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## **“YES, I WILL WORK ON MY FREE TIME” – REMOTE WORK ON AMAZON MECHANICAL TURK AS THE HISTORICAL CONTINUATION OF THE EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN'S LABOR**

Bruno Moreschi  
University of São Paulo (USP), Brazil

Amanda Jurno  
Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), Brazil

Monique Lemos  
São Paulo School Foundation of Sociology and Politics (FESPSP), Brazil

In this research, we analyzed the relationship between women and Amazon Mechanical Turk (AMT) – a platform where people work remotely performing Human Intelligent Tasks. HITs are small and important tasks responsible for making Artificial Intelligence feasible, such as labeling data. In this paper we discuss how AI automation is, in fact, an opaque architecture (Pasquinelli and Joler 2020) that perpetuates gender issues in digital work.

Although the number of turkers (AMT workers) is generic, “about 500,000 registered” (AMT 2020), it is estimated that more than 2,000 can be found simultaneously in the platform (Difallah et al., 2018). This shows that we are not discussing something residual, but a crescent workforce (Kuek et al., 2015). Women proportion is not consensus and varies from 51% (Difallah et al. 2018) and 70% (Ipeirotis 2010).

This cross-disciplinary work involves the interrelation of computer science, social sciences, digital ethnography and contemporary feminist studies. The aim to understand physicalities embedded in the internet and machine learning processes relates to the concerns of the Group on Artificial Intelligence and Art (GAIA), a network of humanities researchers, programmers, and engineers located at the University of São Paulo’s Innovation Center, Brazil.

We aim to expand the studies on digital work (Gillespie 2010; Woodcock and Graham 2019; Srnicek 2017; Gray and Suri 2019; Zyskowski and Milland 2018; Difallah et al. 2018; Irani 2015), gender and intersectionality issues (Federici 2012; Collins 1997;

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Davis 2016; Ribeiro 2017) and how these two topics intersect (Haraway 1988; Atanasoski and Vora 2015; D'Ignazio and Klein 2020).

To do this, we talked to 53 women turkers using a ten-question questionnaire on AMT, in English, filtered to receive only answers from women (cis or trans<sup>1</sup>), paying US\$ 7 for the HIT — 71% more than average payment (Difallah et al. 2018). We consciously chose a relatively small number of interviewees in order to extend conversations via email, marking a “place of speech” from their standpoints (Ribeiro's 2017) – paying US\$ 7 for continuity. To avoid retaliation, we anonymized interviewees and replaced their names by first names of feminist thinkers.

Besides general AMT difficulties (e.g. low wages and high competition), women turkers stressed about having to balance housekeeping, childcare and AMT work; and about partners' lack of appreciation of AMT work and domestic labor. We also identified that anonymity, albeit not intentionally, benefits them minimally.

The concomitance between housekeeping and work at AMT appears in 80% of our interviewees, which relates to domestic work traditionally being imposed on women “into a natural attribute” (Federici 2012). This is a stressful situation, according to Patricia, 48-year-old from the US: “I am working the equivalent of a full-time job or more on AMT yet also nearly having the responsibilities of a full-time homemaker.”

The majority of women (68%) related AMT to their children. Some seek motivation to continue in them, as they use part of payment for purchasing toys – e.g. Rosa, a Brazilian 53-year-old. Others highlighted the difficulties faced when balancing AMT and childcare. Bell, a British 37-year-old single mother, reports feeling guilty and having concentration problems caused by this binomial.

A total of 10 women (out of 53) pointed out situations in which both works are not appreciated as real work – in some cases by their partners. This not only reinforces Federici (2012) consideration of housework as the “most pervasive manipulation” that capitalism has ever perpetrated, but it points to an increase in this violence – now in digital work as well.

Four women indicated that they feel safer when working on the platform because their bodies are not exposed. Lélia, a 48-year-old from the US highlights the fact of not being harassed as an “AMT advantage”. But, it is important to note that anonymity emerges as a coincidence since the lack of individualization of the AMT workers directly relates to employers/requesters' profit pursuit.

The problems pointed out by our research are the result of a total dependence of these women workers on rules and procedures that were built in a totally random way by Amazon and by requesters on AMT. Understanding and approaching women on this platform is envisioning possible alternatives for more independent and fair work spaces on the internet.

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<sup>1</sup> We didn't get answers from any self-declared LGBTQIA+ women.

Work cooperatives was suggested as a possibility by one of the interviewees, following the idea that “it is the common social location in hierarchical relations of power that creates groups and not the result of collective decisions made by individuals of these groups” (Collins 1997). As Grada, Brazilian, 37-years-old points out: “The transformation would be possible if we included the turkers in the construction of a new online platform.”

From what we have heard, we were able to perceive not only the specific problems pointed out by these workers, but something more structural. AMT seems to be the prototype of a new work reality that, remotely, makes its workers insecure and dependent on rules created without their participation. In this sense, AMT created something precious to capitalism: keep the women's labor power available for unpaid domestic services and, at the same time, make it profitable for several companies.

In the so-called “late capitalism” (Crary 2016) or “surveillance capitalism” (Zuboff 2019), there are now not only the specific flows of patriarchy being managed by women, but also the organizing and maintaining contemporary information flows (Castells 2008). About this control and profit from the women labor force at home, Judith, 37-year-old French turker, sums it up: “Yes, I will work on my free time.”

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