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Gender and Time at the Top

Cultural Constructions of Time in High-Level Careers and Homes

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ABSTRACT The demand for long working hours in leading positions is seen as a primary obstacle for women entering decision-making, leading to suggestions that public policy support better compatibility between work life and home. The paradox of high-level positions is that while leaders are said to have it all in terms of autonomy and self-determination, they are subject to significant temporal constraints. This article explores the character of the time of women and men pursuing high-level careers in business and politics in Belgium, where state support for the domestic sphere is high, and yet women's advance in management and politics has been relatively low. This research is based on a questionnaire survey and career history interviews. Women and men engaged in demanding careers organize their domestic worlds in segmented and rationalized ways, while their work has the character of more open and fluid time. This article suggests that assumptions about the character of time in different spheres of life need to be reviewed before further efforts are made to use family-friendly policies to increase women's presence in decision-making.

KEY WORDS Belgium ♦ careers ♦ gender ♦ management ♦ politics ♦ time

GENDER CHALLENGES TO TIME AT THE TOP: THE BELGIAN CASE

The recipe to increase the number of women in leading positions is 'family-friendly policy'. This mantra has become commonplace. Without such policies, women aspiring to leadership are doomed to suffer 'Baby

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Hunger' (Hewlett, 2002). Yet in Belgium, which has one of the most family-friendly state policies, offering considerable support to families with children and working partners (Korpi, 2000; Singh, 1998), women are still underrepresented in top positions. While the state supports the normal working day of nine to five, the demands of top posts as they are structured in Belgium go far beyond this, both in terms of the hours necessary and the kind of presence demanded. These expectations of commitment undermine the best laid efforts to create an equal playing field for men and women through support of the care needs of families with children.

Why is it that good and affordable childcare is not enough to solve the mystery of the woman at the top? It has something to do with the nature of leadership time – a shorthand to refer to the character of the working time of those in high-level positions – which has parallels with the kind of time expected in caring situations. Both leadership time and caring time rest on implicit gender arrangements. To carry out leadership tasks as constructed in Belgium and elsewhere assumes total availability, which parallels the uncontained demands of care work and domesticity. In practice, total freedom to work can only be achieved through a private support system that goes beyond simple nine to five childcare. In exploring the dilemma this creates among male and female Belgian top managers and politicians, the gendered asymmetry that allows men to mobilize female altruism while women have at best been able to get men to split housework and care, or pay for someone else to do it, emerges as significant in explaining persistent inequalities in who holds decision-making positions.

International literature on women and men in management provides many relevant insights to help interpret the Belgian situation. Equally, international comparison indicates that not only does Belgium have a high level of preschool support for families, but also high expectations of commitment in terms of hours from its top-level personnel. Belgian management is constructed to mean more than full-time employment, and hard-working means long-working. 'Managerial and supervisory jobs are *de facto* if not *de jure*, reserved for employees prepared to work full-time hours' (Perrons, 2000: 33) and more. The Belgian executive is expected to be more hours on the job than others in Europe (Vacature, 2001; Woodward and Lyon, 2000) while the gender contract in terms of housework remains virtually unchallenged (Glorieux and Vanderweyer, 2001). The question for discussion is the extent to which the Belgian construction of leadership time as extremely long time is made possible by the combination of these elements. The support of both the private roles of women and the public role of the state underwrites the ability of corporations and the public to demand heroic efforts in terms of hours from their leadership. Given that there is international variation in 'how

much time is necessary to be a real manager or top politician', one can ask whether it would be possible for the Belgians to modify their culture of heavy time demands on their leaders, while still maintaining their state support for childcare during the working week. This could well achieve a better gender balance at the top.

This article explores the character of time – at work and in relation to home – in the lives of people who work in top positions in business and politics. This single-country analysis demonstrates not only that women filling these positions destabilize assumptions about the gender-appropriateness of leadership/care, but also that the gendered articulation of temporal regimes varies by sector. The interviews upon which this article is based document the processes through which women – and to some extent men – are pushed to represent, and indeed live, their home lives and family responsibilities as contained within emotional and temporal boundaries. Their accounts demonstrate that childcare and domestic time are organized in segmented and rationalized ways, while their paid work has the character of more open and fluid time. The findings parallel that noted by Lucy Bailey in her study of the transition of working women to motherhood, in which women use 'the terminology of work to describe the mothering day' (Bailey, 2000: 63). However, Bailey disagrees with Hochschild's (1997) argument that work has become home and vice versa, emphasizing the 'interspatial' connections between the two spheres. The research presented in this article lends support to the notion that the character of work time is more open than home time for those at the top, but the comparative analysis by sector shows that different forms of gender relations in business and politics make a difference as to what can be made visible about family life. The interviewees' accounts evidence both the reduction of family life to a task orientation – moments slotted into diaries – *and* efforts to step outside of this, notwithstanding a concomitant unbounded openness to work.

THINKING ABOUT TIME AND PARADOXES OF GENDER AND LEADERSHIP

Time is a major obstacle for people on their way to the top in Europe who hope to achieve some kind of balance between private life (social and biological reproduction) and work. Some European governments, such as in France, have bravely attempted to regulate working time, while the European Union 1993 Working Time Directive stipulates that the maximum work week be limited to 48 hours. Although work time limitation schemes may have been launched to increase the number of jobs, such policies also have implications for women in leadership, as one of the main reasons given today for the lack of women in top positions is the

adverse implications of heavy time demands at work for the enjoyment of other spheres of life. Despite discussions about the value of balance for creativity and productivity, the time demands on those at the highest levels of organizations are very high and show little sign of decline (Woodward and Lyon, 2000).

In spite of trends towards the general segmentation and rationalization of the temporal order in all sectors of public life (Zerubavel, 1981), top managers and politicians occupy a place which allows for very little separation between work and other kinds of time, and one which seems to incorporate features of both the linear and more fluid frames, both the pressure of the clock and the demands of the task. The very contradiction in top people's time is that time autonomy is coupled with time constraint: leaders have power over time and yet are caught in time. A paradox of high-level positions is that while leaders are said to have it all in terms of autonomy and self-determination, they are in many ways subject to significant temporal constraints. If the leader needs time autonomy in the workplace to be able to make the investment when appropriate, this means that the time demands of other places where process-oriented tasks occur, such as in the home, must be kept at bay. The more-than-full-time ethos that has been characteristic of professions such as law, medicine or laboratory science, and of the top civil society jobs – what Coser and Coser (1974) term the 'greedy institutions' – is also the case for the top functions in business and politics. Seron and Ferris (1995: 23) note that professionals are supposedly always on-the-job, and thus must be able to ensure themselves of release from private obligations to be able to deal with work crises. The time demands of leadership – in hours and availability – subordinate all other aspects of life to work, both producing and structuring non-work time (Adam, 1995); anything left when the job is done is residual, not a legitimate base for a competing time claim (Zerubavel, 1981: 151). Insofar as a private social support system is assumed to underpin such career commitment, leadership time has inhibited women in their career progress to the highest levels.

However, families are also 'greedy institutions'. Hence the paradox that even though the state can provide care during normal work hours, as it does in Belgium, this still may not be sufficient to make it possible for family members to survive effectively at the top, unless there is also a change in the ways that top functions are constructed. Although a higher proportion than average of women in top positions do not have children or (to a lesser extent) live with partners, a significant challenge emerges from the fact that managerial men increasingly have highly educated partners themselves with demanding working lives. Separating the special demands of home time and leadership time will become more and more difficult.

In the literature on time, 'masculine' time has been described as linear, easily broken into its component units, of single usage, dimension and direction, fitting well with the rational working practices of the Weberian bureaucracy (Ramsey and Parker, 1992) – even if paradoxically this contrasts with the character of time for those at the top. On the contrary, 'process' time, denoted as 'feminine', is characterized as 'relational, continuous . . . and cyclical . . . quite unlike the abstract and decontextualized notion of time that is readily measured, commodified and controlled. Mediated through significant others, feminine time is shared rather than personal, and relational rather than linear' (Knights and Odih, 1995: 213–14). Applied to careers, Linda Hantrais contrasts the linear temporality of careers for men climbing up the ladder, to the more cyclical paths of their female colleagues (Hantrais, 1993: 139). This conception of time as a simple gendered dichotomy (Wilson Schaef, 1992) is flawed, however, and this dualism cannot adequately express the complexity of time (Adam, 1995: 37). Such conceptions of circular vs linear, feminine vs masculine time rely on an unproblematic mapping of masculine and feminine time onto the already problematic dichotomy of linear and cyclical or process time,¹ polarities which do not capture everyday life, especially for those at top levels in business and politics (Odih, 1999).

So what are the implications if women who do reach high-level positions do not enjoy the traditional breadwinner setup in reverse, and also have family commitments? Similarly, what do men in dual-career couples do, since this model is increasingly replacing the male breadwinner model at all levels of society (Blossfeld and Drobnic, 2001)? For both men and women in these positions, we can ask: what are their time orientations in the different dimensions of their lives?

TALKING TO MEN AND WOMEN AT THE TOP ABOUT WORK AND FAMILY TIME

There are few women in the really top positions in Western Europe. To analyse the issue of time, leadership and gender, both men and women must be consulted. As time demands vary in different sectors, comparative research is important. The International Comparative Leadership Study² surveyed men and women in key decision-making positions in business and politics in more than 25 countries worldwide (Vianello and Moore, 2000). Top women in the highest positions in both business and politics were matched to an equal number of men by age, political party/economic sector and occupational level. In Belgium, 75 leaders participated in the study.³ Fifteen also talked about their careers at length with the authors. A spread of interview subjects was sought with variation along the dimensions of organizational/ occupational careers;

age/generation (following Apfelbaum, 1993); and type of firm/function: family, banking, personnel.

Family forms are obviously relevant to a discussion of time.⁴ For the Belgian leaders, the breadwinner and dual-career household models predominate. A third alternative of living without a partner is represented among nearly one-quarter of the women in our survey, but just one man. This situation is rather typical for women in management (Parasuraman and Greenhaus, 1993). The majority of women's partnerships are class-homogeneous, dual-career situations. Of the male politicians in the survey, half of their wives/partners are not in paid employment; and 20 percent work part-time. Only two of the wives/partners of the businessmen work full-time, more than half are in part-time work, and one-third are not in paid employment.

All the men except two have children. Of the women, 19 percent of the politicians and 28 percent of the businesswomen are childless. Men predominantly utilize the childcare of their partners (politicians 63 percent, businessmen 70 percent), other family members, private help, or a combination of these. With the exception of two female politicians, whose partners have taken major responsibility for the care of their children, women rely on privately paid help or publicly financed care, to a lesser extent on other family members, or on a combination of these. The advantage of using family members is that their affective concern shapes their willingness to remain available. In the case of paid help, the employment contract rests more on a linear conception of time focused on clock-time and related to fixed working hours, with clauses for exceptional circumstances. Professional demands come at short notice, and crises may be more of a problem for women leaders as they lack a flexible family backup at home. Even though Belgian public services are a great help, they do not cover the unexpected. The limits of those relying primarily on public care rather than having an infinitely available partner are thus more rigidly bound; *and* the character of time in domestic life may become more rationalized and segmented.

The Character of Work Time: Availability and Autonomy

The sum of the respondents' hours regularly exceeds the legal working week and extends through the weekend, with an average working week of nearly 60 hours.⁵ Leadership time clearly differs for those in politics and business. It is quantitatively more demanding for politicians. More than 75 percent of the politicians work 60 or more hours per week, while this is only true for 10 percent of the business respondents. Businessmen state a slightly longer working week than their female counterparts (56 and 51 hours respectively).⁶ However, it should be noted that the hardest-working business men worked very hard: 18 percent of the men worked

70 hours or more (whereas no women worked this long a week).⁷ Among politicians, there are no gender differences in the mean hours worked, although here the long hours were clocked by the women, with nearly one-third working more than 80 hours per week (32 percent vs 14 percent men); and more than one-fifth of the female politicians state that their working week exceeds 90 hours (21 percent women vs 9 percent men).

Many interviewees took pride in reporting their long working days, reflecting the Belgian cultural value that long work means hard work and that leadership can only be done full-time. At a surface level, interviewees lament increases in hours and responsibilities. However, moral boundaries (Lamont, 1992) also guide the management of time, e.g. the importance of rising early (male banker); or of never sleeping while there was still a file to study (male politician). Claims to long working hours are expressed both with irony and self-importance. Yet some do voice their sense of being taken over, carried along – ‘once you’re in the system, it’s difficult to get out, honestly speaking’ (male businessman) – in their reports of heroic schedules. There is also discomfort at the insularity such time commitments produce, with the implications for personal well-being and family life. Guilt weighs heavily, especially when the precarious resolutions of divergent time demands are shattered by children.

‘Leadership time’ is greedy. As we noted earlier, it may be seen as analogous to the total commitments demanded in some caring situations. Although many men and women would prefer a less demanding working life in terms of hours, notwithstanding a financial sacrifice (Jacobs and Gerson, 1998; Schor, 1993), it is difficult to identify more than isolated instances of challenge to the privileging of work in the lives of professionals (Pahl, 1993). Many male executives are complicit in the construction of time binds and live in a gendered nexus of secretaries and wives that allows them to put in their hours in a ‘privileged zone, protected from unwanted interruptions’ from normal daily life (Hochschild, 1997: 58). Availability has symbolic dimensions too, such as signalling inclusion in an elite (Fuchs Epstein et al., 1998; Fuchs Epstein, 2000), which underpins working long hours.

Availability can take different forms at different points in career progression. While the expanded work day is a fact of life throughout the political or managerial career, the meaning of that time differs: ‘Junior status requires time to show commitment, senior status requires time to fulfil responsibilities’ (Seron and Feris, 1995: 26). The junior manager or politician indicates his or her potential by being seen to ‘be there’ in a quantitative sense, by visible availability. Time functions as a crude proxy for performance and commitment at this point in the career (Fuchs Epstein et al., 1998). On the way up, our findings suggest that both women and men have to prove themselves through ‘tests of availability’. The long hours to be put in during this testing period fall just at the time

when many are starting families, and here even the very long hours of public childcare provided in Belgium cannot totally cover the time a parent is supposed to be available. In business, once these 'tests' have been successfully passed, and once people have 'served time' in the lower ranks of the organization, some report increased time autonomy. Nevertheless, some refer to the meaninglessness of this autonomy in the context of such high demands; while others still see an ever-growing increase in time demands. In the world of politics, the electoral process poses the availability test on a cyclical basis. Politicians emphasize the importance of presence in the eyes of the party executive, and the electorate.

The following two examples articulate the operation of availability well. There are two key dimensions to both these accounts, one concerned with gender and the expectations of the business world and the other with ideals of family-work relations.

Gender and Availability Example 1: The Businesswoman and Family

Interviewer: OK, so in your case, why, in your opinion, have you been so successful?

Respondent: . . . [the availability of my husband for domestic responsibilities], that made things a lot easier at the time when I had to be available, when I had to show that I was available . . . because a priori people believe that a woman will not be available enough for a senior management post. . . I felt very keenly that I had to make this demonstration of availability, in terms of time and in spirit.

Interviewer: How did you do that?

Respondent: As I say, I was lucky, my husband was available, I had got a system organized which wasn't easy . . . I felt very strongly that it was like that, that I had to behave . . . and when I was appointed . . . there was one or other colleague who was sceptical about it, there was one in particular who always found a way to see me at 5.30 in the evening (*laughter*) and so, well, we talked of this and that, and so he used to say 'Oh, I admire you', I said 'Why?' 'Oh, but you are so available, what do you do to organize yourself, your children, etc.?' as if by chance he always wanted to see me at the end of the day, and I had well understood that he was testing me . . . and then at a certain moment he said that 'Oh I admire you etc.' I said it's a question of organization and then he didn't do it again (*laughter*). And today if I really need time for my children or whatever, I take it and it's not a problem because . . . I have got myself accepted . . . (Woman personnel director)

This extract shows the performance of the sorts of gender distinctions which permeate many organizational cultures and practices. The male colleague tests the female director by requesting meetings late in the day, perhaps in an attempt to find the limits of her availability, as evidence of her unsuitability for this role about which he is clearly ambivalent. It is a

mechanism of exclusion not only of her, but in pointing to her extraordinariness also makes clear the low claim of others like her (i.e. mothers) to high-level posts. He positions her in an apparently positive light – through his stated admiration – which effectively serves to make more visible the differences between them, and undermine her legitimacy in the world of senior management. She refuses the subject position on offer, that of the overloaded working mother beset with difficulties and obstacles. Rather, she asserts, as if it can be taken for granted, that rational planning is all that is required. Her domestic world can be made to fit in with the time demands of her professional life; she can act as if she is free from constraint (to do so she must rely on the availability of her husband!), she can contain the potentially unbounded claims of her domestic life, and thus diminish the threat they signal.

This single extract illustrates several aspects under discussion including the oft-concealed mechanisms of support which sustain the long working week and the appeal to rational organization to resolve competing demands. This example can also be seen as gendered insofar as the test is specifically directed at a woman with children. Some of the representations of women colleagues or subordinates in the accounts from men suggest that the legitimacy of women/mothers in high-level positions is a continual preoccupation. One banker wonders how it is that some women are perfectly organized while others are not at all so. Even with the same number of children, and in the same professional situation, he comments that this difference is ‘curious’ (even though he later surmises that the husband is perhaps the problem!).

Gender and Availability Example 2: The Businessman with Family

In the following example, geographical mobility, crucial for advancement in many organizations, is seen to pose difficulties for a man in a dual-career partnership. This demonstration of availability is also tied to norms of masculinity in which the ideal of the breadwinner model, with responsibility for decisions affecting the family, is central. A man who mentioned family as being a reason for not being available for a post abroad would be seen as generally incapable, ‘as he could not even manage his wife’ (male manager). Not being able to demonstrate authority and the associated flexibility for career moves is thereby problematic at several levels. In addition, the stint abroad is often talked about as a rite of passage, from boyhood to male maturity (Roper, 1994). A male director of human resources with a professional wife related that his career had been affected as a result of his refusal to follow the standard path. He comments:

. . . we’ve always blocked each other, career-wise. Actually, I don’t mean career-wise . . . it was a question of flexibility. You understand that in this company, flexibility is important. One must go where one is needed most,

which requires moving. I've always been able to resist that, because my wife was there . . . I think that this has restricted my career in a way. Otherwise, I might have – of course, one never knows for sure – I might have risen higher, moved up faster . . . I don't know.

He goes on to talk about the agreement within the family and its costs. He shifts between understanding and respect for his wife, and the hint of resentment as her arguments are difficult to counter – first she refuses mobility in the interests of the children's education, then in order to retain her financial independence. He continues 'But back then, they told me that it was all right, but I would have to wait longer, and that I would regret it later.' Ironically this particular manager worked for an organization noted for its family friendliness!

Relationships between Home and Work: Separation, Spillover and Strategy

As we discussed earlier, leadership time and care time are similarly voracious in their demands, but are often assumed to be totally separate spheres. However, when leadership time takes over all the hours of the day, it very often comes into conflict with private time, and challenges any idea of separation. Yet the Belgian leaders seldom indicated that work demands were in conflict with their private lives, even though after-school childcare was a constraining issue. How is this possible? The malleability of time through redefinition is one strategy for handling the spillover of private demands into the arena of the public and vice versa. Play becomes work and work becomes play. The experience of work/non-work conflict can be mediated by identity (Thompson and Bunderson, 2001). It is edifying here to compare the possibilities for men and women in politics with those in business. Within Belgian politics there is a symbolic place for motherhood such that family life does not have to be hidden away. On the contrary, women politicians are open to public scrutiny as mothers in electoral campaigns (notably in the Catholic PSC/CVP). Female political credibility is in effect linked to maternity. One politician recounted how she had a leaflet produced for an electoral campaign using text and photos of a day in her life, which showed her fulfilling traditional feminine roles such as taking her children to school as well as performing political functions, depicting her as an ordinary woman, one who would understand the voters' concerns. Motherhood seems to be central to symbolic representations of political life although tensions continue to arise in practice.

For male politicians, being seen to be a 'family man' is often what counts for the electorate, but this does not imply spending time with the family. This is culturally associated with being reliable and trustworthy, and thereby having a loyal wife and children (Kimmel, 2000: 173–8). This

image emphasizes the provision of material support rather than physical presence, thereby facilitating separation between home and work. Long working hours may be interpreted as fulfilling this ideal even if the cost for men is high in terms of their participation in family life. Family commitment underpins working time but does not impinge upon it in an everyday sense.

In business, a norm of masculinity based on uninvolved parenting and total work identification is applied to men and women alike. While many women talked explicitly about their husbands and children (or the absence of children) – the fact that their situations challenge traditional gender arrangements means that they have been forced to confront these issues within their relationships and at work. The men were relatively silent on the organization of their domestic lives. One example is of a banker who never referred to his domestic life, even though he describes his day as starting in the office at 7.15 a.m. and his responsibilities as often extending into the weekend. He recognized the implications for his secretary – ‘she no longer has children to look after etc. – that helps a little’ – but never mentioned his wife. This omission is probably not an effort to conceal, but rather evidence of the operation of taken-for-granted assumptions about domestic arrangements.

Resolutions of the problems posed by the timetables and temporalities of careers and family life are often framed in terms of organization, rational and efficient planning, time-budgeting and speed. Time is thus commodified, and disciplined. This is something which emerges most often in the interviews with women, pointing to several familiar gender distinctions (e.g. women’s persistent responsibility for the domestic sphere, and the counterpart of men’s relative inattention to the organization of the home). Even the businessman in the dual-career couple in the previous example stated that in the case of the illness of children, it would be his wife who took time off work. There are tensions between the chaos of managing work and family, and the emphasis on rational organization as resolution, at the level of everyday tasks, and timing across the life course, in effect the triumph of individual capacities. As the following businesswoman puts it:

I have organized myself in such a way that there are as few conflicts as possible. Otherwise you can’t keep it up. Otherwise you give up on it after the first 10 years. . . . Yes. I don’t think you can get there otherwise. I think that that is the most important thing that I try to tell women, everything is a matter of organization and what you want. . . . I also say it is easy for me to talk because I don’t have any children. . . . But organization is very important. At the beginning of my career, I invested a lot of money in household appliances, in comfort at home, in a cleaning lady and all those kinds of things.

Later in the interview, she frames everything in relation to the career, i.e. it is the career that sets the time frame for other life decisions.

Respondent: It's a matter of timing. . . . And there again, I'll say it's a matter of organization. Of when it can be done and when it can't . . .

Interviewer: Yes. You can also see it with women in higher functions . . . who have chosen the wrong partner, as you said . . .

Respondent: Yes, I think that the choice of partners and then the timing of your, of your family, of your family life. And I think that with children it can be done quite easily, but you have to consider when and how you are going to do that. And when, in your career, when exactly it fits in best. Well, that's a very rational approach to the whole thing, of course.

Organization also has its limits. Some say that they had a system, but that it sometimes broke down, that it worked in 'normal time' but not when there was a crisis. This can be read as an instance of conflict, apparent when the limits of organization are pushed. We see here (and earlier) that the strategy of this businesswoman for appearing and being available at work is contingent on the functioning of her system of domestic arrangements, which, she explains, relies on the commitment and support of others, mostly her husband. She talks explicitly about his role in supporting her career in this way, the fact that they have worked this out in direct contrast to traditional roles makes it more present in her account.

If some interviewees talk in terms of only just coping – 'we manage all that day by day' (female politician) – for others, the condensation of time is presented positively. In the case of a banker (the one who discusses the flexibility of his secretary earlier on), we hear a new vocabulary of intensity through the emphasis on quality time in the family. He comments:

I am not sure that it's necessary to spend a lot of time with one's children, but the time spent, albeit limited, is very rich and very interesting, very interesting. Maybe more interesting than if I were with them for a lot longer.

A number of women also assert that they are there for their children when they are really needed, that if they do not do all that a mother-housewife might, they manage to be there for the essentials, even if they also admitted that this sounds unlikely and contradictory in the context of what they described about the timetables of their lives. The space in which action is unconditional is condensed, and the ongoing negotiations of pressure, guilt and success are strained.

Leadership time also means lack of time for oneself. One makes money but has no time to spend it. The time pressure affects the sense of entitlement to even small pleasures. For example, a female politician recounts how she no longer reads (for pleasure):

I would enjoy reading a book, a book that just came out, and then, I say to myself, no, no, no, I can't because I have my work. . . . This has become a failing of my personality, to privilege all that is work and rigour.

Here there is no time outside work. For now, everything is constructed in relation to work time, which has become deeply embedded in the psyche, a constant background preoccupation, whether on holiday or at a Sunday afternoon family gathering.

Interviewer: Are there times when you say, OK, today I won't work, or is it as if work fills all possible time?

Respondent: . . . work fills all the time. It, it's . . . sometimes Sunday, Sunday especially since I have grandchildren, Sundays often I go to my daughter's house for tea in the afternoon. But even so always I worry that I cannot stay too long, that I have my work . . . (*laughter*). My daughter always says to me, but you are always looking at your watch (*laughter*). That's true, I think that really work has invaded me. . . . I don't know if I should regret it or . . . that's how it is, that's how it is. . . . And even on holiday I always have this worry.

THE MALEABILITY OF LEADERSHIP TIME? IMPLICATIONS FOR GENDER BALANCE IN TOP FUNCTIONS

The character of working time of those in high-level positions has implications for the organization of domestic and other non-work time. On the basis of the material presented here, performing the availability expected in the present high-demand Belgian cultural construction of top functions implies an increased rationalization and segmentation of domestic life. Inevitably, the greedy time of the top will come into conflict with the greedy time of the private world. Neither seems likely to subordinate itself to the discipline of the clock. Sick children and political crises can both go deep into the night. Family-friendly policies that legitimate and limit the working day, as well as providing cover for the everyday problems of childcare or care of elders can offer a good beginning. They make the time crunch a matter for discussion. Such services are richly provided by the Belgian state, and sometimes supplemented by the purchase of further services. Still, assumptions about the relationships between market, state and family in the provision of services for elites clearly need some rethinking, as do the symbolic expectations of those in top positions. Those at the top are imagined to rely on the market more than others, to buy the necessary flexibility. The findings of this research suggest that this does indeed happen but not without problems. Market services cannot simply substitute for family ones. There is a different logic of commitment in operation, including the 'person-specificity' of care (Addis, 2002). The state and the market together are still not sufficient to totally replace a homemaker, the traditional figure who puts in the kind of

work in the home that the always-available high-level leader is expected to put in on the job.

Belgium daily newspapers and sociologists (*DeMorgen*, 2000; Geldof, 2001) write about business leaders who have 'downshifted' (*onthaasten*), a neologism coined for workaholics who have left the rat race to live differently. However, the extent of such practices appears, on the basis of the research discussed in this article, to be rather limited. As we have seen, leadership positions in business and politics in Belgium, as elsewhere, have been constructed on the basis of the availability of a private support system at home. Women's entry into leadership positions destabilizes the implicit gendered arrangements underpinning this construction of leadership careers. Our findings show that women in senior positions are in homogeneous relationships, i.e. their partners occupy similarly high-level positions. From our sample, it appears that a similar trend for men is not yet visible, but the implications are significant, given the tendencies for younger men to marry women from their own educational level and class and the increasing educational level of women. In other words, if dual-career couples continue to increase in number, it is unlikely that time orientations at the top can remain unchanged (Hantrais, 1993; Jacobs and Gerson, 1998). Some optimism can be found in our findings to indicate that expectations for top functions in the sectors of business and politics do differ. A further cause for hope is that the amount of hours considered normal in top functions varies among industrialized countries (Woodward and Lyon, 2000). This variation demonstrates that management is possible even if one works less than 50 hours a week. If time is culturally constructed; then the time at the top can also be rethought. Policy is the first step, but changing gender relations and expectations may lead to the ultimate challenge and to change, so that the desirable gender equality in leading positions is finally achieved.

NOTES

1. The common division of time, and especially the hegemony of linear 'clock-time', still has profound implications for human freedom and the organization of everyday life. Italian scholars in particular have focused on how time is a structural element in gender hierarchies, and in some cities special gender-minded time plans have been put into place to lessen the conflicts between work time, school time and traffic (Belloni, 1996; Hufton and Kravaritou, 1999).
2. We would like to thank the National Fund for Scientific Research (NFWO) for financial support for Belgian participation in the Comparative Leadership Study from which these data are drawn, and the European Commission which provided support through its Human Capital and Mobility Programme (Grant Reference: CHRX-CT94-0476).
3. Business: $N = 32$ (12 males, 21 females); Politics: $N = 43$ (22 males, 21 females).

4. As François de Singly's (1994) findings have informed us, married women pay a higher price in career terms than men.
5. This level of working hours is considered by some authors, e.g. Seron and Ferris (1995), to be a threshold, beyond which the time demands of other dimensions of life become difficult to manage.
6. Self-reporting studies such as those run by the Flemish magazine *Vacature* (2001) indicate that women top managers work slightly less overtime than male managers.
7. Similar findings were reported in the study organized by *Vacature* magazine, based on voluntary return of a questionnaire or online participation among the readership. In the top levels a working week easily reached a median of 60 hours, and 70-hour weeks among the chief executives were not unusual. Women on the average seemed to work fewer hours, but were probably in lower positions (*Vacature*, 2001).

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