

Home-Work Embedded in Housework

M. Andersson; 1;

1. Media and Communication, Lund U, Lund, Sweden.

Abstract: The use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to work-from-home (home-work) has been crucial for maintaining labour productivity during the pandemic. This kind of work is not new; media historical studies reveal that ICT such as the typewriter and the phone enabled home-work during the entire 20th century. The meaning and the practices of these devices have always been gendered. For example, adverts for portable typewriters in the 1930s addressed men on the move and women tethered to their kitchens (in which the portable typewriter fit) (Plotnick 2020). The typewriter, the telephone and sometimes the mimeograph were also part of the American postwar ideal suburban home that enabled the housewife/home manager to do some waged labour in-between the duties of home managing (Patton, 2019), not very different from the women who did programming from home in the 1970s (Kneese 2021). Thus, female ICT-based home-work has been embedded in and adapted to housework; a secondary activity. This history underscores the gendered preconditions of work in relation to mobility, private and public spaces, and work-from-home during the pandemic points to a need to understand this differentiation in contemporary times. A report from ILO shows, for example, that women have not only done more overwork than men, but they have also experienced mental distress to a higher degree (2021). This qualitative study of domestic labour contexts during the pandemic explores how women's home-work often remains inseparable from and embedded in housework, and considers larger relationships between gender, work, sociality, and mobility.