices. Research data from this study demonstrate that the preoccupation with efficiency and productivity is not confined to Silicon Valley, or even to commercial centres in the Global North. Digital nomads provide just one example of how these increasingly dominant narratives around discipline, self-discipline and productivity rapidly cross national and economic boundaries, and reach beyond the realm of work and into the domains of nonwork and leisure.

This study also finds that digital nomads travelling alone reported struggles to discipline themselves, whereas digital nomad couples were able to discipline, regulate and support each other. Anecdotal evidence and previous research indicate that digital nomad culture heavily skews towards single travellers (Reichenberger 2017, p. 6) and Sutherland and Jarrahi note that the emerging digital nomad cultural

identity emphasises individual freelance and gig work (2017, p. 97:7). Herein lies a contradiction and emerging tension in digital nomad culture. Most digital nomads start out travelling and working alone, but over time an increasing sense of isolation becomes apparent, eroding the sense of self, and this was particularly evident with single informants. This prompted several informants to alter their travel patterns, stay longer in locations and sometimes stop the practice of travelling and working entirely. Several informants entered into relationships during the study and reported that these changes produced regulating and stabilising effects. Longitudinal data from informants on this study suggest that isolation, namely a lack of connection with place and people, might limit the travel plans of long-term digital nomads, a finding expressed by some prominent digital nomads (e.g. Chris The Freelancer 2018). Again, this is a finding requiring further investigation and monitoring.

The research findings also demonstrate that disciplining and self-disciplining responsibilities placed extra burdens on digital nomads. These burdens were in addition to the core work activities of translating, designing, coding or running a business. Then, added to all that, most informants are engaged in marketing and self-branding tasks across multiple platforms (Gershon 2017). Autonomy and self-determination in the gig economy require effort and labour in a single location, so further studies are needed to quantify how many digital nomads end up going home, after how long, and to ask whether the burden of maintaining a disciplined digital nomad lifestyle is ultimately sustainable. Gershon herself concludes that managing and maintaining a stable, flexible and coherent brand is difficult on 'one medium, let alone multiple media' (Gershon 2014, p. 292). She also points out that it is ridiculous to expect an individual human being to 'have the person-hours or labour that a corporation can draw upon' (Gershon 2014, p. 292). This study agrees with Gershon's analysis, and builds on it by suggesting the additional burden of continual self-disciplining is way beyond the practical daily capabilities of individuals. A neoliberal context might encourage digital nomads to imagine themselves as personally responsible heroic actors, and to disavow the need for workplace rights, pensions or healthcare. However, the empirical evidence presented in this study suggests that maintaining such a 'personal responsibility system' (Harvey 2007) consistently over time, and whilst moving from place to place, becomes an unreasonable and unrealistic burden.

This study also critiques the often-repeated idea that digital nomads reject outwardly imposed discipline (Nash et al. 2018, p. 211; Reichenberger 2017, pp. 8–9). It is true that neophyte digital nomads frame generalised concepts of freedom as solutions to the annoyances of commuting and set work hours. In practice though, externally imposed structures often become valued, and over time informants ended up reformatting and replicating them. Of course, not all digital nomads engage with disciplining practices in the same way. Freelancers working for clients and employers in their home countries were more likely to engage with outwardly imposed discipline, whereas entrepreneurs more actively talked about and experimented with self-disciplining practices. This finding highlights two significant digital nomad subgroups: nomadic entrepreneurs and nomadic freelance specialists. Both of these groups exhibit distinctive disciplining practices and each group requires specific scholarly attention of its own.

Digital nomads in this study also used technology to discipline themselves and they combined these technologies with infrastructures in novel ways. Sutherland and Jarrahi (2017 p. 97:3) have already proposed a concept of digital nomad 'information infrastructures (II)' which digital nomads both shape and actively engage in. Digital nomads combine these informational infrastructures with temporal and spatial disciplining practices to produce environments conducive to productive work—and also to productive leisure. This assemblage of disciplining practices and infrastructures is quickly changing and adapting. Coliving spaces, for example, might be viewed as a product of these assemblages. Coliving spaces were a novel concept in 2016, even to digital nomads. In 2019 they have become more commonplace, not only in digital nomad locations but are now offered as permanent living solutions in global cities such as London, New York and Berlin. This development demonstrates how digital nomadism is shaping contemporary culture beyond its original scope (Ryan 2019). Ongoing research into digital nomadism might help scholars, businesses, technology professionals and the tourism industry to explore and develop innovative work/leisure spaces and infrastructures. For example, how might the digital nomad need for delineated workplaces in sites of tourism influence the design of future tourism ecosystems? Many hotels currently have business suites and centres; will these areas become more like coworking spaces?

Finally, the digital nomad relationship with the work/leisure boundary is complex and initially appears counterintuitive. The clear need for a delineation between work and leisure, and the resulting labour and often ingenious practices used to separate them, challenges the logic that digital nomads wish to collapse the boundaries between work and leisure. Parallels can be drawn to similar contradictions noted by other scholars, particularly the idea of 'The Autonomy Paradox' (Mazmanian et al. 2013) in which it is argued that the flexibility offered by mobile email devices initially offers workers more control over workplace interactions, but over time demands increased availability. Judy Wajcman has argued that 'digital devices are sold to us as time-saving tools that promote a busy, exciting action-packed lifestyle' only to make us busier (Wajcman 2018a, p. 3). David Graeber also passionately summed this up when he wrote:

> In the year 1930, John Maynard Keynes predicted that, by century's end, technology would have advanced sufficiently that countries like Great Britain or the United States would have achieved a 15-hour work week. There's every reason to believe he was right. In technological terms, we are quite capable of this. And yet it didn't happen. Instead, technology has been marshalled, if anything, to figure out ways to make us all work more (Graeber 2013).

These work/leisure conflicts and tensions are not only related to email devices and smartphones. Digital nomads experience these tensions in how they experience life in sites of tourism. Just as digital nomads start to apply rules and practices to separate work and leisure, could we see infrastructures, technologies or even designed environments that more actively delineate between work and leisure? Hotels already have no-smoking policies and rooms; could no-working hotel rooms and spaces become commonplace in the future? This utopian ideal of hybridising work and leisure has been so widely circulated on social media, in blogs, and even

in the naming of new brands and terms such as 'coworkation' (coworkation.com) that it has become baked into digital nomad culture. Although the ideal of blended work and leisure makes an attractive marketing proposition, and even became a fashionable myth in the wake of the dot-com era (Ross 2003), this ethnography suggests that work remains stubbornly work-like. Ethnographic examples showing digital nomads working hard to separate work and leisure support the analysis that cultivating true leisure can be more demanding than work itself (Beatty and Torbert 2003 p. 239). Given that digital nomad identity is centred on work, it makes sense that attempting to work in sites of tourism is inherently problematic, creates anxieties, and ultimately leads to the additional burden and labour of separating work and leisure tasks. Yet in spite of these anxieties digital nomads are reflexive and adaptable, so it is highly likely that they will quickly choose to work in new and surprising locations in the future.

It is intriguing that many of the disciplining practices discussed in this paper also reflect the daily experiences of workers in the contemporary Western workplace. The pressure to be productive and disciplined is proliferating, and the accounts presented in this paper appear to be tightly linked to Wajcman's concept of the 'acceleration society' in which speed, convenience, flexibility and hyper-productivity have become normative (Wajcman 2018a). Freelance, remote and flexible work is also rapidly becoming the norm, so the seemingly extreme practices of digital nomads might offer a glimpse of a near future workplace. Digital nomads then are engaged in a love/hate relationship with the Western institution of work. They might initially proclaim that they are escaping the 'traditional office' or the '9 to 5', but they end up performing and reformatting these structures in their daily routines. Rather than asking what digital nomads are escaping, it might be better to ask, what are they taking with them, or even exporting? In today's globalized and connected world, it seems it doesn't really matter if you are working in an office or in a coworking space, as an employee or as a freelancer; all workers are required to be responsible, self-motivated, flexible and disciplined. From these pressures it seems there is currently no escape, whoever you work for or wherever you are.

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