Family and Career in Science

Edited by
Sven Hendrix

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## Content – Family and Career in Science

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Introduction

Sven Hendrix

Combining a successful career in science and a happy and healthy family life is a challenge for early stage researchers (PhD students, postdocs) as well as experienced scientists. In 2013 the Flemish universities organized a joint symposium on “Families in Science” in Brussels to bring together researchers who investigate the impact of modern academic life on scientists and their families as well as ‘practitioners’ who present a personal testimonial on how they handle their academic career and their family life. In order to make some of these findings and testimonials available for a broader audience several speakers agreed to summarize their ideas and perspectives in this book.

This unique mix of perspectives allows us to get a more complex view about the unspoken rules and concepts we live with in the modern scientific world and includes advice on how to handle the dilemmas we all face.

Ann Van Soom’s testimonial combines a personal perspective on her family history with a concrete ‘seven point plan’ to combine career and family.

Marnix Beyen argues that academics who want to combine their academic work with family life are better off when their partner is also in academia.

Sven Hendrix summarizes twelve effective strategies how to handle the challenges and pitfalls of a successful scientific career with a healthy family life.

Marloes van Engen and colleagues review two studies they have performed at a Dutch university. Firstly, a case study on individual strategies to handle conflicting norms about parenting and academic excellence. Secondly, a study on organizational norms which define how work and care are combined in academia.

Lutz Steiner gives a concise introduction to culture theory and investigates strategies for dealing with cultural differences when moving to another country as a family.

Patrizia Zanoni argues that the perspective of ‘multiple accountabilities’ of academics is better suited to describe the challenges of combining the different roles academics have to play in their families, in their social life and at work.
including a critical analysis of gendered views in this context.

Jean-luc Doumont discusses stereotypes about men related to the concept of work-life balance and how current approaches to avoid gender discrimination may make things even worse. He gives an example how to break through these stereotypes.

Corinna Onnen chose a sociological perspective and describes the acceleration of work as a key element in society which sets the modern family under pressure.

We hope that this book will help you to combine a happy family life and a successful career in science!

Sven Hendrix, Hasselt, 01.06.2015
Career and family: a happy combination?

A testimonial

Ann Van Soom

Figure 1: Family in the fifties of the 20th century. My grandparents were both teachers – my grandmother put her career on hold while the children were young.
Career and family: a happy combination?

A testimonial

Ann Van Soom

When I was a ten year-old, I already knew that someday I wanted to become a veterinarian. Dogs, cats, horses, cattle, rabbits, pigs: I loved them all and I tried to keep all of them as pets (if not for my parents they would live in my room for all I cared!). Walking dogs, riding horses, petting cats and breeding rabbits: I decided that all these hobbies would become my profession in later life!

Little did I know that petting dogs was not what a veterinarian actually does for a living! A veterinarian I became alright – a child’s wish come true, but my career developed somewhat different from what I envisioned it to be as a child.

When I graduated, now 25 years ago, I had learnt by that time that farm animals are not pets but are kept for economic reasons and small animals are in some cases not real pets either, but are treated as humans. Since my real interest was focused on how an animal developed and behaved, I therefore decided that starting up a veterinary practice was not really my thing and I successfully applied for a PhD position in Ghent, Belgium to study in vitro fertilization in cattle. I was very happy to start scientific work in this new and interesting area of research. I think many events in life are caused by being on the right place at the right time. There are probably several ways to lead a happy life if you take advantage of the opportunities that you meet along the way and if you do not regret the decisions that you have made.

At that time I must admit I did not actively pursue an academic career in veterinary medicine. Today however, I am a full professor in animal reproduction and happily married to Hans, who is a full professor in animal virology. Together we have four wonderful children, Elise (21), Wannes (19), Willem (15) and Cato (10). When I look back upon my career and my family I sometimes even wonder myself: “How did this all happen?”

I will try to explain some of it in the following paragraphs.
Many young scientists wonder whether it is possible to combine a successful academic career with a family. It is often said with some dismay that in academia, there is no place for family life, but I believe that in this day and age, both women and men can indeed choose to have both, but only under certain conditions.

In earlier days, it was much more difficult for a woman than for a man to combine her work and her family. Women were most of the time working inside the house and looking after the children while men were having a "real job". However, some evolutions in the course of the 20th century made it more easy for women to continue working whilst raising children.

**Contraception and the Catholic church in the 20th Century**

My grandmother was born in 1907. She was an elementary school teacher. She married my grandfather in 1931 and they got eleven children. She stopped to teach but started again after my youngest uncle was old enough to go to school, when she was about 45-50 (Figure 1). In those days it was not possible for a woman to combine a family and a career. The main reason for this was the large size of the families – reliable contraception was not widely available, and child mortality rates were much lower than they had been in the nineteenth century. Moreover, since the Catholic Church preached against contraception, there was not much that could be done to reduce the number of births except for abstinence.

My mother was born in 1941. She was a kindergarten teacher. At that time, it was one of the highest educations for girls – university was not an option, despite the fact that she was a bright student. She married my father in 1963.
and when I was born in the sixties, the contraceptive pill was already available to women, allowing them to limit the size of their family and to do family planning. The influence of the church was not so important anymore. My sister is 3 years my junior, and my brother 7 years (Figure 2). Since my mother was a teacher with similar working hours and holidays as her children, she was able to combine her career and her family. As a child, I have never experienced any problem with the fact that my mother was not at home: in fact, she was all day with me in the school, so I sometimes wished she wasn’t there when I had been naughty!

Today, the problems that my grandmother and mother faced (many children, no general access for women to the university) are not an issue anymore. All women have the opportunity to go to university, to decide about the number of children they will have, and if they want, they can choose to combine academia and family life.

**Career and family in the 21st century**

Contemporary women who pursue an academic career start out as a PhD student. We can easily appreciate that over the last 20 years, the percentage of female PhD students is equal to that of male students (Figure 3).

![Figure 3: Evolution of PhD degrees according to gender at Ghent University between 1984-2006](image)

However, if we look at the figures of the number of professors under 40 according to gender it is obvious that women are underrepresented at all faculties (Figure 4).

![Figure 4: Professors at Ghent University of 40 years and younger according to faculty and gender](image)

It appears that the most successful women with an academic career belong to one of the following three groups:
1. They have no children.
2. They have a partner and children but they have a partner that works at home.
3. They have a partner and children and both partners pursue an academic career.

However, many women in their thirties leave the rat race at some time point after their PhD or postdoc in order to establish a family (the biological clock!) and in fact they do not return to academia. This is not necessary and it can be prevented. I therefore propose my seven point plan.

**Seven point plan to combine a career and a family**

1. **Don’t put your career on hold to have children!**

We decided to have children and start a family while I was still working on my PhD. The two first were born two years apart during my PhD. I continued on a Postdoc and I started to look for a permanent academic position. Again by some lucky coincidence and because my boss stood behind me, I could apply for a position as an assistant professor at the same department of reproduction and I signed my contract in 1999, with my third baby in the Maxi-Cosi. After the birth of the youngest in 2004, I became a full professor in 2008 and head of department in 2011. This may seem a quite easy road to go if you read the lines written above but it wasn’t. After each baby I suffered a kind of baby blues, which expressed itself as an overwhelming urge to stay home and become a housewife and a proper mom, grow vegetables in the garden and leave the science for what it was. I was also thinking about starting a part-time job, but my husband forbid me to do this saying it meant getting 80% of the wages and doing 100% of the job and I think he was right. I took maternity leave for each child, but no breastfeeding leave or no parental leave. I tried to reduce my time away from science as much as possible and it was already difficult enough catching up. If you want a career in academia, you have to make some sacrifices, and most women have children when they are ready to start an academic career. Only a few exceptions have them earlier or later.

2. **Keep your house tidy and put the children in daycare**

I can be short about this item: in Belgium, daycare for babies and
children and hiring people to help in the household is extremely well-organized and tax-deductible. It is also not traumatic for your children or for your house to be looked after by someone else! Take advantage of it! It is more of a problem for the mother than for the baby to leave him or her at the day care and you can have quality time with your child in the evening and in the weekend. And allow someone else to help with the cleaning and ironing. My parents and parents-in-law have always been very helpful on Wednesday afternoons, picking up the children and helping out in the house, and I think they enjoyed their Wednesday afternoons with the grandchildren too.

At some point, we decided for one month, I think it was in September 1998, that pre- and after school activities were bad for the children and we wouldn’t leave them there anymore. So we worked in two shifts: I left early to start to work early and leave early to pick up the children in the evening, my partner took the children to school on time so he could stay late at work. We never had so much stress as back then and the children reproached us the fact that they couldn’t play with their friends anymore during the afterschool activities so this trial was soon abandoned, and we never felt guilty anymore about putting our children in daycare or after school activities!

3. Ordnung muß sein!!

We have a very strict schedule during the week. We chose the secondary school of the children for its quality but also for its location – we can easily drop the kids there on our way to work. We get up at 6.15 am, have breakfast at 6.30 am, at 7.15 am everyone must be ready to go, we pass at school and we arrive at the university at 8.00 am. Fortunately, my partner and I work on the same location so we can share one car. During the drive in the morning we make all practical arrangements for the day and we leave both at 5.15 pm, discuss our day in the car, pick up the children, do some shopping and we arrive at home at about 6.00-6.30 pm to cook and have dinner together between 7 and 8 pm. In the evening, when the children are asleep, we can chose to continue to work (like answering emails or prepare a lecture) or to relax a bit.
4. **Teleworking**

Teleworking is a typical benefit of the 21st century. Take advantage of this too! *Whenever I can (in practice this means twice to six times per month) I work a day at home.* Since I can start earlier than 8 am, and work later than 5 pm since I do not lose 1.5 hours driving, I can combine it very well with some small domestic duties, and I can progress much quicker than at work. **Teleworking is ideal to finish a paper or prepare a lecture!**

5. **Visibility**

Women often forget that working hard and staying late in the office is not sufficient to make a career in academia. It is also important to go to that reception, to talk with colleagues after the faculty council, or even better, if you are not a member of the faculty council, try to become one. Choose your committees wisely: before I was a professor, I was a delegate for the assistants in the faculty council, and I organized information sessions for the students in order to promote scientific research. **Small duties but they put me in the picture.** Other committees and organizations which advanced my career were the university committee for Gender and Diversity, and in the FWO committee. **By joining these committees in the university and the FWO I improved my knowledge on how the university was functioning and how good research projects have to be written.** Later on, I was asked to be a Workgroup leader and later also Chair of a COST Action. The network I obtained by being member of the COST was enormous, and it broadened my views a lot. For many of these committees I was asked, and this was before committees had to have gender equality, as it is nowadays.

6. **Just say no!**

However, it is also important to know when to say no, otherwise no family time will be left anymore. I decided to decline some invitations to serve in the board of a smaller organization and of a smaller journal. I don’t do evening lectures, and I try to avoid being absent from the family during the weekend. I limit international travels to a maximum of 6 times a year, which means I have to decline some invitations. If the conference is out of my scope, or if it takes too long travel to reach it, I won’t go. Teleconferencing is always an alternative for travelling. And please, do not take
internet with you on your family holidays. Two weeks without any connection to the office has never killed anyone. If there is an emergency at the office they can always call.

7. Super(wo)man?

And finally, we all have some idea of how the ideal (career) woman should look like (maybe you saw some examples in *Sex and the City*. She is very fashionable, she is a better cook than Jamie Oliver, she has interesting hobbies (theatre, opera, parachute jumping,…), she goes to fitness 3 times a week, sees her friends once a week at tea parties and she takes her children to the academy of music and arts, and to the sports club.

I can tell you that you don’t have to be like that. I am not a superwoman either! I only wear casual clothes (which I buy in the airport, waiting for a delayed flight), and I can cook spaghetti. My hobby is breeding cats since I am teaching cat reproduction, and I don’t go to fitness but I go for a walk with the dog three times a week. I meet my friends on Facebook, and a few times per year we meet in person. My husband is driving the children to a limited number of activities in the weekend.

In conclusion, anyone can combine a family and an academic career under the following conditions:

- Your partner is supportive
- Your parents (in law) are supportive
- Long absence at work is avoided
- You use household help and daycare for children
- You are visible in academia and work efficiently
- You can say “no” and value “quality time”
- You can accept that nobody’s perfect
Acknowledgements

This is a personal testimony and life will turn out different for anyone else. However, I hope I have been able to explain how it worked for me and my family and I hope that it will be some sort of inspiration for young women (and maybe also men) who try to combine an academic career and family life. I would like to thank my partner Hans and my children for standing behind me when it was difficult, and also my parents and parents-in-law, which were always ready to look after the children when both Hans and me were not available.
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Two Careers in Academia, One Family

A Tale of Blessings and Conditions

Marnix Beyen

Disclaimer: The thesis defended in this article only applies to families in which the children do not suffer from any serious physical or mental problems. As soon as these arise, a new situation comes into being of which I am fortunate not to be an expert (yet).
Two Careers in Academia, One Family

A Tale of Blessings and Conditions

Marnix Beyen

Let me start by bluntly stating my thesis: **Academics who want to combine their academic work with family life** - by which I mean a life entailing the care for and the education of children – *are better off when their partner is in academia, too.*

Of course, this does not mean that I only see the blessings of such a situation. As a matter of fact, things can be extremely complex for couples who try to develop two careers and one family. The greatest difficulty seems to me that both, family life and academic life, are fields which create ever expanding networks which you can never fully get rid of: in academic life, you are in contact with your undergraduate and graduate students, with your colleagues within your department, within other departments at your university, with other national and international colleagues. Most of these contacts can hardly be limited to the office hours. As a parent, you create contacts with your children’s teachers, with the parents of their friends, with their sports clubs, their art academies, their youth movements, their orthodontics, and so on. Even if you manage – which is absolutely needed – at least partly to delegate the material caring duties (getting the children from school, feeding them, bringing them to their activities), the complex ‘logistics’ of it all is constantly keeping you busy.

As a consequence, both fields tend mutually to invade one another – and this in itself nearly unavoidably engenders problems of concentration and focus: **one is never 100% academic, but neither is one ever for the full 100% family member.** Needless to say that this can be quite frustrating: you always have the impression that you are behind things, that you are not living up to your duties in both fields, and so on. If you are two in this situation, self-evidently there is the danger that these frustrations become predominant.
The Blessings

However aware I am of these dangers, I still would like to defend my deliberately optimistic thesis. I do so because I discern three blessings that a shared academic commitment can have for couples with children: flexibility, equality, and mutual comprehension. It is my firm belief that couples in academia should always keep these blessings in mind.

Undeniably, flexibility is not always a blessing. Particularly for those who are in subordinate positions – and hence for researchers and assistants - it can become a curse when employers use it to require a constant availability from them. For autonomous academics, on the contrary, flexibility is a good to be cherished. Let us never forget as academics how privileged we are to be able largely to master our own agendas (apart from our teaching duties): we can decide when we go to our office, when we work at home, we can reshuffle our agendas sometimes even at the latest moment. If you are two in this position, the unpredictability of family life can most often be managed, since at least one of the two will be able to make an arrangement. I can hardly imagine how a family could be run if one partner has an academic job and the other a requiring job in a sector where presence is requested between at least 9 and 6, or where deadlines are truly rigid. In those cases, nearly all household duties would be put on the shoulders of the flexible academic partner, and her or his career would seriously suffer.

Such a situation would, self-evidently, entail a high degree of inequality. The same is true, though in the opposite way, if the academic’s partner has a rather undemanding part-time job or decides to stay at home. In that rather traditional pattern, it is not the academic career, but the academic’s commitment to family life that would be threatened. Academics can easily fill all the time they have at their disposal with academic matters, and they also tend to do so. The situation in which the academic is the partner and parent of his or her work rather than of his or her partner and children, is of course a really existing one. When you are two in academia, such a situation simply cannot arise. Both of you are, for better or for worse, struggling to combine things, trying to find a balance, using the flexibility that you have, and exploring its
limits. In that sense, your relation is unavoidably based on equality.

This equality is all the more solid because it goes along with the third blessing of couples-with-children in academia, viz. mutual comprehension. As academic partners, you are unavoidably to a certain sense allies, who both know what it means to be in academia, that strange world where people are passionately engaged in activities whose direct sense is not always obvious at first (and in many case not even at second) sight. You both know what it means to work also during the evening, rather than watch television – and most of the times you are doing it together anyway. All this means that the chances of being alienated from one another are very small in spite of the high amount of work. Being in the same discipline – like my wife and myself – certainly helps in this respect, but is not necessary. In most cases, I believe that between academics something even better than mutual comprehension is at stake: mutual admiration. Presumably, indeed, academic couples are at least partially the outcome of two people falling in love with someone they admired because of their academic skills. If both of them are able to remain in academia, they can continue to do so even when they have a family and a burdensome professional life.

The conditions

Thanks to the blessings of flexibility, equality and mutual comprehension, the combination between science and family life can become profoundly satisfying. In order to reach this goal, however, some conditions have to be fulfilled – and this at several levels: that of science and family politics, that of university policy, that of the internal arrangements within departments or sections, that of the family organization and that of your personal attitudes.

At the political level, I believe there is relatively little to complain about in Belgium. Particularly the relatively wide array of affordable childcare opportunities makes it possible for couples in academia both to continue their career and to raise children. It is a situation which tends to arouse among our foreign colleagues reactions of surprise, of jealousy, and sometimes even of moralizing rejection (significantly, my wife is much more confronted with this kind of reactions
than myself). It goes without saying that improvements at the political level are still possible. As such, a more relaxed fiscal system for childcare at home (e.g. through an extension of the system of service cheques to childcare) would certainly be welcome. The generalization of a system in which children stay at school until 6 pm could bring even more relief, both for the children themselves and for their academic parents. It would help to delineate the boundary between work and family life in a more clear-cut way, while contributing to neutralizing the social inequalities (connected to the fact that not all family situations are equally supportive of learning processes).

Self-evidently, a more generous funding of the universities could also be of great help. Nowadays, the high ideals of low-threshold university education and high-level research have to be realized by a far too small number of academics, which means that nearly each one of them is combining two full-time jobs. Adding family life to this demanding combination of jobs without getting burnt-out, is a daily challenge, whether or not one has a partner in academia. Rather than to wait for these political demands to be satisfied, however, significant measures can easily be taken at the university level. The diversity plans which are actually being developed at most Flemish universities are undoubtedly a good step in that direction. Nonetheless, I believe the most important work can and should be done at the level of the concrete departments and/or research groups. Indeed, in any department where a minimal sense of collegiality exists (admittedly, I am fortunate to work at a department where much more than this minimum is attained), it should be easy to obtain that no meetings are organized before 9.30 am nor after 4 pm, and that lunch meetings are opted for as much as possible. More in general, within such a department, administrative duties and education loads can be distributed with respect for varying stages of family life, and all the members are not only allowed but even exhorted to take a sabbatical leave at a regular basis.

All of these measures are directed at facilitating the combination of an academic career and commitment to the family, not specifically at combining two academic careers and a family. Such a combination, in my opinion, necessitates first and foremost some
arrangements within the family, as well as the mutual willingness to stick to these arrangements and to discuss them openly when necessary. One part of these arrangements (keeping at least one day of the weekend entirely free from academic work, maintaining a combined agenda,...) should be directed at preventing academic life from constantly overwhelming or destabilizing family life. In this respect, too, however, the challenge can be formulated in more positive terms. Being two in academia, indeed, not only entails threats but also important opportunities for family life. To give just one example, it is not impossible for academic couples to organize a longer research stay abroad during the same period in the same town. Doing so, an important career move can at the same time become an unforgettable family experience. During the six months that we spent in Paris, my wife and I were not only able to give a new impetus to our research, we were also closer to our children than ever before. Both in our career and in our family life, this period has turned out to become an important milestone.

Finally, combining family life and academic life requires some personal attitudes. Among those, a certain resignation might be the most important one. Remaining aware that one can impossibly live up to all expectations – coming both from academia and from the family - is crucial in the prevention of frustrations and of the sense of failure. Not every unanswered mail, not every deadline unstuck to should weigh as a heavy burden on one’s conscience, and obtaining a quick promotion is much less important than maintaining a harmonious balance between the family and academia. Conversely, people should refrain from feeling guilty when their children’s schoolwork has not been checked or when the other children’s parents are more assiduously assisting the football matches of their daughter’s or son’s team.

This kind of resignation is a necessary precondition to concentrate on what you deem to be the core of your duties. As such, listening to the children’s concerns, taking them seriously from a very early age, and telling them every now and then a good story or a silly joke can be so much more important than providing them every day with freshly washed and ironed clothes. And trying to inspire
your students by teaching in a passionate way can be so much more fundamental than filling out one more form about your teaching aims and the way you try to reach them. A certain passive resistance against senseless regulations and expectations is crucial to keep on going and inspiring – a duty which you have both as a parent and as a teacher.

Maybe most importantly, academic couples (and their components) should never ever forget the extremely privileged position in which they are. Speaking for myself, this means that no day passes without me wondering about all the luck that I have, and about the fact that all my dreams have come true. I dreamt of a life dedicated to acquiring and distributing knowledge – and I have one; I dreamt of a partner which I could not only love but also admire – and I have one; I dreamt of a large family bustling with activity – and I have one. By actively and consistently reminding myself of this, it is possible for me to cope more or less successfully with the practical difficulties and the essentially insurmountable workload with which I am confronted day by day. I can only advice other people in my situation to do the same thing.
Marnix Beyen (*1971) is a Senior Lecturer at the History Department of the University of Antwerp. Apart from directing the educational board for the history program, he teaches several courses on modern and contemporary political history, and on the theory and methods of history-writing. He is also a member of Power in History, the Research Centre for Political History at the University of Antwerp. His own research deals primarily with the cultural and political representation of nations in Western Europe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Among his main book-length publications figure Held voor alle werk, De vele gedaanten van Tijl Uilenspiegel (1998), Oorlog en Verleden. Nationale Geschiedenis in België en Nederland, 1938-1947 (2002), Un autre pays. Nouvelle histoire de la Belgique contemporaine, 1970-2000 (together with Philippe Destatte; 2009) and Nationhood from below. Europe in the long Nineteenth Century (together with Maarten Van Ginderachter, eds.; 2012). In the framework of this meeting, finally, it is not unimportant to mention that he is married to a History Professor, with whom he has four children currently between eight and fourteen years old.
12 strategies to combine a successful career in science with a healthy family life

Sven Hendrix
12 strategies to combine a successful career in science with a healthy family life

Sven Hendrix

Many young parents in science have a strong feeling of guilt when they try to combine a successful scientific career with a healthy family life. However, there are many good examples of parents who succeeded. Integrate these 12 strategies into your life to enjoy both your family and a successful career in science:

1. Start to develop the attitude of the ‘guilt-free parent’

I know this is easy to say and difficult to do. Nevertheless, when you decide to combine a healthy family life and a successful career in science you simply must embrace the best time management methods that work for you and learn to handle the unavoidable feelings of guilt.

I found it very relieving to realize that my children learn a lot of social skills in the kindergarten which they probably would not learn when they stayed at home with mom or dad alone. I also realized that a people are often much happier parents when their career is not sacrificed. But people will push your soft spots and ask things like ‘How can you leave your child the whole day in day care? Don’t you miss her?’ Find true answers to these questions and answer with confidence. Do not defend yourself, just be transparent about your feelings of guilt. ‘Yes, sometimes it breaks my heart to leave my child in day care.’ Congratulate people who spend more time with their children and ask how they organize their days. If the time with your child is limited because of work, make the time together real quality time. Play, read, watch TV TOGETHER! All attention you can give, counts! Even if you are very late at home, read one bedtime story with your child to have your private time that day.

Finally, identify those aspects of your life which give you the strongest feelings of guilt and change the most important ones.

2. Get a domestic helper

“It is better to let someone else clean the house than have someone else watch the kids.” If you can afford it get a domestic helper for ironing or cleaning to use your free time for your family.
3. Prepare meals in advance

With older children it may be a good idea to prepare your meals one day in advance, while the children are sleeping. So the next day, when you arrive at home, tired from the job with angry hungry children, you just can get the meal out of the fridge and you can immediately eat. In that way, you have more time for your children in the evening and can cook later without attention-demanding children in the kitchen.

4. Do not let your child be the last child picked up in the kindergarten

When talking to many young parents I realized that most parents feel very guilty when they leave their children for very long or until late in the hands of the nanny or in the kindergarten. I realized that 15 minutes can make a big difference. When my daughter was waiting at 5:30 pm with tears in her eyes at the fence of the kindergarten as the last child to be picked up - it broke my heart. When I came just 15 minutes earlier she was playing wildly with other children and did not want to leave...

Sometimes it is unavoidable to pick up your child late but try to avoid it as much as possible by good planning and professional time management.

5. Do not bring the baby to the lab

Even as a full professor I sometimes saw no other option than to bring the baby to the lab because there was no babysitter available. A few times this worked well and the baby just slept while I had a meeting with external colleagues which had been planned for months and could not be rescheduled.

However, when the baby is awake it needs full attention and you get nothing done. In a lab, in an animal facility or in a dissection room there are many dangerous chemicals and potentially infectious agents, thus, there is never an excuse to bring a child. My older daughter does not mind to be hours in front of the computer and watch videos but after three minutes I already feel as a terrible parent and have the tendency to report myself to child protection. Thus, organize childcare well in advance.
This seems self-evident but needs some training :).

6. Do not work during weekends

One of the best decisions I ever made in my life was not to work on weekends anymore. This is more difficult as a PhD student or postdoc but becomes easier in later stages of your career. During my PhD and my postdoc period I spent many weekends in the lab instead of spending time with my loved ones. This may work well for a while if your partner works also in the lab and you have a weird kind of ‘time together’ at the bench. In the moment you have kids this does not work anymore. Thanks to classical time management books such as First Things First by Stephen Covey, Eat that Frog by Brian Tracy and Getting Things Done by David Allen I learned to eliminate most weekend tasks. I realized that only a little bit of planning and discipline is necessary to get my important work done during the work week. You can waste a lot of time by just being ‘busy’ such as surfing the internet, reading Facebook posts, screening Pubmed, formatting your paper for the 5th time etc.

Document precisely which activities are really productive and eliminate the rest. This will free most of your weekends.

Be careful to communicate this to your boss and peers.

Many colleagues I know have the attitude that ‘weekends are for losers’ and young scientists have to stay in the lab 24/7 if they really want to make a successful career in science (whatever a successful career in science may mean to them and to you). However, it is a well-known fact that parents are often more productive and better organized in their work than their colleagues without children – because they have to be.

Just keep in mind: The only thing that counts in the end for getting an attractive position and funding is your output – nothing else. It does not matter whether you reach your goals during your work week or 24/7. Of course there are weekend duties which cannot be rescheduled such as precisely timed experiments, animals which have to be checked daily or unexpected deadlines – but these should be exceptions and not the rule when you decide to have a healthy family life and a successful career in science.

7. Reserve three hours per day for the most important task

Every highly productive person I know follows this rule. When you reserve three hours per day for the most important task you will be very productive. I had to learn that even with the most sophisticated time management system a normal workday is always filled with a lot of
little urgent activities which are completely unexpected and destroy your plans such as ad hoc meetings due to surprising technical difficulties, giving immediate support to crying or angry staff members, sudden requests by collaborators who realized that their PhD student needs to submit their 33 pages long paper within 48h to have the right to defend his thesis in time … well, you get the idea. However, if you start every day with three hours for the most important task without interruption you will get done a lot. Politely postpone non-urgent tasks. If someone wants to discuss items with you during this period make an appointment later. Reserve uninspiring work such as answering emails or feeding data into data banks for less productive periods such as the time after lunch. When you leave you will have the feeling that you have definitely done important things and can now give your full attention to your family life.

8. Do not think about work when you are together with your family

One of the biggest mistakes I did in the past was to think about work while I am with my children. I learned quickly that I did not get any work properly done because the children request full attention and at the same time the children feel that dad is absent-minded. This dilemma is very tiring. Thus, shutting down the ‘working mode’ and relax with your children is much healthier.

9. Do not check your emails while you are with your children

This point is closely related to the last one. Thanks to our mobile gadgets we can check our emails under all circumstances. However, you may answer a few more emails but you are mentally absent from your children. I am convinced that it is not worth it. The best strategy I learned is to check my emails only three times per day in a very effective way and leave the inbox untouched during the rest of the day. I only check my email on my mobile phone during waiting times e.g. in the supermarket, at the dentist or when my wife is trying 7 different pairs of shoes. However, I never feel effective doing this.

10. Save your work ideas on your mobile phone

This is a very simple trick which allows you to keep your head free when being with your family. When I am with my children on the playground I get about 50 great ideas for future projects, somebody reminds me of a colleague I
have to contact ASAP, I suddenly want to send three emails and the 7 most urgent job requirements will meander through my mind. Thanks to the very helpful concepts in Getting Things Done by David Allen I developed the discipline to quickly jot these thoughts down into a simple ‘inbox list’ on my mobile phone to clear my head and send this list to my own email address – but I force myself not to check my emails. Now I am sure that I will copy these ideas to my to do list on Monday and can give full attention to my children because I know that these ideas are saved.

11. Do not try to become SUPERMOM and SUPERDAD

Accept the fact that you cannot be a perfect parent. Accept the fact that your child is in day care. Congratulate yourself and your partner how well you have organized your life so far. There are many websites about parenting:

https://theguiltfreemama.squarespace.com/ or http://fatherapprentice.com/

Check them out to get some ideas and realize that many other parents make similar experiences.

12. Choose your goals well

Make clear choices and accept the consequences with confidence. It is OK not to be awake 23 hours and to do your career-boosting extra-work while the children are sleeping, and to be a perfect partner who is sexy and well-trained (3-4 times workout per week for at least 30 minutes), and to clean the house and to cook for the family and to participate in the local nightlife and to enjoy the current cultural highlights and to travel regularly and to learn Italian and playing the Ukulele.

Decide what you really want and postpone or cancel the rest. If consciously done and discussed with your partner this will lead to substantial relieve and create a life you enjoy.

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Parents in academia: New norms required

Marloes van Engen, Susanne Beijer, Channah Herschberg, Inge Bleijenbergh, Claartje Vinkenburg

Are you a conformer or a fighter?  
Do you negotiate norms or navigate around them?  
Read on, and be in for some surprises.

Discover how you yourself deal with conflicting norms, how you perhaps are unwittingly instrumental in confirming the norm of masculinity and how you – whether an academic, father or mother, or a manager - can help create new norms.
Parents in academia: New norms required

Marloes van Engen, Susanne Beijer, Channah Herschberg, Inge Bleijenbergh, Claartje Vinkenburg

Introduction

Do you think that research is a tough job to combine with parenting? Do you feel the pressure of present norms in academia that being an academic means reaching excellence at the expense of everything else, including care for others? Check this out: 33% of EU researchers is female; women and men researchers have more children than the average European population (EU, 2012), and researchers are often part of a dual-career couple. So parents in science are here to stay, yet new norms are required.

At the moment universities are still broadly characterized as having a culture of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (Knights and Richards, 2003; Smith, 2008), characterized by a single-minded pursuit on status enhancing research and where disciplinary technologies such as publication targets, quality audits define ‘excellence’, often at the expense of teaching, administrative tasks, self care or care for others. Being an academic is considered ‘a calling’, and success is typically achieved by working long hours. These academic norms conflict with the existing norms for parenthood, which are especially tough on women. In the Netherlands, for instance, normative parenting belief holds that a child suffers if the mother works more than three days a week.

In this chapter we review two different case studies in the Netherlands, the first one concerned with individual strategies and the second one analysing organizational norms on combining work and care in academia.
1. Case study on individual strategies

(van Engen et al., submitted)

In view of the conflicting norms about the parenting and academic excellence, parents need to negotiate their identity as academics. We have discovered in a case study at a Dutch University that parents employ several strategies to deal with this. They conform to the norms of hegemonic masculinity, accommodate them or resist them, sometimes simultaneously, depending on the context. In doing so, they can at the same time fight the norms and reproduce them time and again. We also discovered that women and men academics with children use similar strategies to position themselves within the dominant discourse of the ideal academic. Under-representation of women professors in Dutch academia is relatively large and often attributed to the Dutch culture in which men work typically full time, and women half time. The university we studied has an even larger gender gap than the average Dutch university. However, the mean difference in working hours between men and women is negligible (1.3 hours). Moreover: though fathers and mothers work fewer hours than non-parents (2.5 and 3 hours respectively), the difference is small. Most surprisingly: respondents were not aware of these similarities.

We interviewed 15 academics (assistant, associate and full professors) with children in each of the five schools of this Dutch university. These interviews were part of a larger study at this university, initiated by the executive board in order to inform policy recommendations to increase the representation of women. Through semi-structured interviews we encouraged the academics to reflect on critical moments during their individual career paths. We asked them about their career goals, their conceptions of success and failure, and their experiences with combining work with parenthood. Furthermore, we talked about organizational support in combining work and family life, the role of the supervisor, and the role of colleagues.

Analysing these interviews we reconstructed the dominant discourse on the ideal academic and the implicit assumptions on parenthood. The widely shared view of the ideal academic matches the norms
described earlier: constant availability and working long hours. The importance of publication productivity for living up to the ideal academic is shared unanimously among interviewees. Many respondents designate the criteria for academic success as difficult to combine with care responsibilities. So how do they reconcile their life’s choices with the dominant discourse about the ideal academic and parent?

**Typology of discursive strategies**

We describe five strategies that parents in academia use to position themselves amidst the pull of incompatible demands, to negotiate their identity: Conformers, Pragmatic arrangers, Optimists, Fighters and Sufferers.

**Conformers:**

Conformers openly support the way things are done within the organisation. Here, one of the interviewees reflects on this when I ask her whether she experiences support from the organization having had a child:

“*So ideally I do not think that, as a pregnant woman or so, you should get preferential treatment over for example a man who is unable to work for half a year.*”

A, female assistant professor

Becoming a parent is depicted as a personal choice and parents are solely responsible for the consequences. This identity fits with the institutionalised norms and rules within the university. Illustrative is the following interview excerpt of a women assistant professor who first posits that because of her husband’s income she does not need a job financially (!):

“No one says I should do so but I want to do so very much. Well then you shouldn’t complain.”

D, female assistant professor

In short:

- Conformers emphasize care giving as an individual choice.
- Conformers see care giving as a personal burden to carry.
- Conformers feel that academia is not responsible for compensating or facilitating care givers.
- Conformers substantiate the idea of academia as a meritocratic organization, in which you are rewarded according to merit.
Pragmatic arrangers

Some academics rely on pragmatic arrangements to accommodate family life and the demands of the organization. They assume responsibility for arranging flexibility in their job. Many of them ‘buy’ this flexibility by opting for part-time contracts, while actually working full-time. This creates ‘psychological space’.

*I deliberately opted for fewer hours, so I could tell myself psychologically ‘no I won’t do it today’. I always did it anyway, as I did work on those days off, but you can tell yourself, since I was free on Wednesdays, when the children were at school I would anyway do some work.’*

C, female full professor

“A 0.8 FTE contract seems to be accepted nowadays. I think that you can also achieve a lot in four days and maybe you also do your job a bit more efficiently, so that uh, if you drop below that [a 0.8 FTE contract, ed.] it seems to me that it would be too little. [...] If you want to operate on multiple chessboards, so to speak, [laughs] then you need to sit at those boards sufficiently often.”

K, male assistant professor

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<th>In short:</th>
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<td>• Pragmatic arrangers juggle conflicting demands in creative ways.</td>
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<td>• Pragmatic arrangers ‘buy’ flexibility between life spheres.</td>
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<td>• They try to keep both parties (work and life) satisfied.</td>
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Optimists

Optimists emphasize the positive aspects of combining dual roles. They feel they have a high level of efficiency on working days and feel that their care duties help them to take some distance from their work. Typical for optimists is the claim that synergy occurs when combining multiple identities.

“During the time that I worked two and a half days I was certainly as productive as my colleagues who worked four days. Just because you, uh, you are very concentrated, uh, you are sweeping the pavement or doing the dishes or folding the laundry, and you have already planned what needs to be written, so you just need to sit at it for a few more hours and it’s done.”

D, female assistant professor
In short:
- Optimists see work as an enrichment of life
- They see family life as an enrichment of work

**Fighters**

A significant number of academics indicate that after maternity or parental leave, output criteria are not corrected, illustrating the dominant discourse in which the actual research time is not a valid criterion for productivity. Fighters resist this and argue that it is unfair if their care responsibilities are not taken into account. They call for an adjustment of output criteria based on actually allocated research time.

“But as I was pregnant, uhm, or I have indicated then that they should take that into account so that you need to prolong this period. And then they said, at the end of the month there will be a letter which says whether your research time will be extended. And uh for what kind of reasons and whether there are any exceptions. But the month has passed. Yes, so I am waiting for that letter, and things remain uncertain…”

M, female assistant professor

**Sufferers**

The fifth strategy is adopted by academics who feel victimized. They report frustration due to losing their battle against unfair treatment. This interviewee had extended parental leave after fathering twins:

“I requested an adjustment of publication productivity criteria. [...] Then he came to me with this story, that it didn’t happen at all. Because formally I have a full-time appointment, and the department gets assigned full-time research money. So they were simply judged on the basis of full-time employees. Which I wasn’t. So ultimately they do not take that into account at all. [...] It would be a sign of weakness if I were to request it again.”

N, male assistant professor
In short:
- Sufferers are aware that care giving poses a threat to one's status
- Sufferers see the risks of victimizations when requesting care giving rights
- Sufferers consider fighting the norms a battle that can not be won

Patterns in the use of strategies

Although we can clearly distinguish these five discursive strategies, individuals do not solely use one particular strategy. All academics interviewed combine discursive strategies, sometimes contradicting themselves, for instance using the strategy of a conformist while acknowledging that private life enables them to perform at work, which is the argument of optimists. Sometimes they use a strategy as an antidote to the consequences of another, for example when the frustration of the sufferer is countered with feelings of pride felt by the optimist.

Importantly, we found that women and men academics with children use similar strategies. This shows that hegemonic masculine norms about academia and parenthood do not only disadvantage mothers in academia, but also affect fathers who value combining academia and fatherhood.

Remarkable is our finding that nearly all academics individually express resistance to the dominant discourse, yet do not share this criticism with others and in so doing reproduce the dominant discourse.

There is no collective awareness of the fact that almost everybody uses some or other strategy in response to incompatible demands. Many interviewees feel they are different from colleagues who (seem to) conform to the dominant discourse. As long as group members do not exchange viewpoints or experiences, the development of new norms will be hindered. This conclusion is supported by the following study.

2. Case study on organizational norms

(Herschberg et al., 2014)

If care is not considered a conversation topic, this is highly problematic for men and women alike. We concluded this
from exploring qualitative data from interviews and a focus group with men and women academic staff collected in the context of an action research project at the engineering faculty of a technical university in the Netherlands. We found that actively negotiating norms is a potential source of change. By creating an organizational culture that allows for openly discussing the combination of career and care, technical universities can support men and women in meeting the demands from both domains.

Norms are an important component of organizational culture. They are a manifestation of the shared and implicit assumptions that are taken for granted in a group. **Norms influence organizational behaviour because they describe and prescribe “how we do things around here”**. There are different ways to deal with organizational norms. Poelmans (2012) developed a multilayered typology, which we used in our research to explore organizational norms on combining career and care (Poelmans, 2012). There are three types of dealing with norms according to Poelmans:

- nominating (recognizing) norms
- navigating norms and
- creating new norms

In order to analyse how academics relate to norms on combining career and care, we used data collected in individual interviews and a focus group with academic staff in different hierarchical positions of a faculty of engineering in a Dutch university. In 2009, this faculty employed 684 academics of which 17.7% were women. Of the 55 full professors, 5.2% were women. In our analysis of the interviews we found all three types of dealing with norms. By creating an organizational culture which allows for openly discussing the combination of career and care, technical universities can support men and women in meeting the demands from both domains.

**Nominating norms**

The interviews with individual academics showed that norms about combining work and care were self-evident and implicit for some of them, ultimately shared by all of them, but not discussed at all. When we presented this conclusion to the focus group participants, it made them to consider
and discuss this norm. One of the focus group participants immediately agreed with this interpretation, whereas others asked for clarification before realizing that this is a norm that actually exists within the faculty.

**Researcher A (R-A):** At [faculty], family is not a conversation topic amongst colleagues.

**Participant B (woman):** I can agree on that.

**R-A:** [Name participant] can agree on that.

**Participant C (woman):** You receive this feedback from people. So I wonder whether it is just a remark or is it slight complaint they’re making, or? That’s why I wonder, is it an issue?

**R-A:** No, it is not a complaint. This is what we found very poignant.

**Researcher B (R-B):** It struck us as interesting. That several people mentioned it. Well, they mentioned it, they observed it, so.

**R-A:** They said things like “no, no we don’t discuss that”. And for us that was new.

**Participant A (man):** Is it family or personal interest?

**R-B:** Family.

**R-A:** We have been discussing that. But we found that personal interests with regard to hobbies were discussed. So we thought we should call it family. Because it’s about family relations; most often partners, children, or parents.

**Participant C (woman) (addressing researchers):** Why did you find it striking? Sorry, we’re now asking questions to you. Why did you find it striking?

**R-A:** Um... because I’m also working at a university in [city]...

**Participant C (woman):** And you discuss it?

**R-A:** …and we discuss family um I think every lunch break.

**R-B:** At the coffee machine. Very often.

**Participant C (woman):** So it is like a different culture or something?

**R-A:** That’s right. So that’s where the point of amazement began. So that’s why of course also why we put it in a statement. So this is typically..

**Participant B (woman):** I can agree on that because I also worked at an academic medical centre for a long time […] for one day a week in [city], at the [organization] and I observed that there family is more often discussed then it is here.
Negotiating norms

The interviews showed that there is some space for deviating from the norm that one does not talk about family issues. You can talk about life changing events with close colleagues in the proximity of the same lab group or in the seclusion of a shared office, and in extreme situations also with the supervisor. It appears that there are young fathers who explicitly resist these norms by talking in the larger group about their babies. The focus group immediately ridicules these men, compensating for the norm deviation and in doing so restoring the norms about combining career and care.

Participant A (woman): So then let me ask you whether you discuss your family with all of your colleagues or with some of them?
Researcher A (R-A): If I would think about it, everyone with whom I would have lunch will discuss his or her family. But I’m not lunching with all of them of course.
Researcher B: No, but I would, I would. With the boss, with the dean. Yes.
R-A: How is that to you?

Participant A (woman): Because in my opinion it’s normal that you cannot, you won’t go around the whole faculty discussing your family with persons who might be your colleagues but you don’t really know. But on the other hand there are some colleagues which, with whom you will discuss it.
R-A: And what’s the difference between these colleagues with whom you discuss it and the others?
Participant A (woman): Um... some you better know simply.
Participant B (man): Yes, some you consider as friends and most of them are just colleagues. There is a difference.
R-A: So some colleagues you consider as friends and if you..
Participant B (man): Yes, personally. [...] So um, but but that I come back to more personal things, yeah. But that not with everybody. No, certainly not. And I don’t feel the need for it either. But on the other hand, in our laboratory we have a procedure of drinking coffee two times a day as a group. So everybody sits together [...] discusses a lot of things. But coming to think of it, family is not the hottest issue, no.
R-A: But it is an issue?
Participant B (man): Sometimes yeah. Yes but we have people, young fathers that discuss their children. If you call that discussing your family, yes. It’s one-sided in a way because usually it goes about how they were kept awake all night.
(everyone laughs)
R-A: What is the hottest issue?
R-A: Music?
Participant B (man): Yes. Because there are a lot of people below 30, 35. Maybe I consider it the hottest issue because their choice of music is quite different than mine.
(everyone laughs)

Navigating norms
The interviews revealed that some academics found a way to cope with the existing organizational norms by navigating around them. One man assistant professor used his right to paid parental leave to reserve time for care and now ‘buys time’ by taking up vacation days. He challenges the existing norm in the faculty by considering care more important than his career. So, even though the organization does not really facilitate combining work and care, academics sometimes creatively and subtly find their way around the dominant norms.

Researcher: Um... what effect does your private life have on your career? Or did it have?
Participant 6 (man): Um..... I hope an important effect in a way that it refrains me from giving work even more priority. Um... it already is too much, but I refuse to, let’s say, join the rat race to finish everything as good as possible and as quickly as possible. Even in the sense that my supervisors tell me actually you are fully qualified to make the next step, but I’m like I will continue proportionately but I have other priorities than um than those.
Researcher: And um how do they look at that here?
Participant 6 (man): With astonishment but with respect.

Creating new norms
By openly deviating from the existing norm, someone can become a trailblazer within the work environment. The following transcript shows that this man academic made other colleagues aware of the possibility to take parental leave, as he did himself. Acting as a role model, he can create a snowball effect within the organization.
Researcher: Um... and colleagues. To what extent do colleagues offer support in combining career and private life?

Participant 6 (man): Um... well sometimes by setting an example for instance when someone achieved something particular, for example that he works one day from home and then a precedent has been established that it um is thus possible.

Researcher: Okay and were you actually the precedent or were there others before?

Participant 6 (man): Um... not in this case [working from home], no. With parental leave maybe, but yes that can be legally enforced so that actually doesn’t count.

Researcher: Yes but to enforce it and to do it are two different things.

Participant 6 (man): Yes well as a matter of fact I’ve made two people um aware of that possibility, especially people that um for example come from the United States they are brought up in the rat race so they um explicitly ask if you won’t be judged by that later on.

Researcher: Oh they ask that?

Participant 6 (man): Yes like um... how do people look at that and um is that even possible?

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Take home message

The daily practice of the majority of academics is that they juggle caregiving tasks and working demands. As academics, certainly compared to other professions, we experience a huge level of flexibility in where and when to work, to adjust to demands is at work and at home. Perhaps that is why academics have more often and more children than other workers. Yet, academia is for most academics not a job, but a calling and part of one’s identity, which means that the boundary for work to invade the private life are thin and discontinuous. We have outlined different discursive strategies that parents in academia use to negotiate their work and private life. These discursive strategies are on the one hand personal strategies, part of one’s identity, yet often informed by the context. Parents may ‘shift’ their strategy depending on the susceptibility for and room in the particular work environment (e.g. department, School) for care giving responsibilities. If academics perceive no room for negotiating their work and life demands (both in actual (face)time demands and in terms of room for
multiple identities) this results in burden that may lead to costs in both the work and private life domain. Family-friendly organizations are better for individuals (with and without children) and the organization. Therefore, universities are advised to facilitate parent to negotiate work and life. **Universities may facilitate career and care by modifying the ‘material structure’,** the criteria, norms and rules and regulations. **For instance by standardizing compensation (part-time work, care leave) in performance criteria, by communicating that care leaves are a right or even a plight and not a favour.** This means that universities need to create new norms for combining career and care and by doing so raise awareness, challenging existing stereotypes, dichotomies and norms. There has been a substantial shift in what we find ‘normal’ in the sense that present and future generations see a dual career as ‘normal’.

**Now we need another substantial shift in academia that combining career and care is ‘normal’!** For this we need (male) trailblazers that Dare to Care!

**References**


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Academic Mobility: Surviving in New Cultures


Lutz Steiner
Academic Mobility: Surviving in New Cultures


Lutz Steiner

Introduction

Academia is inherently international. From undergraduates to full professors, scientists at all stages of their career often seek international experience. In research groups and laboratories, people from all over the globe are working together on finding answers to whatever research question interests them.

In Europe, the Bologna process has fostered a system of vertical mobility, allowing people to move from one country to another with each step of their academic maturation: A Bachelor’s degree in Strasbourg, a Master’s degree in Amsterdam, a PhD degree in Helsinki and a postdoc phase in Boston. Not only since L’Auberge Espagnol have students moved across borders to study. Although more and more universities prepare Erasmus exchange students with language and culture specific training for the semester abroad, free movers, PhD students and postdocs often have to find their way without institutional help. Bachelor and master students mostly are single when gaining their international study experience. In contrast, some PhD students and many postdocs have to consider the needs of their partners and children.

This chapter illustrates some of the issues relevant when junior scientists are moving from one country to another. In the first part, I take a closer look at the term ‘culture’. It includes a concise introduction to culture theory and investigates strategies for dealing with cultural differences. Furthermore, it highlights culturally determined differences in academic systems. In the second part, I discuss possible implications of moving as a couple or
family. Issues of daily life and practical tips complete the picture.

**Part 1: Culture**

Whatever the definitions of culture are – and there is no shortage of them [1-8] – common to all is the idea that it is **represented in the way people think and act.** Whereas the thinking process is invisible to outsiders, the acting part of the equation is what is readily observable. That is why the metaphor of the iceberg is so popular when visualizing culture. You can observe certain aspects of culture, but much of the underlying value and belief system remains invisible. The way people act, how they speak, what they wear... all that is easily observable, but why they act certain ways and why they speak the way they do is not clear. **Under the surface – to keep with the iceberg image – lies a set of values, beliefs, norms and attitudes that shape what we can observe above the surface.**

Culture takes on many forms: National, regional, urban or rural, subcultures, corporate culture, academic culture, and even discipline-specific culture. In the context of this chapter, I am referring to national/regional culture and nationally/regionally influenced academic culture. Thus, what are the cultural challenges of for example a student from Indonesia pursuing a PhD in Germany, an Irish PhD student in France, or a Polish postdoc taking on a research position in Spain. In which way do these cultural differences influence the academic world? What kinds of competencies will help them to adapt successfully to their new surroundings?

The key to understanding other cultures is to be aware of and understand one’s own cultural predispositions. As long as people do not leave their natural habitat, they most likely are not aware of the particular cultural imprint that shapes the way they are functioning. It is not until being confronted with the other that the self is challenged. **Consequently, step one to survive in another culture is to understand one’s own culture.** Do you like to get straight to the point and call a problem by its name? Or do you prefer to insinuate and expect others to read between the lines in order to understand what you mean? Are you a careful planner or do you believe in getting started quickly and adjusting as needed? Of course, these preferences are also a matter of personality, but cultural theory has produced certain
categories that cluster certain traits across given cultures.

One of the most often cited set of categories are the cultural dimensions by Geert Hofstede [4]. Though the beginnings of his work date back to the 1970s when he was working at IBM, he is still active today and continuously develops his model. Once you have understood his theoretical construct, you can place yourself and others on the dimensions he describes. In addition, since his data is based on quantitative research, you can use online tools\(^1\) to compare the scores of your own culture with that of others.

Hofstede’s dimensions refer to the attitude people from different cultures have vis-a-vis four core topics\(^2\):

- hierarchy
- the individual
- gender roles
- dealing with uncertainty.

Two more characteristics are central when looking at cultural traits:

- communication style
- time management

Edward T. Hall introduced respective categories in his work [3]. In the following, we will have a closer look at these six aspects and their application to academic settings.\(^3\)

**Power Distance**

This dimension refers to issues related to hierarchy. What is the relationship between the professor and the students? How formal is the interaction between them? How is the office or workspace divided up? How are decisions reached? Is the preferred leadership style directive or participatory? Do the group members meet outside the university/lab? More

\(^3\) A word of caution: These culturally influenced traits are only one aspect when looking at interaction between people. The personality of those involved and the situation in which the interaction takes place are equally important. There may be outspoken students from high context cultures like China who very clearly communicate their expectations. And there may be PhD students from monochronic cultures like Germany who still show up late to every lab meeting. A PhD supervisor can be very supportive and friendly in her role as supervisor, yet very demanding and challenging in her role as examiner during the thesis defense.
importantly, to what degree do all parties accept and live differences in the distribution of power.

In high power distance cultures, the role of the professor is that of the benign father/mother. S/he is a person of great respect, an omniscient figure that demands and protects. His or her status ranks far above that of the students. The interaction is rather formal and reduced to the classroom or lab. Students are told which classes to take, which papers to read, and which experiments to carry out. They will not challenge their professor’s research results.

In low power distance cultures, professors and students are - at least in matters of scientific debate - on equal terms. Students are expected to challenge existing knowledge and scientific authority. Professors are facilitators of independent learning. It is up to the students to figure out how best to gain the necessary knowledge, to develop their own research focus, to set up their own research question. The interaction between faculty and students is less formal. First name basis and socializing outside of the classroom or lab is not uncommon.

**Individualism vs. collectivism**

This dimension refers to the degree to which people in a given culture understand themselves as unique and independent individuals or as member of a group. Is their identity primarily hinged on a sense of self or do they see themselves as part of something bigger? Do they draw self-esteem out of personal achievement or out of a sense of belonging? Is the goal of personal action personal gain or collective gain? Are people largely independent in their decisions or do other members of the group exercise a significant influence? Are people concerned with self-fulfillment or is the collective good of more importance?

Thus, in highly individualistic cultures the degree of cohesion within and commitment to a research group is small compared to collectivist cultures. Both faculty and students are relatively independent. Ideally, the contributions of each member of the group to a project or paper is clearly identifiable and honored via the division of authorships. Arguing over first authorships, seeking one’s personal advantage, progressing based on personal achievement is commonly accepted. Everyone is in charge of his/her own personal and academic success. Positions are usually filled based on the candidates
proven track record including publications and teaching experience. Department heads have relatively little power over other members of the faculty. Scientists of all levels usually set their own research agendas.

**In collectivist cultures, academic leaders set the agenda for their departments or research groups.** The group - and its leader - is more important than the individual. The scientific output of the group stands above individual output. Relationships, loyalties, personal ties matter more than individual achievement. Students draw self-esteem from belonging to a certain research group rather than having their name on the publication. The harmony within the group must not be disrupted. In fact, group harmony is more important than personal opinion or self-fulfillment. And matters of career and success are subject to external factors, not just personal achievement.

**Masculinity vs. femininity**

In this dimension two aspects are addressed: To what degree are gender roles clearly defined and is there an emphasis on ‘male’ values (material goods, career, status) or ‘female’ values (community, happiness, health)? **It is important to note that attributing material goods and career as ‘male’ values and community and happiness as ‘female’ ones is already a gendered point of view.** However, for the sake of this analysis and in absence of less ambiguous terms we will follow this gendered concept temporarily.

‘Masculine’ academic cultures are thus characterized by a clear and strict division of gender roles, e.g. male professors and female secretaries, female students in the humanities and male students in science and engineering. Male students find it difficult to accept leadership by female professors. There is a great deal of competition both between faculty and between students. Presidents and deans enjoy material privileges such as representative office space and reserved parking. Personal performance and achievement is measured and influences career advancement and remuneration.

‘Feminine’ academic cultures, on the other hand, emphasize work/life balance. In such a context, it is relatively easy to combine work and family obligations. Dual career, parental leave, childcare services at the university are normal features. The faculty comprises equally male and
female scientists, and the latter can be found in leading positions as much as their male counterparts. The system is set up to take care of its weaker members as well, e.g. by allotting funds irrespective of academic output. Competition and excellence are viewed with suspicion and academic institutions are leveled across the country.

**Uncertainty Avoidance**

**In this dimension** the degree to which members of a given culture are able to deal with unforeseen events is addressed. Do people feel threatened by uncertainties or do they see opportunity in sudden changes of events? To what degree are people willing to take risk or to what degree do they minimize risk through insurances? How important is planning ahead and sticking to plans? Is there a tendency to regulate and steer or are things left in the ambiguous, open for serendipity? Does „different‘ equal „bad‘, or are people curious and open to otherness?

In academia, high uncertainty avoidance is reflected in fixed curricula, published regulations for admission, study and examination, or research grant applications based on milestones, work packages and deliverables. The faculty is expected to be omniscient and courses are carefully planned and organized. Module descriptions detail learning outcomes, types of examinations, and averaged student invested time.

**Low uncertainty avoidance, on the other hand, allows for trial and error approaches both in teaching and in research.** The faculty may not know and plan everything. Rather, students and faculty design the learning process together, developing the goal on the way. Similarly, research funding is awarded to new ideas and interesting approaches, outcome unknown. There are fewer regulations and there is more room for individual decisions. Albeit the possibility of arbitrary and inconsistent decisions is higher.

**Monochronic vs. polychronic**

This category refers to the attitude of people towards time. Is time a flexible variable or fixed? Is the day carefully planned or do people live by the moment? Do people complete one task at a time or do they multi-task? Do they schedule meetings both in their professional and private life? Is being late considered rude or not even an issue?
In monochronic cultures, time is not flexible. Appointments are made and kept. Classes and lab meetings start on time. Deadlines are fixed. Professors often prefer appointments or consultation during office hours. Academic administration is simply not available outside office hours. Interruptions are not appreciated.

In polychronic cultures, people and relationships are more important than tasks and deadlines. On her way to the classroom a professor might meet a colleague and discuss the joint paper, risking to show up late for class. Multi-tasking is common and no offense is taken. During the lab meeting, someone might follow the presentation, explain some aspect of it to another student and discuss personal matters on his mobile phone. People and events are incorporated into the flow of the day, allowing greater flexibility in meeting people and getting things done. Plans and timetables are mere guidelines, not fixed roadmaps.

High and low context

Reading ‘between the lines’ or explicit statements, that is what high and low context communication is all about. In the first case, a lot of information is in the context, known to all involved based on who said it and under which circumstances. Therefore, there is no need to make this information explicit. Quite to the contrary, in low context communication very little information is in the context. Thus it is necessary to state very explicitly what is meant and expected. Whereas in high context cultures such as Japan a lab leaders statement like ‘Tomorrow Mr. Yakumoto will visit the lab’ suffices to ensure that the next day everyone is wearing lab coats, posters and presentations are prepared, lunch and tea is organized and all are ready to join the Karaoke evening. In contrast, in low context cultures the same statement would be registered as pure information about Mr. Yakumoto’s visit. Here, individual reaction would not take place unless the lab leader explicitly asks for it. ‘Please, everyone wear a lab coat, all project leaders need to present their current research, two members of the group order lunch and tea, and everyone must join the Karaoke night out.’

As a result, criticism is voiced very differently in high and in low context cultures. Indirect criticism is typical for the first, and direct criticism for the second. ‘Your hypothesis is weak, you did not include a control
group, your data analysis is flawed.’ are statements no presenter likes to hear. But in low context cultures, such statements are perfectly acceptable, even helpful. In high context cultures, criticism would have to be hidden in metaphoric language and nonverbal clues. No one would be singled out, in the presence of others. Saving face is highly valued and this communication style is often found in collectivist cultures. Interestingly, even between low context, often individualistic cultures the degree of direct criticism and the way to deliver it can vary. When giving feedback, an American would often balance the negative with something positive. A German, on the other hand, would focus on what needs to be corrected and thus only point to the negative.

I have built up such dichotomy in describing the cultural categories used by Hofstede and Hall for the purpose of clear illustration. Now it is important to put things into perspective. The characteristics described above are not ‘either/or’ categories. Cultures, people and academic systems are not as clear-cut as theory might suggest. What I have described are the extreme ends of a continuum. There are many cultures and academics who fall into the middle or integrate aspects of either end of the continuum. Furthermore, it would be an oversimplification to reduce people’s behavior to cultural predispositions alone. Different personalities and situational aspects are equally important. On the other hand, ignoring cultural differences in international scientific settings means ignoring key aspects of the equation.

Part 2: Daily life and families

So here you are: accomplished junior scientist ready to take on a new Post-Doc or tenure track position abroad. You are excited about the challenge ahead. You want to prove your scientific expertise, work in an international group and learn a new language. How can you best prepare for what lies ahead of you?

An obvious and rather self-evident first step is reviewing selected literature about the new host culture. For many countries, a plethora of books is available; from more personal, entertaining accounts to guides on business etiquette, from simple do’s and don’ts to more intricate analyses of cultural traits. Secondly, participation in an intercultural training will deepen the understanding of a new culture. If
done well, participants will not only learn about country specific aspects, but also about themselves and about cultural categories as described in part 1 of this chapter. Simple, yet effective exercises and role-play mimic intercultural encounters and convincingly create experiences that complement cognitive learning with affective learning. What does it feel like to be in certain situations and how do I react? This enables participants to put experiences they make in new surroundings into perspective. Why is this happening, why do they act the way they do and why do I react the way I do – or vice-versa. Such trainings are sometimes available at the host institution. Ask the ‘welcome center’ of the new institution about it. Lastly, taking language classes serves on three levels: It trains the brain, it builds confidence and it demonstrates an effort on the side of the expatriate.

Careful preparation certainly helps to get a good start, however, you will learn the most about a new culture and a new language when you immerse in your new environment. In the daily interaction with local people, you will unravel the mystery of what lies beneath the surface, to keep with the iceberg metaphor. In this process, you can get help through several sources. Firstly, find your personal ‘culture spy’. Someone you have identified either at the new institution or in your private circle of friends who understands where you are coming from and who knows the local culture already. Such a spy can explain and put into perspective experiences in the new hometown that strike you as odd or even inappropriate. Secondly, look for a network of expats: international academics at your institution or compatriots who live in the same city as you do. Such networks will enable you to share experiences with people who are in the same situation as you are. You will quickly learn that you are not the only one who has to deal with ‘strange’ habits of your hosts. Make use of social media tools such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Yahoo groups or Meetup and look for groups of like-minded or like-interested people sorted by city or region.

Connecting to other expats will also help you to deal with the effects of culture shock. This phenomenon often occurs after some time in your new surroundings and can be divided into several phases. The initial phase is one of euphoria. You are excited,
looking forward to being in the new place. Cultural differences you encounter are still interesting and fun. **After a while, however, the euphoria wears off** and you find cultural differences increasingly burdensome, disturbing and difficult to deal with. As a result and to varying degrees you can experience confusion, frustration, and anger. You may feel helpless, isolated, homesick, or bored. You may experience a loss of appetite or gluttony, respectively. You may be irritated, stressed and in physical pain. You may tend to alcohol and drugs of abuse. You may suffer from sleeplessness or, to the contrary, excessive sleepiness. In this phase, you hit rock bottom. Some tools that help you to get through this phase include the following:

- Connecting with family and friends back home
- Connecting with a network of expats in your new hometown
- Keeping up (family-)rituals and habits
- Pursuing your hobbies
- Enjoying familiar or comfort food
- Taking some time off and going back home for a short visit
- Keeping a diary or, the modern way, writing a blog
- Reading other expat blogs

Once through the slump, the curve points upwards after that and over time you begin to understand the host culture better. You learn how to adapt, develop coping strategies and, in the end, are able to navigate new waters with confidence. **Sometimes, culture shock ripples through in waves rather than in one curve.** Often, the trouble starts all over, once you return to your original culture, a phenomenon commonly referred to as **reverse culture shock.**

**The partner**

Discovering a new culture is enriching and rewarding. It contributes to personal growth and an expansion of horizon. That is true both for the academic moving abroad to take on a new position and any partner and/or children that are coming along. Never the less, the euphoria aspect is usually higher for the former. He or she is excited about the new job, has a task and a purpose, and is in daily contact with colleagues. **However, what about the partner?** Imagine a partner who does not work, who does not find fulfillment in professional development, who is lonely at home yet afraid to venture out. Such situation can put quite a strain on the relationship. It is
important to be aware of these risks and actively tackle the issues. The stay at home spouse needs a lot of understanding, support and encouragement from the working one. The following simple strategies may save your relationship:

- Do not just leave the mundane stuff like phone bills and grocery shopping to your partner.
- Do not come home from work too late.
- Talk about each other’s expectations, wishes and emotions and find ways to balance the need of both partners.
- Make sure you explore the new surroundings together: museums, theatres, concerts, sightseeing, restaurants, or just as well excursions into nature and weekend trips to other cities.
- What about the option of both partners working? Check if the university or research institution you join offers a dual career program. If both partners are accomplished scientists, an academic position for each might be possible. Otherwise, the personnel department may offer administrative positions or assistance in finding employment outside academia.

- Should children be involved, two working parents bring up the issue of childcare. Depending on where you are, organizing appropriate care or schooling can be more or less difficult. Here too, some institutions may offer support. Possibly, there is a childcare facility on campus or agreements with nearby kindergartens can secure daycare slots for your children.

The children

Depending on the age and personality of your children, a move abroad can be more or less of a challenge. Third culture kids (TCK) - children that on the one hand can easily navigate two cultures, that speak two languages, but that, on the other hand, don’t feel like they fully belong to either culture. They know the culture of their parents since they are raised with their parent’s values, in their parent’s language. They also are insiders of the host culture since they immerse in kindergarten or school. On the individual level, they amalgamate these two cultures into a new one, the ‘third culture’. Hence, the term Third Culture Kids. The third culture lived by their children can present a special challenge to the parents.
Especially, if children adopt attitudes and behavior of the new culture that go contrary to their parents' core values and beliefs. It is one thing to accept and deal with divergent norms of the host culture in daily interaction with people of that host culture. However, it is much harder to allow these norms to take root in your own family if they go contrary to your own core.

Nevertheless, this is part of the process of personal development for your children as much as for yourself. Thus, be open-minded and embrace your children when they develop their own third culture. After all, it was your decision to move abroad.

References

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His own international experience and his daily dealings with young scientists from around the world got him interested in the topic of academic mobility. In 2010 he became a licensed trainer and coach for intercultural competence at artop, an institute of Humboldt University Berlin. Since then he has worked for numerous graduate schools in Germany and beyond on topics like academic cultures and intercultural leadership in academia.
Academics’ work-life balance: 
A tale of freedom and gendered multiple accountabilities in the knowledge economy

Patrizia Zanoni

Gendered accountability standards push us all to reproduce a gendered division of labour in the workplace and outside. Work-life balance poses distinct challenges to men and women knowledge workers in the academia, as they are held accountable against distinct standards. We can achieve more gender equal work-life balance by disrupting gendered expectations and challenging dominant gendered accountability norms.
Academics’ work-life balance:
A tale of freedom and gendered multiple accountabilities in the knowledge economy

Patrizia Zanoni

From public intellectuals to knowledge workers with multiple accountabilities

The question of gender, work and life in the academia cannot be addressed without first taking a step back and reflecting on how our profession has fundamentally changed in the last decades. Whereas academics in the past represented public intellectuals, or “free” thinkers bestowed with the duty and the privilege to think beyond (and above) *hic et nunc*, today our profession can best be captured by the notion of knowledge workers. Prototypical of these latter, we think for a living, our core competence being that we define and solve problems precisely *hic et nunc*. We are in the first place workers, rather than thinkers, as we are expected to produce not any kind of knowledge, but rather knowledge that generates value, increasingly defined as *economic value*. Also, we do so in a fundamentally different environment than academics used to do in the past, one structured in temporary project organizations, as members of evolving networks ranging from the local scale to the global. In this process of knowledge production, we stand in close relations of structural (inter)dependence with multiple parties including funders, administrators, policy makers, students, the scholarly community, etc. In our relations with them, we engage in intensive communication not only to jointly generate knowledge but, at the same time, to continuously promote ourselves as attractive partners for future collaborations.

As academics, we are expected to produce value out of the human capital we possess, the capital in which society has invested, and for which we are, in turn, accountable.
to multiple parties within those networks and society at large. A political concept, accountability refers to the “relationship between an actor and a forum, in which the actor has an obligation to explain and to justify his or her conduct, the forum can pose questions and pass judgment, and the actor may face consequences” (Bovens, 2007), a relationship with characterizes, more than ever before, a core aspect of our profession today. Similar to other knowledge workers, academics are accountable, for their work, to a multiplicity of different actors, each of whom evaluates performance along own, distinct criteria.

Within academic organizations, such accountability is enforced through an unprecedented multiplicity of controls (Knights and Clarke, 2013), including both ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ ones. On the one hand, direct - bureaucratic - modes of control are pervasive. Consider the continuous monitoring of academics’ research and educational output enacted through IT-facilitated surveillance techniques (e. g. research output databases and students’ evaluations), but also of the ability to raise external funds, and to give visibility to the university in wider society. On the other, academics are controlled indirectly through managerial and professional ideologies with which we proactively identify to build a positive professional identity for ourselves (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). The contemporary academia is characterized by a strong professional ideology calling individuals for strong forms of identification with and commitment to the profession. This ideology is enforced through professional temporary, networked organizations enabling extensive peer control and the continuous intensification of work.

Despite the lasting discourse of academic ‘freedom’, taken together, these modes of control de facto exert...
multiple pressures to perform along multiple accountability lines towards a number of actors (Figure 1).

This requires high cognitive and emotional investments from academics as knowledge workers.

**Multiple accountabilities and the gendered question of work-life balance**

Now, to return to our initial question: what does this shift in our profession mean for our work-life balance, as women and men in the academia? Or better, what does it entail for our ability to live a life outside the academia next to the one within it? This latter formulation is perhaps more adequate as the former presupposes a clear distinction between life and work, suggesting the impossibility of an overlap between them. **Yet strongly identifying with their profession, academics commonly see their job as central to their lives and identities.** For many academics - as for other knowledge workers - there is little life (possible) outside or without work. Aided by, among other, widely available communication technologies erasing all space-temporal boundaries between paid work and the rest of our lives, we ‘think for a living’ everywhere and at any time.

Yet our accountabilities stretch out to also include actors outside the work sphere, such as family members, neighbors, friends, school teachers, etc. Engaging in these multiple relationships, both in the work sphere and outside, we are invested with different ‘roles’ and accordingly expected to perform distinct sets of actions and achieve outcomes for which we are held responsible (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Multiple accountabilities of academics in the work and life spheres**

**The multiple accountability lens is attractive** to conceptualize work-life issues because different from the dominant metaphor of work-life balance, it does not focus on the
quantitative trade-off between time that can be allocated to one role versus time that can be allocated to another. It rather allows also to pay attention to the different types of obligations -- or accountabilities -- we engage in taking up multiple roles, and to gain a better understanding of how we experience multiple demands on us which might not solely conflict in terms of time but also in terms of the kinds of behaviors we are expected to enact to fulfill these roles (Kamenou, 2008).

It is precisely on this point that gender should be added into the equation, if we are to understand the gender-specific challenges academics face when attempting to juggle between multiple roles and responsibilities. Gender is crucial because it helps conceptualize the distinct social roles men and women are expected to fulfill in the different spheres of work and life, leading to partially distinct sets of accountabilities towards other actors. Despite increasing convergence in terms of the time allocated by men and women to activities in various spheres of life, these roles remain partially distinct in terms of systems of accountability. In other words, even when performing similar roles, women and men are today still held accountable based on other standards, other criteria, in partially different ways. For instance, men and women are expected to relate and to care in different ways as parents, children, spouses, neighbors, and friends in the private sphere. At the same time, they are held accountable for their behavior in the professional sphere along distinct sets of criteria, reflecting institutionalized gendered expectations. This has been widely documented among others for academic workplaces: despite the ideology of a neutral meritocracy, men and women are expected to act professionally in partially specific ways - as candidate employees, colleagues, leaders, subordinates, and teachers - reflecting intersecting professional ideals and ideals of appropriate ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ behavior. Or, they are held accountable along somewhat distinct standards. To problematize further, institutionalized gender roles are not only imposed from outside but are also, importantly, to varying degrees, internalized by men and women in their socialization into adulthood, and come to constitute their own sense of the self, their identity, or understanding of who they are. This explains the difficulties
of attempting to change existing gendered accountabilities, as the social practices that enforce them are at once constitutive of our own gendered sense of the self, limiting not only other actors’ ability to envision different relations but also our own.

For men, in academia but also in the knowledge economy at large, the challenge to better balance work and life is a challenge of re-negotiating accountabilities with multiple actors to reduce their own engagement and responsibility in the work sphere and increase it in the private sphere. This is because their accountabilities have historically been imbalanced towards the former. As a result, the (unusual) choice to care at the expense of work is largely perceived by their environment as an individual choice, not as an issue of accountability towards actors in the private sphere, such as the spouse, children and the family. This framing explains why for instance, when men - exceptionally - make use of work-life policies such as part-time work, they disproportionally suffer from career penalties (Theunissen et al., 2011). To the extent that they are not expected to take up significant responsibilities in the private sphere, they cannot be held accountable for them by actors either in the private or professional sphere. Their choice to care is thus perceived as a luxury choice, a sign of lack of commitment, one which disrupts institutionalized gendered division of labor among women and men (and their employers). Moreover, as men are less expected to take up supportive, caring roles in the work sphere than women are, a possible spillover effect of their care role into the work context is not perceived as desirable and valuable. Importantly, men who choose to take up more caring have to renegotiate their own role and accountability standards also in the private sphere, with multiple actors (spouses, their family and in-laws, the school, their children...). This might require quite some investment, although the individual’s willingness to adopt roles that are seen as ‘feminine’ generally meets appreciation and lenience on performance standards by actors in the private sphere.

Women’s challenge to balance work and life is of a quite different kind. Their accountabilities have historically been imbalanced towards the private sphere. They remain thus
accountable by multiple actors for the care for the nuclear (and possibly extended) family and the management of broader social relations in the private sphere. Yet as professionals, they are at once accountable to an increasing number of actors in the workplace, such as their employer, students, colleagues, customers, etc. Anything reminding workplace actors of their accountabilities in the private sphere, such as a pregnancy, or mere absence -- whatever the actual reason therefore might be -- might fuel doubts about their commitment towards their profession. Not only, the collective awareness of their key roles in the private sphere makes that they are considered (and often consider themselves) suitable for jobs in which relations and care feature prominently. As a result, women are largely over-represented in supportive sectors and jobs involving a large share of management of relations and care of socio-emotional dynamics. Even in de-segregated professions, such as the academia, they are held accountable and often pushed to take up responsibilities that match their alleged essential ability to better care for and support others, such as administrative functions and teaching. These gendered accountabilities are often enforced informally and even subconsciously, through micro interactions, because actors’ expectations as to what women can do well and as to how women should behave are highly institutionalized, or taken for granted. Importantly for women’s career is that precisely these tasks -- ‘feminine tasks’ -- have historically been less valued in organizations, leading to the Catch 22 situation for women that conforming to ‘feminine’ roles will entail career penalties. Behaving in ways that are seen as appropriate for women will inevitably detract from one’s authority and signal to actors in the work sphere lack of ambition, while behaving in gender inappropriate ways will make one fail to meet expectations to support and care for others, for which women are held accountable, also at work, curbing their professional path.

Multiple-level policies to foster a better work-life balance
So, where should we go from here? How should we stimulate change in a profession where work and life are interwoven against the background of persisting, pervading institutional gender arrangements? I believe that this ambition can be met only by tackling conditions simultaneously at the organizational, societal and
individual levels. Whereas the focus of much of our policies and research is on the individual, who needs (to be enabled) to change his or her attitudes and behavior, structural change is a necessary conditions to enable individual change. Individuals are not islands, they are embedded in specific social contexts which have specific expectations and responsibilities -- accountabilities -- on them and thus foster specific behaviors.

Let’s start with what organizations can do to create different workplace contexts. An extensive body of managerial/organizational work-life balance literature has to date focused on how organizations can facilitate employees’ management of conflicts between work and life by offering policies including work time reduction or flexibilization (e.g. part-time work, flexible working hours, telework), or alternatively by providing services that reduce employees’ -- read women’s -- responsibilities in the private sphere (e.g. child care facilities, household support services). Relatively little attention has however been devoted to structurally changing systems of accountabilities towards actors in the workplace. Some initiatives that could contribute to such changes are:

- **Mainstreaming of work-life issues and policies** making them legitimate and negotiable for all employees, rather than (implicitly) an arrangement catering for female employees’ work-life balance needs. This initiative requires the formalization and promotion of policies as well as the alignment of performance evaluation criteria to adapted work time.

- **The diversification of career paths**, whereby a more heterogeneous range of competencies are acknowledged and valued by organizations, rather than ordered hierarchically as it is often currently the case. This initiative redresses the historical undervaluing of ‘feminine’ competencies relative to ‘masculine’ ones.

- **Allowing and rewarding gender-transgressive behavior of men and women at work**. This implies a cultural change broadening the range of valuable competencies to include ‘feminine’ ones and thus broadening possibilities of behavior for both men and women. The academic leadership can play a
crucial role in legitimating novel behavior.

- **Fostering fora in which employees can collectively reflect** on their own and others’ gendered assumptions and expectations. This initiative fosters a culture of self-interrogation and learning.

- **Contributing to changing current accountability mechanisms imposed on higher education institutions through macro-level policies** in order to allow a better balance between freedom and responsibility. Acknowledging the linkages between policies at various levels, this initiative aims at the long-term alignment and harmonization of ambitions of excellence and of better work-life balance.

Macro-level policies should rather attempt to structurally change both the academic environment and gendered accountabilities of partners vis-à-vis each other in the private sphere. In the academic sphere:

- **Evaluating performance criteria of universities** in terms of their potential side-effects in terms of work-life balance and the internal gendered division of labor.

- **Rewarding universities for the effectiveness of their work-life policies** as opposed to their intentions or mere availability of these policies.

- **Rewarding universities for the effectiveness of their gender policies**, in terms of achieved gender outcomes, as opposed to intentions and initiatives facilitating equal opportunities.

In the private sphere:

- **Evaluating changes in social welfare services provisions in terms of their (gendered) effects on work-life balance of citizens.** In this case, policies are systematically screened for the potentially different effects of its implementation on men and women, in order to avoid indirect discrimination due to the persistence of gendered roles.

- **Enforcing long-term solidarity between partners**, or a more equal sharing of the long-term professional and economic risks and consequences of work-family choices by each partner. Increased solidarity represents a powerful means to stimulate a more
balanced division of care and paid work between partners.

Finally, as individuals, men and women do retain some margin of maneuver within which they can make some difference in their own lives and the micro-environments of which they are part:

- **Choosing consciously how to balance**, considering a wider range of possibilities as to how to balance, even though this might entail contesting one’s accountability along traditional gendered standards. Decisions about how much the partners should invest in career and care should be made considering more carefully, and even strategically, both the short- and the long-term pro’s and con’s on each of them.

- **Daring to (selectively) challenge gendered expectations** both at work and at home and to (selectively) negotiate novel arrangements that enable a better balance for oneself and one’s partner, showing their compatibility with commitment and performance.

- **Pro-actively managing one’s image at work** to steer perceptions away from institutionalized gendered expectations and accountability criteria.

- **Pro-actively managing one’s own expectations as to one’s ability to meet various actors’ expectations.** This includes working on one’s own sense of accountability towards oneself, and one’s expectations about what is good performance on all fronts.

**Conclusions**

In this short text, I have reflected on the challenges women and men academics encounter in balancing work and life as knowledge workers who ‘think for a living’. My brief analysis aimed at going beyond dominant readings of work-life balance issues as a (gendered) individual problem of time trade-offs. Instead, I have highlighted the social structures -- the multiple gendered accountabilities in the private and the professional spheres -- which constrain our ability to envision and implement novel identities, practices and relations at work and outside. To foster change, I have argued that a number of initiatives needs to address structures at the organizational, macro policy and individual levels.
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Work-life balance:
Breaking through stereotypes

Jean-luc Doumont
Work-life balance: 
breaking through stereotypes

Jean-luc Doumont

The way we regard life in general, and families in particular, is deeply influenced by so-called received ideas. Some of these stereotypes, such as the expected role of women, have been extensively discussed in the last decades. Others, in contrast, are seldom identified or questioned, even by otherwise critical thinkers such as scientists. What is worse, the very way we challenge stereotypes may in fact backfire. Sharing my own experience as a male in general, as a father, and as a husband, I unearth below some stereotypes about men, clarify why most current approaches may well make things worse, and exemplify how to break through at least one stereotype related to work–life balance.

Symmetrical barriers

I have been attentive to discrimination against women almost as long as I can remember, and my sensitivity to it was certainly heightened at university. My female classmates in the engineering school seemed as capable as their male counterparts to me, and I was baffled by stereotypes suggesting otherwise. When my girlfriend and I decided to pursue a PhD degree abroad and contacted such US universities as Caltech or Harvard to receive application materials (there were no websites at the time), we were not treated equally: I received a thick envelope with the requested materials while she got a small card saying, in essence, “are you sure you should be applying to our university?” All they knew about us was our names and postal addresses - and, yes, they could easily infer from our first names that she was a female and I was a male. To the best of our knowledge, they had discriminated on the basis of gender. I was shocked by such an attitude and decided I was from that moment on… a feminist.

While discrimination against women has received much (and, in my opinion, well-deserved) attention in
the last decades, comparable discrimination against men has not.

For example, an ad by Belgian bank bpost arguing that “if you do not have a rich husband, you’d better be smart” has been condemned by the jury of ethical advertising as demeaning to women, because it suggests that women cannot have a financially successful career of their own. The ad had to be removed. In contrast, an ad by Hoover for an iron “so simple even men can use it” in women’s magazine Marie-Claire was apparently found acceptable. As a man who spends a lot of time ironing his shirts before his talks in hotels around the world (with various makes and models of irons), I found the ad offensive. I trust that scientists, both males and females, have had to master more complicated sets of skills in their career than ironing their laundry.

Gender discrimination thus goes both ways, but with one difference: stereotypes typically question the competences of women at work and the competences of men at home. Myself, I truly started to feel discriminated against once I started a family. Even the most feminist of our female friends frowned upon my taking an active role in planning our wedding (“What? You helped design the wedding dress? But it’s bad luck for the groom to see the bride’s dress before the ceremony!”). When my wife was about to deliver our first child, the nurse wanted to kick me out of the delivery room, arguing that, as a man, I would faint. (For the record, I did no such thing.) In the following days, nurses seemed to panic every time they saw me holding my newborn in my arms. And these were only the first of a long series of disparaging remarks about my role as a husband and as a father. All in all, I feel a lack of recognition of my family skills in the same way that women may feel a lack of recognition of their professional skills. As a more recent example, I was offended by an online store of Belgian bank KBC (moederspreventiewinkel.be) asserting that “mothers know best” when it comes to safety and security. I find I care as much about the safety and security of our children as my wife does, even if she and I are sensitive to different types of danger. Once I became a dad, I naturally went from being a feminist to being an advocate of gender equality - not the same thing.
Any stereotype potentially hurts both genders, too. While the above KBC initiative implicitly casts fathers as unconcerned, it also casts mothers as overprotective - hardly a positive trait, especially in the eyes of teenagers. Similarly, parking spaces reserved “for mom and her baby” at a Carrefour supermarket near our place (Figure 1) upset me for suggesting that fathers do not go grocery shopping (or at least not with their baby), yet it could be interpreted by mothers as suggesting that they are too weak to carry their baby across a parking lot.

Yet, choosing words that avoid the stereotype is often simple enough. A few years later, the sign was advantageously replaced by another one reading “for baby and his or her family.”

Worse than the mere commercial ads mentioned above is official endorsement, for example by the Flemish government. Klasse voor ouders, a magazine printed at 700 000 copies each month and distributed to parents throughout the schools in Flanders, frequently challenges dads.

![Figure 1: Stereotypes potentially hurt both genders. Parking spaces reserved “for mom and her baby” unfairly suggest that fathers do not go grocery shopping with their baby - or perhaps that mothers are too weak to carry their baby across a parking lot.](image1)

![Figure 2: An official Flemish magazine, Klasse voor ouders reinforces the idea that mothers are natural parents while fathers need to be educated about parenting, as in this article titled “what dad are you?”](image2)

An article in the April 2010 issue (Figure 2) helps you find out what kind of dad you are - and no matter which
category you fall into, it tells you what you should be doing differently. Apparently, then, it is not possible to be an OK dad. In fact, on the website (www.klasse.be/ouders) of Klasse voor ouders, dads are listed alongside such issues as ADHD, aggression, and alcohol. Mothers are not listed on the site or challenged in the magazine: mothers are taken for granted, while dads have to prove themselves time and again.

**Just another brick…**

Having one’s childcare abilities constantly doubted is unpleasant but otherwise inconsequential in my case. My real concern as a dad is how gender stereotypes at school may affect our children; after all, they spend a lot of time in school. Instances of open discrimination - and hence reasons to worry - unfortunately abound in our schools. For our daughter’s fourth birthday at school, instead of buying a cake, I decided to bake a big batch of waffles. There I was with my daughter, bringing the waffles to her teacher in the morning, only to have the teacher turn to her and ask, “Please say a big thank you to your mother for the waffles.” My daughter under-standably frowned at the comment and looked at me, not knowing what to say or do. Clearly, she was affected by it. More recently (she’s now eight), she was telling me about a game her class played, in which the boys had to catch the girls. When I rolled my eyes at the very idea, she went: “Oh, that’s OK; boys versus girls is a quick way to decide on two teams. But they were fewer boys than girls and what I didn’t like is when they said that it did not matter because boys run so much faster than girls.” As it happens, she outruns all but one boy in her year, and she knows it. Still, she had tears in her eyes as she reported the incident. If she is told a few more times that any boy run faster than she does, she might actually start to believe it.

While I fully support the many initiatives to train young researchers, in particular on gender issues, I find that these initiatives come late: efforts should also be directed at kindergarten and primary school. This is where stereotypes are born and raised. Teachers so strongly reinforce them. Schoolbooks reinforce them. The whole system reinforces them. When our son finished primary school last June, the Davidsfonds (an organization promoting the Flemish culture)
attributed a prize for the best essay in his class. I applaud this initiative to encourage our kids to write well, and I am therefore proud to report that our son won the prize for best essay, which was this year on the theme “If I were minister of education, then...” Still, he was only one of two winners, because they gave a prize for the best essay by a boy and one for the best essay by a girl. Why? Minutes later in the graduation ceremony, the local library offered a book to each student (Figure 3). Again, I am delighted that they encourage kids to read, but - wouldn’t you know it - the boys received one book (a mummy story) while the girls got another one (advice on “how to survive your boyfriend”). Again, why a different treatment? Many people will insist that “boys and girls are different,” of course.

The question whether boys and girls are different or similar makes no sense, anyway: it is a question of perspective. Some people focus on differences, some people focus on similarities, and I am admittedly in the second category. I respect people who choose to see males and females as different, yet I worry about the consequences. From a communication point of view, insisting on the difference is not the best way to get equal treatment - including equal salary. This is one of three strategies about genders that are just “another brick in the wall” between men and women, or between any other partitioning of a population: all too often, “celebrating diversity” is really reinforcing stereotypes.

A second strategy that perplexes me is emphasizing exceptions by celebrating them. An example is the election of the ICT Woman of the Year by Belgian ICT magazine Data News (Figure 4), reminding everyone...
that being a woman in ICT is exceptional - another word for abnormal (deviating from the norm).

Figure 4: Initiatives such as electing an ICT Woman of the Year reinforce the view that some careers are not “normal” (not within the norm) for a woman - a strongly negative message. The woman’s silhouette does not help, either: her figure, clothes, and posture are a stereotype of sexual attractiveness, which hardly promotes the image of a competent and successful professional.

In contrast, I never gave a second thought to the employment of a male caregiver in our children’s day-care center (that is, until he received major press coverage for being one of the few male caregivers in Belgium). Why? Partly because, as a dad, I found it perfectly normal for a man to take care of babies, but largely because the day-care center itself never pointed it out as exceptional: when I visited the center as a possible option for our firstborn, the director introduced the male caregiver just like she did any other team member, without a fuss. What is presented as natural is more easily perceived as natural. While well-meaned and a necessary step toward change in some cases, support groups for women in science or for dads at home, quota for women in boards of directors, and so on unfortunately reinforce the stereotypes they are meant to fight. By providing support to specific groups, they are telling these people “you’re not normal” or “you need help.”

Finally, fighting stereotypes with stereotypes hardly strikes me as an instance of thinking out of the box. The initiative by Data News mentioned above is overtly trying to lure young women into ICT by supplying visible role models to them and, in the process, engendering additional role models for future generations. Similarly, many scholarly societies claim that “we need more women” in science, often sounding like they will stop at nothing to trick females into engaging in scientific careers. Reliance on role models is an instance of peer pressure, perhaps understandable for a social species such as homo sapiens yet debatable as grounds for decision-
making, at least in (young) adults otherwise expected to think critically. Typical in this respect was a campaign of the European Commission arguing that science is “a girl thing” (Figure 5).

![Image of people holding a phone with the text: SCIENCE: IT'S A GIRL THING!](image)

**Figure 5:** As an attempt to replace one stereotype with another, presenting science as “a girl thing” is hardly thinking out of the box. How about teaching kids to resist such kind of peer pressure altogether when choosing a career?

I would admittedly not want our daughter to disregard science as a boy thing, but I would not want her either to choose science because it is a girl thing. I want her to be an independent thinker: this is the role I am trying to model for our children - that of someone who followed his dreams against what society wanted him to become.

**Tear down this wall**

Among gender-related stereotypes from which I have had to free myself is the very concept of *work-life balance.*

This phrase in itself already suggests that work is not part of life or that life is not part of work. Even talking about balance between private life and professional life draws a line between the two, a necessity strongly imprinted upon me yet one I decided to challenge.

Eight years ago, my wife Geneviève and I joined forces to run a business together - from a home office - instead of further pursuing our separate careers. In other words, we decided we did not have private life and *professional life: we simply had life.*

At the dinner table, we might thus be discussing an urgent e-mail from a client, then our kids’ day at school, and finally an invitation from friends, without walls. *Our two children are de facto part of this life and are typically eager to contribute,* often wishing they could help more: I have been to meetings at clients with our two-year-old daughter when day care was closed; both our kids have participated in scientific experiments already; and, when possible, I take them with me on speaking tours around the world.

Judging from the reactions of our friends, our way of life goes against
something many of them hold sacred, namely a strict separation of the private and the professional. As a husband-and-wife team, we are often seen through the filter of traditional gender roles, too. Clients assume Geneviève is my secretary rather than my business partner, while family and friends confuse working from a home office with being a stay-at-home mom. In contrast, no one imagines for a second that I might be a stay-at-home dad; in fact, clients frown when I decline a late-afternoon meeting because of having to get the kids from school. Still, our own approach to work–life balance is working well for us so far. Balance in how we allocate our time remains an issue, of course (so much to do, so little time), but it is no longer a simplistic dichotomy of work versus life: we balance what is urgent and what is important - all of it - in a much more flexible way.

The situation described above is admittedly specific and perhaps extreme, yet, it is one example of going against stereotypes and of breaking down what was for me a long-standing yet unnecessary wall. We are often taught to see things in well-separated boxes: one for boys, one for girls; one for private, one for professional; etc. For example, I never knew what my own father did at work; this was not to be discussed at home. What I recommend we do is to think out of the box, tear down the wall, integrate the parts into a meaningful whole. The parts can still exist - you can see some things as private, some as professional - but the boundary has been blurred.

To integrate two parts into a whole, you have to be OK with both parts, of course. To avoid sexism, you have to be OK with men and OK with women. To relieve tension between work and family, you must believe work is OK and family is OK. Such beliefs are a question of attitude; they involve choice. You can regard your work as a necessary evil for earning a living and count down the days to retirement, or you can regard it as a unique opportunity to grow and to make this world a better place. Similarly, getting up in the middle of the night to feed your hungry baby may be an ungrateful chore you apprehend or a magical (if exhausting) moment of intimacy you look forward to, depending on how you choose to look at it. Do what you love; love what you do - at work and at home.
Concluding thoughts

I believe scientists are uniquely placed to tear down walls, in particular the one between career and family. More than ever, female scientists want a career, ideally without sacrificing their family. In turn, male scientists increasingly want a family, ideally without sacrificing their career. In other words, there is a strong symmetry. Scientists are typically independent thinkers, and they can model this role for their children. And scientists are often passionate about their work, and they may have more flexibility in their schedule than other professionals: they can thus blur the boundary between work and family in an effort to reduce tensions.

While I encourage everyone to break through stereotypes and I hope the personal stories I share in this contribution can help, I am by no means suggesting that what works for me will necessarily work for everyone. For one thing, and as mentioned above, there are boundary conditions or success factors, such as being OK both with your work and with your family. For another, going against stereotypes requires some level of self-confidence; in a sense, you have to be OK with yourself, too. Given how much I care for our children, I have occasionally been told that I was not “a real man” - a convenient way to avoid questioning stereotypes by excluding individuals who do not fit them. Frankly, I don’t know what it means to be “a real man” (except perhaps for obvious biological traits such as being attractive to potential mates). Frankly, I don’t care. To break through stereotypes, people must be critical thinkers. Scientists are - in their own field of research. (Not enough, if you ask me, but still, they are.) I am less sure they are in the rest of their life. In my humble opinion, one missing component in the training of young researchers is a course in critical thinking: learning to identify and to question assumptions in order to make better decisions. I am dreaming of a training that would cut across the usual walls, too: one that would be as much about challenging the conclusions of a paper they read as about challenging the assumptions of the people they live with. At this point, it is just a dream, but it would not be the first time that I make a dream come true. So here is hoping… and already wishing you a balanced life, free of stereotypes.
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Faster, higher, better?

The race for growth and the consequences for families.

Corinna Onnen
Faster, higher, better?
The race for growth and the consequences for families.
Corinna Onnen und Daniela Hrzán

Growth is closely linked to globalization which brings along fundamental changes for the work environment as well as for family relations. The consequences of globalization which can be currently observed, however, are not new. Marx and Engels, writing at the middle of the nineteenth century, described in their critique of capitalism the need of the bourgeoisie for “a constantly expanding market for its products” which involves hunting for new economic opportunities “over the entire surface of the globe” (Marx, Engels et al. 1848).

Economic growth has become a key goal of modern nations. National economies which do not grow become impoverished and are left lagging behind in the global competition. Economic growth prevents unemployment by bridging imbalances of rationalizations and increases the productivity. So far for the economy! But economic growth also seems to have an impact upon the quality of life enjoyed by human beings. The gross domestic product correlates highly with the Human Development Index which – in addition to measuring the life expectancy of human beings – also measures the level of education which individuals have attained. Niklas Luhmann has postulated that economic growth will remain an illusion as long as the paradox of scarcity (one person’s wealth entails the impoverishment of another person) has not been overcome (Luhmann 1988).

That this perspective must be considered to be one-dimensional has become obvious in the case of the Lehman Brothers debacle of 2008 and therefore does not need further elaboration. And, of course, this insight can be transferred to private living conditions as well. Despite economic growth we might see, for example, a rise in unemployment which – as perceived from the perspective of private forms of life and of the family – is essentially a negative experience.
Moreover, this one-dimensional perspective of economic growth disregards fundamental aspects of sustainability.

At the same time, however, we can observe an economization of life which includes all aspects and dimensions of the life of individuals, social groups, organizations and families and which is accompanied by a strong instrumental rationality. The modern credo is “everything must pay off”, and each individual is expected to find his or her own way in order to meet the different demands of life. These two sides of the same coin are currently being addressed under the slogan “reconciliation of work and family life” ( = “work/life balance”). Yet, what is quite irritating about this is the fact that the issue of work-life balance is mostly considered a problem to be solved by women alone. In more general terms, there is the question of how individuals may reconcile the demands of the labor market and corporate requirements with personal ideas, desires and goals for a good life.

Looking at the current situation in higher education from a structural perspective, universities must bow, for example, to economic factors: The research support programs sponsored by Germany’s Federal Government and the individual state governments are no longer sufficient to finance the operation of universities and institutions of higher education more generally. Today, more than ever before, researchers are expected to acquire third-party funding. The programs providing such funding, however, are structured in ways that do not always match well with individual researchers’ profiles. Furthermore, it is expected that researchers present the results of their work at as many conferences, workshops and working group events as possible. Visibility in the national arena is no longer sufficient. Rather, research is increasingly expected to be visible at the European level at least, but international presence beyond Europe is considered to be even more desirable.

Is there a chance to overcome the paradox of scarcity? Must economic growth always result in more burdens on private life and the family?

The job locations as well as the working hours of modern individuals have constantly changed during the past two centuries. In addition, new types of work activities place new
demands on the working population. These demands are so deormalized that they no longer offer a clearly defined structural frame within which workers might move: New self-organized forms of work and more flexible conditions for employment along with a normative subjectification of working conditions have resulted in the fact that paid work accounts for an above-average amount of lifetime and frequently enters private life in ever-growing dimensions. Even young workers, for example, do not want to work only for earning money, but place great normative demands on themselves regarding the meaning of their work and personal self-fulfilment.

This process is usually accompanied by an acceleration of work. Indeed, there are few work-related activities left which can be carried out without time pressure. This development must be seen as an immediate result of the rise of new technologies and the changing organizational structures resulting from such technological advancement which frequently require companies to run a 24-hour operation of business. On the other side, modern computer technologies, for example, enable new forms of home office. This, however, leads to a pattern known from work in traditional agriculture: Work increasingly invades the private living space not only with regard to time, but also in its more spatial dimensions. It is up to the individual to find a solution for balancing both areas of life. The frequently inflexible working hours, the lack of childcare facilities in many companies and the demands for a nearly unrestricted mobility of individuals at the service of the employer – to name just a few examples – result in different coping strategies for men and women in the course of their lives. With regard to what is considered to be the ideal biography, men face the challenge to find a balance between the required workload and a personal life which includes recreational activities. One typical problem that arises is that men may experience problems in their family life and partnership due to a lack of presence in their personal lives. The fact that men who have a family are often more successful and also more satisfied with their lives in comparison to male singles, may reduce the familial disadvantages only to a certain degree. The lack of attention for family matters resulting from too much time at the workplace especially affects children in a negative way.
The results of empirical sociological studies present the ideal biography for young women as a complex structure made up of different demands: On the one hand, young women wish to live in “a happy family” and on the other hand, they wish to work in a qualified profession. As the current political and economic campaigns for a “reconciliation of work and family life” demonstrate, **having a family and a qualified position is the official ideal for young women today.** Young men tend to support these ideals and nowadays more and more of them share the female perspective – mostly those men who are unemployed, and at least for a short time because they earn often much more than their partners. Starting a family, however, still presents a number of professional and familial risks that tend to be much higher for women because the question of how to reconcile work and family life is more closely linked to the female than to the male life course. For women having a family often means that they have to arrange their employment activities in a sequential manner: Women tend to work while still young. In the middle of their lives they tend to live for the family without being employed on a full-time basis and, beginning at age 50, women start re-entering the workforce. That this sequential arrangement of employment activities almost inevitably results in a closure of professional career paths seems to be a self-explanatory fact. Moreover, professional careers and family life also seem to be incompatible with regard to the expected social roles for men and for women. Even though traditional ideas concerning the social roles of men and women have changed, care work which is crucial for a functional family continues to be carried out mostly by women. As existing research about dual career couples demonstrates, **the birth of a child almost always results in the re-emergence of traditional gender roles** and their respective patterns of male and female agency (Solga and Wimbauer 2005). This especially means that women – to a greater extent than men – adjust both their mental resources and their time budget to the demands of family life.

Even though many individuals feel overburdened by the working conditions that they encounter, the balance between employment and family life remains unsatisfactory within most families. The results of empirical studies demonstrate **three different strategies in coping with this situation:**
- Especially highly qualified women perceive the advancement of a professional career initially to be much more attractive so that they tend to **postpone starting a family** until it eventually becomes impossible due to biological barriers.
- Others, mostly the elderly or those who are established in their career as well as economically, **follow traditional role models** and live in clearly separated worlds in which men prioritize their professional careers while women prioritize family life.
- The third and largest group is characterized through the **double burden of professional career advancement and family life**. The central challenge for this group lies in the development of strategies to plan and manage the interface between the two areas of life as perfectly as possible.

Even though executive positions may bring much satisfaction to those who hold them – some authors even go as far as speaking about the „eroticization of management“ – the family easily finds itself in an „objectification trap“ (Hochschild 1997). **Leisure time needs to be perfectly organized at all times.** This particularly puts a strain on the relationship between a father and his children as well as on the parents’ partnership that is often comprised of interactions for the purpose of familial coordination only.

A well-known US-American study of professionals situated on different levels of hierarchy in a company presents an even more extreme picture of the situation. The employees, who enjoy many offers ranging from flexible working hours to child care facilities in order to allow for an optimal balance of professional and family life, had no desire to leave work to go home and spend time with their families. Why would this be the case? **At their workplace the employees were able to enjoy a well-structured space within which they could move confidently, whereas at home they had to confront numerous unpredictable and unstructured demands.** For top managers, for example, it seemed to be a wonderful experience to act like a “good father” who is always available for his employees. The men found this experience to be especially satisfactory in cases where they had to deal with a pubescent son at home or had to confront demands made by their wives who asked for more time with the children. Leading professionals in top positions furthermore experienced
“time free from responsibilities” as particularly pleasing, for example the time spent in hotel rooms during a business trip. This was especially true for those men who had wives at home who managed the family, drove the children around, organized the household and praised the perfect interaction within the partnership (Hochschild 1997).

Since the 1970s the diversity of private forms of life has increased at least in the same way as demands for persistent growth have been directed at the economy. Now as before, family life occupies the highest rank of personal life goals. The structures of lives and the expectations for those who live them have changed: Contemporary lives have become more pluralistic and certainly will change even more in the future. For a democratic society it is important to change the social conditions (such as working time structures, infrastructures for institutions of childcare and care of the elderly) in such a way as to allow human beings to develop and connect their ideas of partnership and family life in a satisfactory way. And if, in addition to that, human beings were able to put greater emphasis on aspects of sustainability and social interaction and find ways to balance them with demands for greater economic productivity, they even might manage to overcome the paradox of scarcity because growth – or to be more precise: economization – of one area of life will no longer negatively impact upon the other, and family life and professional activities might be compatible after all.

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