



Time, Space and Gender

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Standpoint

I take a critical stand against the assertion that virtual work increases flexibility and autonomy among employees who work long hours at high-responsibility jobs





Virtual work, flexibility and autonomy seem to have different meanings for women and men, reproduce traditional power relations, as well as gender segregation in the home.





Standpoint

- Gender as a social practice.
- Shaped by the social structures or culture within which people live.
- These structures can have significant and different impacts on women and men.
- Women and men not only passive victims of social structures.





The possibility of working virtually is supposed to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life, not least of all for those who work long hours. Nevertheless, many questions about the role of ICT in organizational life remain to be answered, especially those concerning the complex nature of the interaction between technology, work and home (Ursula Huws, 2013).





Judy Wajcman (2004, p. 7)

“The virtuality of cyberspace is seen to spell the end of naturalized, biological embodiment as the basis for gender difference. . . . Technology itself is seen as liberating women”.





Simone de Beauvoir, 1949/1976,69

It is not the body object described by biologists that actually exists, but the body as lived in by the subject. . . . It is not nature that defines woman; it is she who defines herself by dealing with nature on her own account in her emotional life.





Sulamith Firestone (1979, 19)

The reproduction of the species by one sex for the benefit of both would be replaced by (at least the option of) artificial reproduction: children would be born to both sexes equally, or independently of either. . . . The division of labour would be ended by the elimination of labour altogether (through cybernetics). The tyranny of the biological family would be broken. And with it the psychology of power.





Virtual technology

- A less controversial way to improve the work-life balance
- Both genders have a positive attitude toward virtual technology as it makes the reconciliation of work and family easier
- Nevertheless, it prolongs the workday





Flexibility

- Good jobs are characterised by flexibility
- Traditional definition of flexibility is problematic, in relation to virtual work, and more problematic for women than for men
- While the use of the virtual technology can increase work flexibility, this same flexibility makes it increasingly difficult for employees to disengage themselves from work.



“It never ends ... or, yes, when I fall asleep.... I don't quit at five because I continue to work at home ... if there is something I want to do, or need to do, I work at night” (Female academic).



“I think it is probably more in my mind than it is in reality that I can decide when I work and where I work”

(Academic mothers with both young and grown up children).





“Last winter I worked every single evening and it was very difficult to do that, but I mean, that was just the **price that I had to pay** for leaving work so early”.

(Female professor and mother of 3 children)



When I became a 'hot shot' manager and we got kids, my wife reduced her work – and it was quite natural for her. The finances and the home became her responsibility. It just happened automatically.

(Male manager and a father of 2 small children)





Time

- A web in which people can move around, at times situated in one compartment, and sometimes in many simultaneously
- This kind of “multi-time” is important while studying women’s lives and has become more important in the virtual world





Power of time

- All time is not equal
- Those who have more power in relationships are more likely to be able to manage their own time and the time of others, and this applies to both private and public relationships.



“A long work week really means that you have a lot of time to work on things that you like, you are working on it because you **decided** to and that’s what you **like** to do, and **that’s why** you are doing it”. (Male manager and a father of 2 small children and 2 teenagers)





Space

Due to virtual work, people opt in and out of work – they are placed in many spaces simultaneously. Not only the physicality of space is evident in the office or home, but also the space of our thoughts and social relations



When I was a kid my parents worked and we had to wait until they came home to talk to them. Now the children call and ask – and you tell them,
‘Yes, love, you can have some yogurt, yes, you are allowed to do this or that’.

I don't know if this is good or bad

(Female manager)





- “I like waking up early on Saturdays and Sundays, then the kids want to watch TV. So maybe I will just take my computer and sit with them for two or three hours. I get a lot of work done and they are just ... watching television” (Professor and father of three children).



Working always and everywhere



It is important for me to work on the sofa, not in a separate room. That is actually the only way for me to use the three hours I have with my kids – I also have to use the time for work.” (A male manager).





I have always been [snaps her fingers] 4.30! I have to go home! Pick up [the kids]! I have to cook and all that stuff, but I usually start by putting my computer up at home, check if I have gotten any emails since I left and I go between [domestic] chores and work. I sit down at the computer to check [my email], maybe try to finish something, send out one or two emails, and then I maybe get disturbed again. And I am doing it whilst I am cooking or something like that”.





Female managers represent themselves as bravely taking on both the conventional private feminine role and the public masculine role instead of challenging the traditional gender order in their own families (Heikkinen, Lämsä, & Hiillos, 2013).

Rock the boat?



The gender contract remains





Conclusions

Thanks to virtual technology, women can continue to multitask – they opt in and opt out of work/family tasks, and by doing so, they can “do it all”, without challenging conventional gender roles, without threatening their marriages or the belief that they are good mothers.





Conclusions

Flexible working schedules and virtual technology perpetuate traditional gender roles and reproduce unequal gender power.

Therefore we need to understand the “psychology of power” (Firestone) in everyday life.

Virtual work is sending us back to the slogan: the personal is political!



Sunrise or sunset?

