

No time to lose
Unconventional ideas on time management

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Workshop on 'Time management and the balance
between a career in research and family'

I'm invited to share with you my unconventional ideas about life-work balance. So, I'm supposed to have unconventional ideas. I don't know, that will be up to you to judge. I will not be speaking about time management. I'm speaking about the weight of work versus the organization of intimacy in the life of women. I focus on researchers. I do not pretend that what I am saying goes for every kind of work. I'm speaking for a sector where most people are in love with their work.

My own work in progress at the moment concerns two main activities:

- An extensive research project (ESF) about the portrayal of work on television. How is work, and specially working women, treated on television. In the news, political talk shows, soaps, and advertisement.
- A second time consuming activity concerns the dismantling of our women's studies program. As you may know, we are out of financial resources. In the future there will no longer be a full academic program on women's or gender studies at the Flemish universities.

Attitude

What is the general attitude about work ? What is the dominant discourse ?
What is the feminist stream concerning work ?

- *We want it all.*
Previously women had to choose, between a family and a career, and earlier they even had no choice. Now a days women don't want to be forced to choose. Everything has to be possible simultaneously. For women as for men.

- *The limit*
In that formula, work has to fit in 38 hours maximum.
- *Onthaasten*
There has to be room and time for *onthaasting* don't hurry, me don't hurry
- *“They ruined the job”*
There is a difference in attitude towards work between the generations. Most elderly workers in top jobs, at the university and elsewhere, did not care about the amount of working hours. My younger colleagues, do care. Even in the many commissions for equal opportunities I was active in, again and again, one was trying to reverse the existing working culture. The endless hours to publish and to manage a department are not a future young women envisage.
- *Quality time equals anytime but work.*
Quality time is defined as time spend with family, with friends, leisure time. That is the general terminology. Look at the standard terminology ‘work-life balance’. Many people always make a little joke after using the expression, nevertheless that terminology opposes life and work.

Some research and project results

- The Belgian Gender Institute ordered last year several researches about women in politics. It is not about researchers, but female politicians are also in a position to be prepared to work restlessly. The results of the study were presented during an interesting conference June 19th 2006. The recommendations were predictable but interesting: if you want more women in politics,
 - politics has to fit in working hours;
 - work has to fit in family life, and every one has to respect family hours;
 - women have to accept that other people can do a part of the mothering, the caring and the cleaning;
 - traditionalists (men and women) have to see that the work can be done in less hours and at the right moment;
 - every one has to accept the schedule of the family hours;

- it is not a women's problem it is a gender question.
- Positive action at the University of Nijmegen|
From 1980 till 2001 I worked at the University of Nijmegen. Since the early 80s I have been active in positive action commissions. Our commissions did not propose other recommendations than the one I mentioned concerning politics.
In the late 90s, as commission of affirmative action of the faculty of social science, we were in a possibility to do a research concerning the motivations and ambitions of the female researchers of the faculty. The results were very revealing for me. The female researchers had hardly any ambition: they wanted to do their job, even obtain their PhD, but did not plan a career; the most important thing was the compatibility of their work with their family life. They also had adapted their ambitions to the very little chance there is that they become professor, or even obtain a permanent research appointment. It looks like an adequate coping strategy.
- Stagnation of women in top job. New research was released last week confirming our worst fears.
- EU: women in science.
Many of us have followed the effort Nicole Dewandre and others have put into it.

My opinion

- For researchers, working is a continuous process, a passion, a hobby. Everything that needs time in the life of someone with that kind of passion and ambition receives less time, less attention, less priority than when one lives with someone that does not have that kind of passion. This situation exists since always, and women living with men with a passion or ambition know that very well. It is not a disaster, but a choice, a way of living. For female researchers it is no different.
- Much of our housework (and also caring and mothering) can be outsourced. Feeling guilty about this is senseless.
Collectivizing housework was no success, but on the market there are many products and services that can make housework manageable for men and women. It is used, but it could be developed more systematically,

and we could think about it and develop it more positively and in a more serious and creative way.

- Also, there is nothing wrong with delegating housework, and the management of the household, to other people. Even when those people are other (decently paid) women.
- I hate our do-it-yourself culture. This does not mean that I don't appreciate handcraft, good knowledge of everyday ingredients, skills to repair things, etc. But I hate the way of life in which two people living together in a household (or, even worse, one person) is supposed to do everything by their selves: putting together cupboards, bookcases, hanging chandeliers, cooking, running errands, doing the laundry, ironing, installing your home computer, gardening, scanning your own stuff in the supermarket, checking in automatically in the airport, you name it, you know what I mean, and you have to do it yourself. It is in an important question, with hard economic and psychological dimensions, but when one thinks about it seriously, one realize what claim this mentality put on your time schedule and sense of responsibility. Service vouchers (dienstencheques) do answer partially the problem, but not fundamentally and practically enough. It is too complicated and expensive, and it is questionable that the state has to pay for it. Ironing shops, errand services (home delivery, collect and go, home managers, e-shopping, child hotels, nannies, computer-godfathers/mothers), it does exist, but it could be more personalized. When Marco Van Basten, with the Dutch national football team became European champion, in an interview afterwards, he said: it is beautiful, it is exciting, I'm very happy, but anyhow, I have to go to the supermarket next Saturday, life does not change that much. Meaning: European champion or not, I remain a normal person, there are many things I have to do myself. That was 1988, and it became worse and worse.
- People who invent creative solutions to combine hard work with 'a life', receive very little exposure, and no political attention. The mainstream message is: a job fits in a time schedule from 9 to 5, even a top job has to take maximum 38 hours a week, there should be no overlap between the public sphere and the private life, and the ambition of people having children together is educating the children together. I know that the

divorce rate is very high, but the ambition is to do it together.

- Punishing hard work (by taxing it, by a negative portrayal, by policy discourse and policy measures about the relativity of a working life) is absurd and bad for the general and public benefit.
- All the credit regulations we know, the leaves, the part time facilities, subsidies etc. are framed on the idea of a mainstream job and a mainstream family. Nevertheless we do, mostly silently, many difficult and extreme things to live with our (work)passion. When (and if) you do, you have to puzzle everything together yourself (again), and you have to pay it yourself. The support goes to the regular formulas. Look around, and you know that people
 - work and live in Sweden and in Denmark during the same period, that people work partially in the States and have a family in Brussels, work and live for years and years in The Netherlands and in Belgium (what I did for 21 years), or have different teaching jobs in different parts of Germany, ...
 - regularly remain for long periods in an remote foreign country
 - live in a nomadic way
 - also live this way: he, Minister in The Hague and she, ambassador in India (Arie Pais and Eegje Schoo), in the 80s. He created 10 chairs in women's studies at the universities in the Netherlands.
 - who are single, and automatically colleagues think that they don't have no organizing and caring to do.
 - .. you know many other examples ...
- Different periods in life can differ a lot. There are no long term solutions. Hedy d'Ancone, the first Dutch minister for emancipation (and a militant feminist) did not want a second term as minister, because during 4 years you can keep your social life on hold, 8 years you can't, she said. Being divorced and single she said, she had to be more careful with her friends.
- I do not think that top jobs are done in 38 hours, and certainly not in 19 hours. It is dishonest to do as if it can be done. There are 168 hours in a week, and 56 of that time one has to sleep. Remaining: 76 hours. That is twice the time people are supposed to work. We all know that in intensive jobs a large amount of that 76 hours has to be spend in working. In top jobs, highly educated people work a lot more, paid or unpaid.

- 38 hours is a fable when we are speaking about managers, ministers, high ranked civil servants, professors, researchers. I have no problem with it, I only have a problem when we say it can and has to be done in 38 hours.
- Mieke Vogels (former Flemish minister of Equal opportunities) was the protagonist for *onthaasting* don't hurry- mentality. We fully disagreed on this point. She knows how hard she and many women work, but over and over again, she claimed time for not working, and pleading for going slowly.
- Much is going on about stress of men and women in the rush hour of their lives. They care for children, and for their parents, they have to construct their careers. Often the claims about the generations are not well calculated, but suppose that people in their 30s are very busy:
 - The cause of the exhaustion and the stress is not only work or career. The pressure results from doing and wanting everything at the same time.
 - Writing a PhD maybe means not going to concerts or exhibitions, postponing children and having them earlier or later. Maybe it means not living together with the children for a longer time, maybe not going on holiday. If the partner does not want to cross out the holiday he/she has to go by him/herself and when the children cannot have a family holiday maybe they have to go to a camp.
 - There are so little public examples of what unconventional things women do to have a career, to live their passion. That's a pity, because a lot of things are happening since many years. The European network of Women's Studies, Athena [<http://www.athena2.org>] was very instructive for me in this perspective. Many colleagues are living the same unconventional life as I do, but in our Positive Action Commission we plead for the mainstream 9 to 5 life.
 - I have the impression that I hear less extravagant examples from young women, and I certainly don't hear about the efforts in the Positive Action Commission I was a member of. There are many projects and researches about the combination of work and family, but in my opinion, the most important thing is the attitude, the

mentality of the people how have to do it. Girls and women have to want it, and boys and men must not stand in their way. That is the most important. I would want them more ambitious.

- Time management: work is quality time, in certain periods work comes first, and in other slots of life it does not. Life, work and thinking is about more than only planning.
- I'm sure that wise practical lessons about time management stress the fact the success of the combination of a career and a private life depends of the quality of the organization. It is possible to have it all, if you don't lose time, if you are clever in putting your priorities, selection, calculation, managing your agenda and being exhaustive in what you put in to it, being reasonable in what you think you can do en passant, being open towards your colleagues in claiming free moments for short family business, .. Sure, I know, but I am not happy with it.
 - I hate the discipline that is enforced to others, the lack of flexibility, the ruling family schedule.
 - The formula is bad for work-related thinking.
 - The formula is bad for the general degree of intellectuality of a society, it slenders social life.
 - This formula formalizes work in an unpleasant way.
 - Rules, checklists, discipline ... and for men the same formula.
- Since the 80s there has been a lot of critical comments about the work of Simone de Beauvoir. The reason mainly is the fact that she did not took into account that women's problems consist of doing the housework and that they are (and want to be) mothers. In her general ideas about emancipation, she neglected everyday life. However, she herself exemplified a everyday life without housework. Housework is, indeed, no ill fate, it is a choice. If you don't want it, you don't live that way. Point.
- I spend a large part of my working live, in the name of feminism, in commissions talking about motherhood and about women who refuse to choose. There is no bitterness in what I am saying, the only thing I say is that women in top jobs need more honesty, the

responsibility to make choices, much more creativity, passion and ambition, not the permanent demands for more state support, and constant warning towards the employers about life-work balance.