GENDER, TELEWORK AND THE BLURRING BOUNDARIES OF WORK IN THE ERA OF PANDEMIC

Mira Karjalainen
University of Helsinki & Jyväskylä University School of Business & Economics
Spring 2020: globally almost all employees able to work from home transfer to telework
- In Finland, the pandemic pushed almost half of wage earners into telework
- European research e.g. Iceland, Portugal, and France show that corona-era housework and care have fallen mostly on women, and especially mothers
  - Studies in, e.g. Australia, Turkey, and the United States indicate the same
- Finland is considered egalitarian country regarding gender roles, equality is often taken for granted and gender mainstreaming is considered unnecessary
  - However, women do regularly more housework and Finland stands out from the Nordic model due to the lower involvement of men in childcare
RESEARCH QUESTION

**Gap:** Although studies on the effects of the corona pandemic on collective telework have already been published, the gender effects of blurring boundaries of work have not yet been sufficiently studied.

1) How experts in a long-term and full-time telework perceive the boundaries of work and their blurring, and how these evolve in prolonged telework?

2) How these experiences are gendered and how the diverse background and life situation (age, gender, family situation) of employees is reflected in these experiences?
BLURRING BOUNDARIES OF WORK

• Time & space

• Work leaking to other areas of life
  • Emotions (e.g., Hochschild 1983)
  • Friendships and networks (Fleming 2009)
  • Well-being (Cederström & Spicer 2015)
  • Spirituality (Karjalainen 2018)
  • Body (e.g., Wolkowitz 2006) and Looks (e.g., Witz et al. 2003)

...are being incorporated to the sphere of work
DATA

• Two surveys in a consulting firm operating in Finland
  • Fall 2020 (N 87) and Fall 2021 (N 94)
• Intersectional perspective (gender, age, family situation)
• Open questions: the course of the day, the pros and cons of teleworking, changes in knowledge work, and experiences of emotional, social, spiritual and aesthetic labor
• A multi-method research framework:
  • Quantitative background variables were examined quantitatively
  • Theoretically informed thematic content analysis - the qualitative intersectional approach (Braun & Clarke 2006; Guest et al. 2012)
FINDINGS

• Women reported slightly more emotional labor
• The same amount of social labor was reported by all genders
  • Women reported experiencing sense of inadequacy
• Spiritual labor was practiced evenly
  • Women experienced a bad conscience about inaction
• Teleworking had changed aesthetic labor for all genders
  • Changed was more radical with women and the ways of aesthetic labor were gendered
FINAL REMARKS

• The study showed how the practices changed during the prolonged telework, and how this was gendered

• Blurring boundaries of work and attempts to draw those boundaries become gendered, as gender and life situation are reflected in many ways in knowledge workers’ experiences on teleworking