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Gender, agency, and time use among doctorate holders: The case of Iceland

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Abstract

This article investigates how doctorate holders in Iceland make sense of time and utilize their own time management as an instrument in their career development and whether gender is a defining factor in this context. The project is based on 32 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with participants holding 5 to 20-year-old doctorate degrees in Iceland. These interviews were then analyzed using a phenomenological approach. The results indicate that the men generally felt a higher level of agency regarding their work–life balance and time management than did the women, who more often expressed difficulties finding a proper balance and expressed being more stressed about the often fragmented time they had to combine their career and family obligations successfully. The study provides a picture of how societal time norms among highly educated people are very gendered and how time is still inevitably linked to power. The contribution of this study to prior studies is that, even when comparing highly educated people among whom it is more likely to find a higher level of egalitarian attitudes, in a country where gender equality is assumed to be at a higher level than in many other countries, women still seem to experience time differently from men in terms of personal autonomy.

Keywords: gender, time, career development, agency, meritocracy

Introduction

In the Western context, a growing awareness about the importance and benefits of a gender-equal society, together with a significant amount of equality legislation against gender-based discrimination in the labor market, have effected changes toward a more gender-equal society. In this regard, Iceland is considered to be in the forefront.

Various measures have been taken to effect these changes, such as implementing policies aimed at changing the gender representation on the boards of larger companies (Axelsdóttir and Einarsdóttir, 2017) as well as applying an equal pay standard that aims to help employees and prevent salary discrimination (Government of Iceland, 2017). Furthermore, Iceland defines both mothers and fathers as active caregivers as well as employees and reserves three out of nine months of parental leave exclusively for fathers, while three months are for mothers, and the remaining three are for shared parental leave (Act on parental leave, no. 95/2000). This reflects the fact that the labor market participation of Icelandic women is among the highest in the world and also the highest among the women in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (83.3% in the year 2017) (OECD.Stat., 2017a), where the average was 62.8% in 2016 (OECD.Stat., 2017b). Also, women comprise 70% of the university graduates in Iceland (Statistic Iceland, 2018a).

The Nordic welfare society is a dual-earner family model where men and women take on “shared societal roles” in “a dual-earner, care-sharing family” (Leira, 2002: 82). “Defamilization, also characterizes the Nordic societies, which is ‘the degree to which individual adults can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living, independent of family relationships, either through paid work or through social security provisions’” (Lister, 1997: 173).

Iceland belongs to the Nordic countries, and even though all these countries score highly on the Global Gap Index, Iceland has been ranked first since 2009 (World Economic Forum, 2018). For that reason, the country has been portrayed in mainstream media as a gender equality paradise where equality has more or less been reached (Jakobsdóttir, 2018; Lindberg, 2017).

However, when it comes to academia and top management positions, studies show a persisting gender gap (Heijstra et al., 2015; Júlíusdóttir et al., 2018; Ólafsdóttir and Rögnvaldsdóttir, 2015). For instance, a recent analysis of Icelandic academia has shown that men are not only more likely to hold a full professorship position, but also progress considerably faster than women toward it (Heijstra et al., 2015). Additionally, statistics have shown that men hold above 70% of the top executive positions (Statistic Iceland, 2018b).

Considerably less attention has been given to gender equality in the home and the interplay between home and work. However, a study done by Thorsdóttir (2012) indicates that although men are indeed participating in housework to an increasing extent, women still bear the main responsibility of the home, and the traditional gender division in the home is still prevalent. Also, Rafnsdóttir and Heijstra (2013) and Rafnsdóttir and Júlíusdóttir (2018) showed how time is intertwined with material conditions as they

analyzed the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) among academics and business leaders. Even though ICT has partly increased the labor market flexibility, it also reproduces traditional gender relations in families and at work and “accentuates the gender role and reproduces unequal gender power” (Rafnsdóttir and Heijstra, 2013: 294). Rafnsdóttir and Weigt (2019) further show that despite the different affirmative actions in Iceland that aim to increase gender equality at the workplace, we still know too little about how gender operates interactionally at the micro-level or how the traditional masculine working culture can (re) produce gender stereotypes (Rafnsdóttir and Weigt, 2019).

This shows that despite the many progressive public policy changes toward gender equality, the hegemony of masculine domination as well as the deeply embedded gender stereotypes still prevail. Here, older and more well-known theories, such as Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony that is used to address the relation between culture and power under capitalism, could be applied to explain the situation, that is, how the hegemonic group (here men) has managed to renegotiate the legitimacy for their rule through constant dialectical interaction with the subordinated groups (here women) (Gramsci et al., 1971). Even though hegemonic masculinity has continually changed over the years, especially around ideas regarding work participation, sexuality and fatherhood (Hearn, 2004) and time and leadership (Rafnsdóttir and Heijstra, 2013; Rafnsdóttir and Júlíusdóttir, 2018), men remain as the hegemonic group that holds the power.

This renegotiation also exists at a more institutional level, which can be observed in the way gender inequality is no longer accepted in its overt forms. In this regard, national courts across the world as well as the European Union (EU) court have worked toward eliminating it at the institutional level, but nevertheless, the covert forms of discrimination continue to prevail (Caprile et al., 2011). Covert forms have, in a way, been “negotiated” as gender-neutral conceptions rooted in the idea of the power of individual agency as well as the notion that equality has more or less been reached (Aiston, 2011). However, this notion hides the fact that institutional structures are not the only structural elements that must be considered. Individuals also embody gendered social structures and values that are constantly being produced and reproduced within the hegemonic order of society. This, coupled with other social structures such as the structuring of time, can have a major impact on how individual agency is realized (Bryson, 2007; Giddens, 1984; O Grada et al., 2015).

We argue that the overall gender-equal and family-friendly environment in Iceland serves as an ideal research context and provides an opportunity to analyze the structuring of time among doctorate holders in Iceland—a career-oriented group—to see whether gender is a defining factor in their sense of time and their time management as part of their career development. In more concrete terms, we want to investigate how this group perceives their agency regarding their time management in combining and balancing their career and family. To the best of our knowledge, such a study that focuses especially on doctorates in relatively gender equal societies such as Iceland has not been conducted previously. By doing this, we can conclude whether time is a factor in explaining the remaining gender gap in academia and leadership positions in Iceland.

Continuity and change: The gender context

Drawing on Giddens' structuration theory, we see gender as a structure embodied by individuals through elements such as informal rules, beliefs, values, or patterns that are constantly being produced, reproduced, and transformed within society through time by agents who are engaged in their practice (Giddens, 1978). Although Giddens did not form his theories specifically around gender, his interest in understanding both continuity and change resonates well, as Bryson (2007) notes, with other feminist ideas like Butler's (1990) "doing-gender". Furthermore, Giddens argues that "institutions, identities, ideas and structures of domination do not simply 'exist', but are maintained or modified through time by the repetition of individual acts that accumulate as social practices" (Bryson, 2007: 114).

Giddens views social structures as fluid entities. He also emphasizes the importance of taking their temporal elements into account whereas analyzing and treating social structures by bracketing time is like "taking a snapshot of society" (Giddens, 1980: 62), which inherently means taking the elements in which social structures move out of context.

This lack of context can, for instance, be seen in the measures taken at the institutional level. Despite the evident importance of intervening at the structural or institutional level regarding efficiently pushing for gender equality, such institutional changes have often failed to recognize and address the deep structural processes that result in unequal outcomes, resulting in either limited impact or "tokenistic nods" toward gender equality (O Grada et al., 2015).

Both Giddens and Butler place an emphasis on the capacity of individual agents in making changes to (gendered) social structures. For example, by not repeating certain acts that would reproduce the structure, whether intentionally or not (Giddens, 1984), or in Butler's (1990) terms, by "undoing gender" generated through the "failure" to behave in gender appropriate ways.

These concepts are indeed important when explaining the changes that have occurred over time. However, changes to the social structures, which often are deeply embedded in people's way of living, do not happen overnight and can cause immense resistance from the majority complying to the norms. In this regard, some feminist scholars have criticized Butler's "vision of [people's] freely chosen, ever subverting gender performance[s]" (Bryson, 2007: 114), or as Lorber (2000: 83) argues, "Gender is a constant performance, but its enactment is hemmed in by the general rules of social life, cultural expectations, workplace norms, and laws. These social restraints are also amenable to change, but not easily, because the social order is structured for stability."

In this context, despite the changes that have occurred, the manner in which "doing gender" usually involves "producing relations of dominance and submission" (Bryson, 2007: 61) often gets downplayed or forgotten in the discussion of the importance of making workplace-related changes. Although women today are legitimately able to compete with men for positions and career progression in the labor market, they generally do so on culturally male-dominated and heteronormative terms that have been preestablished. As many feminist scholars have argued, this is especially evident when examining the

difference in the use of time by men and women and how “gendered time norms play a key role in maintaining oppressive gender differences” (Bryson, 2007: 57).

The gendered structure of time

A significant body of feminist thought exists on the gendered nature of time (Adam, 1990, 1995; Bryson, 2007; Davies, 1989; Everingham, 2002; Leccardi, 1996; Odih, 1999). Although not all scholars agree as to what extent it is sensible to talk about and analyze men’s and women’s different time use and experiences as separate time cultures, scholars find common ground in the perspective that different time cultures do indeed exist and that time is inevitably linked to power. In line with this, Adam (1995) argues, “Not all time is money. Not all human relations are exclusively governed by the rationalized time of the clock. Not all times are equal. That is to say, all work relations touched by clock time are tied up with hegemony and power.” Bryson (2007: 121) goes further stating:

“[T]he dominant model of time in contemporary capitalist societies is the linear, goal-oriented, commodified time of the clock: time that can be individually owned, bought, sold, invested, spent or wasted, [. . .]. However, this hegemonic understanding coexists with other ways of relating to time; in particular, human relationships and caring interactions may have a very different temporal pattern and logic, while our bodies have rhythms that we can never entirely escape.”

Like most feminist scholars today, both Adam and Bryson refrain from discussing the differences between women’s and men’s time use in dichotomous terms as if “all women at all times of their lives” stood in the shadow of the hegemony of universal clock time (Adam, 1995: 94). However, they do emphasize that general differences in physical and social experiences often present women and men with different relationships to time (Bryson, 2007) and that the devaluation of the responsibilities, which have been associated with women within the hierarchical framework through history, has forced the temporal rhythms that are bound up with these activities to adapt to the dominant “time is money” culture.

The increased participation of women in the labor market, combined with a lack of significant changes to the gendered division of the domestic sphere, validates the argument by Davies (1989) that the time discipline of the workplace is increasingly felt in the home, or as Bryson (2007: 132) posits, “Because this discipline requires that time is used efficiently, it can suggest that the principles of ‘time-management’ should be applied to personal life and that the emotional and physical needs of partners, family and friends can be organized into a tick list of tasks to be performed in pre-allocated time slots.”

From the viewpoint of the commodified clock time of modern capitalist societies, in which time is regarded as a scarce resource that can be spent or saved at will, it is often forgotten that certain needs—whether physical, emotional, or communal—are still commonly bound up with women’s work in the home (Davies, 1989). In other words, time is not just an individual resource to be used at will; as Everingham (2002: 340) mentions, time “must first be made before it can be spent.” Hence, with women

disproportionally bearing this responsibility, “their time—more than any other family member’s—becomes others’ time” (Davies, 1989: 38).

Holding a professional or executive career often demands excessive work and long working hours. In this work culture, long working hours are commonly associated with workplace loyalty and commitment and are often considered essential in striving for a successful career progression (Bryson, 2007; Hochschild, 1997). However, recent studies indicate that, although prolonged working hours cause men to face powerful external constraints and normative pressures when allocating their time, women with professional careers still bear the main responsibility for domestic obligations more frequently, such as the overall planning and coordination of activities for other family members when coming home from work (Acker and Armenti, 2004; Etzkowitz and Ranga, 2011; Rafnsdóttir and Heijstra, 2013). This is what Hochschild (1997) famously addressed as the exhausting “second shift” of unpaid work, which despite ever-increasing egalitarian attitudes (especially among younger and more highly educated men) (Dex, 2003; Vohlídalová, 2017), still falls disproportionately on women.

Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the home sphere consists not only of a set of distinct and identifiable activities that need to be managed but also involves a certain demand for interpersonal care that is simply associated with the time needed to just “be there” (Boyd, 2002; Bryson, 2007). Both adults’ and children’s needs do not always conform to the logic of the commodified clock, so the attempt to squeeze “quality time” into the cost-efficient time table of the labor market can often feel like what Boyd (2002: 466) refers to as the “McDonaldization of love.” This lack of family time and the attempt to organize it more efficiently around the demands of the workplace necessitates the often guilt-ridden “third shift,” which refers to the emotional labor at home (frequently done by women) attempting to repair the damage caused by time pressures felt from juggling work and family life (Hochschild, 2003).

The cultural hegemony of time efficiency and meritocracy

These above-mentioned examples on how the hegemonic “time is money” norm, though it does not really favor the subordinated groups the way it favors the ones in power, is widely culturally accepted among all groups, resonates well with Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony. Although, in Gramsci’s mind, consent and force nearly always coexist, he argues that among the Western societies, ruling groups maintain their hegemonic power instead of forcing their rule by “giving their domination an aura of moral authority through the creation and perpetuation of legitimating symbols” (Lears, 1985: 569). Gramsci went on to further argue that people create their own symbolic universes to make better sense of their lives, but of course, not all these symbolic universes become hegemonic. According to Gramsci, the transformation of a symbolic universe into a hegemonic entity depends on how successfully it forms alliances with other groups (Gramsci et al., 1971). “The keys to success are ideological and economic: to achieve cultural hegemony, the leaders of a historical bloc must develop a world view that appeals to a wide range of other groups within the society, and they must be able to claim with at least some plausibility that their particular interests are those of society at large” (Lears, 1985: 571). However,

hegemonic symbolic universes never serve the interests of all groups equally, but if they convincingly seem to be the most logical or plausible way to run things, subordinate groups may participate in maintaining that hegemonic symbolic universe, even if it serves to legitimate their domination. In other words, subordinated groups may share a kind of half-conscious complicity in their own subordination (Gramsci et al., 1971).

The use of Gramsci's concepts in terms of the time-management ideas and career path development of highly educated people within academia and the career-driven business sector, can be helpful in shedding light upon how, despite the many progressive public policy changes toward gender equality, the hegemony of masculine domination as well as the deeply embedded gender stereotypes seem, in most national contexts, to be far from being eradicated. However, gender division regarding housework and paid labour certainly moves within different national contexts, and through policies and legislations, states can have a big impact regarding this matter over time. In this regard, the Nordic countries have received recognition for embracing social as well as gender equality as core values of their states (Borchorst and Siim, 2008), and progressive legislations in these countries, like the one that reserves a part of the parental leave exclusively for fathers, have indeed challenged traditional masculinity and workplace practices and have led to more equal societal changes (Bryson, 2007).

In line with this, studies have shown that Scandinavian men participate in housework to an increasing extent (Haavind and Magusson, 2005; Johansson and Klinth, 2008; Wall and Arnold, 2007), but the same studies have also shown that women still take primary responsibility for the children and housework. Moreover, Bekkengen (as cited in Johansson, 2011) argues that, although there is an increasing tendency toward men wanting to be at home with their children and developing a more caring attitude over the years, these trends do not necessarily correspond with gender equality or the eradication of ideas rooted in traditional, hegemonic masculinity.

Although seemingly plausible and even gender-neutral, the conception of meritocracy (on which both the academic and business sectors rely heavily) puts enormous emphasis on individual qualities while downplaying institutional and social contexts, for instance gendered time use (Aiston, 2011; Beddoes and Pawley, 2014). The fact that meritocracy is based on the idea of fairness and justice as well as the belief that the standards in the labor market are neutral, objective and universal, gives it an enormous power to pass the responsibility of unequal outcomes back to the individual and to stigmatize the unsuccessful candidate as incompetent, which the individual is then likely to internalize (Aiston, 2011; Knights and Richards, 2003).

Studies show that, in the Nordic countries, the idea of success as something that is solely based on merit is prevalent (Powell, 2016), and despite institutional changes and higher state support for working mothers in those countries, women are nevertheless, as Skevik (2006) points out, unable to manage their time the way it is expected of them. Therefore, they become "overwhelmed by guilt for not coping well with the burden of combining their career with motherhood" (Skevik, 2006: 245).

With the Icelandic context in mind, in terms of being a country that is considered to be further along in gender-equality compared to other countries, we analyzed the structuring of time among doctorate holders—a group of highly educated people, presumably holding a higher level of egalitarian attitudes in general—to see if gender is a defining factor in how they make sense of time and their own time-management as a factor in their career development. Specifically, we examined how the participants perceive their own agency regarding their time-management in their career development.

Methods

The study is based on 32 thematically structured, in-depth interviews with people holding 5 to 20-year-old doctorate degrees. The interviewees were evenly distributed across gender, field of study (i.e., science, technology, engineering, and mathematics vs. social sciences and humanities, henceforward referred to as STEM and SSH), and career choice (within academia vs. outside academia). To cover the variety of doctorate holders, we deemed it necessary to interview people from both STEM and SSH. In order to protect the interviewees' anonymity, the distinction between the fields were not used further in this study.

The participants' ages ranged from 38 to 63 years. All but one interviewee were employed full time. The people within academia either held an assistant, associate, or full professorship. Of the people who worked outside academia, 11 held some sort of management position, although not all of them were in charge of other employees. Regarding work hours, a distinction could be found between the people working outside academia versus those working within. Those working outside academia generally worked 40–50 hours a week, with a very few working up to 60 hours. They commonly enjoyed a flextime of around 2–3 hours, which their workplace offered to promote a family-friendly environment. The academics, however, enjoyed a very high level both of flexibility and autonomy but at the same time, almost all of them worked more than 60 hours a week.

There was a slight difference in the demographics both between men and women as well as between people employed within academia versus people employed outside of academia. Of the women, 3 out of 16 were childfree, whereas one man did not have children. Also, four of the women were single parents, whereas all male interviewees were married or cohabited (if not at the time of the study, then during the time their children were growing up).

The average fertility rate of the people interviewed also varied considerably. The women outside academia had, on average, 2.1 children, whereas the men had 1.8 children on average. The biggest difference was however among the people employed within academia; the women had, on average, 1.25 children whereas the men had, on average, 2.75 children. The children's ages varied from 6 months to a little over 30 years.

The interviews were performed between March and June 2018 and lasted between 40 and 80 minutes. Most of them were conducted at the interviewees' workplaces, although two of them were conducted in an office organized by the interviewers.

Considering that the population of Iceland is only around 350,000 individuals, and those holding a Ph.D. account for about 0.7% of the total population, some challenges were faced in protecting the interviewees' anonymity. In order to protect the anonymity of the interviewees, not only were fictional names used but sometimes other things were also changed in the interviewees' biographies for better protection.

The qualitative interviews' aim was to explore the participants' perceptions of the possibilities and constraints relating to their career path, as well as their experience of their situation before, during, and after achieving their Ph.D. We also wanted to understand their experiences of everyday life and perceptions regarding things like their working environment, their family life, and their multiple tasks both at work and at home. In this sense, we were particularly interested in understanding better their perception of time and how it is woven into their consciousness as they reflected on their past, present, and future. Therefore, the phenomenological approach seemed to us the most convenient approach; this particular approach enables the researcher to examine in-depth, lived experiences from daily life, and by doing so, move beyond the taken-for-granted way of seeing things and come closer to understanding what meaning people put into their lives (deMarrais and Lapan, 2003; Nelson, 1989; Van Manen, 2016). The phenomenological approach we then further used as a tool to analyze the interviews by utilizing the three analytical steps as explained by Orbe (1998) (i.e., description, reduction, and interpretation).

Findings

Working hours and the balance of family life

As mentioned earlier, the academics enjoyed a higher level of flexibility than did the ones working outside academia. Although the academics referred to flexibility at work as one of the biggest advantages that, in their mind, helps with maintaining a certain work-life balance, they also sensed the pressure that comes with the unregulated work hours. In a way, this high level of flexibility becomes a tool to increase the working hours. This is how Eva, a young mother of two, explained how she often takes her work home:

“I do this, but I'm trying to stop it. [...] Sometimes when I have a lot of teaching, I take the work home with me, just because I've been so long at work, I don't feel like staying [at the office] any longer. [...] But yeah, of course it's not particularly popular when you are at home but still at work.”

Here, Eva is referring to her family, who sometimes complains when she has to take work home. Although the male academics in our study also feel the pressure of their workload and struggle with balancing their work and family life, the women generally had a harder time achieving this balance than

their male counterparts, garnering more critique, especially from their children, when they have to continue working from home. Indeed, they expressed feelings of guilt more frequently when discussing work-life balance.

Although it is by no mean absolute, it is quite evident that the women, including both the female interviewees and the male interviewees' partners, were responsible, in most cases, for handling the communication with their children's school and also maintaining the overall planning regarding the children's extra-curricular activities, doctor's appointments, and other arrangements concerning family life. Looking at our interviewees' working hours, it is worth noting that, the male participants and the female participants' partners have always been in a full-time job, and many of them work above 60 hours a week. The women in our study however, as well as the men's partners, had often taken a part-time job at some point in their career to accommodate the family's needs. The women's working hours, no matter how long, were rarely met with their partners' accommodation regarding working hours, and never with them taking a part-time job.

When asked about the balancing between work and family life, a distinction between the men's and women's answers could be detected. The women more often expressed difficulties regarding finding a proper balance and seemed generally more stressed about it, whereas the men more often in quite a relaxed way, stated things like, "This somehow just works fine" or "this is somehow no issue really." Or, as Sindri, a father of three children, said:

"Yeah, I mean just fine, I think. I mean, you know, this is just how it is. I think sometimes I work too much, I mean, but I don't think the family suffers because of it, except maybe when I'm away at difficult times. But I mean, I think it just works fine."

With this in mind, it therefore perhaps comes to no surprise that the discourse of working shorter hours but nonetheless efficiently, as an alternative, no worse or less profitable to working long hours, was more frequently used by the women than the men. Many women in our study talked very positively about the "shortening of the work week," an ongoing debate in Iceland and the other Nordic countries.

The division of housework and childcare

Due to the age diversity among our interviewees, certain societal changes over the last decades, especially concerning the division of housework and childcare became clear. Thinking back to the time when Sandra and her husband were both building their careers in the 90s, she talked about how she always prioritized her family first, whereas her husband was more work-oriented:

"In fact, before I started my doctoral studies, I always did bear the brunt of the family responsibilities. I worked shorter working weeks than him and I felt like I always prioritized the home and the children whereas he did not."

However, Sandra did add that the reason was not as if he felt certain chores were beneath him; "it was never like that." It was more that status-seeking and climbing the career ladder seemed to be more

important to him. Thus, Sandra's husband saw it as a choice to prioritize long working hours and to be away from small kids. Sandra felt this was a common attribute for men in general.

Herborg, a woman over 60 and mother of three grown children, had a similar story: "Yes, I reduced my workload, and so, so you know, he blossomed but I did not." Here, she is referring to her ex-husband and how she always worked part-time during their marriage and their children's upbringing, whereas he had a full-time job and was able to advance on his career. In light of her experience, Herborg placed high importance on her daughters' independence, not wanting them to sacrifice their education or career for their partners. She sees however, that some changes have occurred over the years. Herborg spoke about how young people today share the responsibility of household work and childcare in a much better manner than she experienced. This statement was in line with those of the younger participants and indicate that certain societal changes toward equality have occurred, especially related to sharing childcare responsibilities and kitchen work.

When asked specifically about household chores, many of our interviewees claimed to share responsibility equally with their partners. The men often talked about how cooking and cleaning the dishes after meals were their main obligations. Despite the fact that sharing the responsibilities at home is more common among the younger generation, the division of labor between partners still seems to be a little gender traditional. As Axel mentioned, "It's pretty much even, maybe I do a little bit more of the typical men's stuff, and yes, she maybe does a little bit more of the washing, but I still iron more frequently whereas I'm the one wearing the shirts. The cooking however, I would say is about 50/50." In the same line, Svavar stated that he perhaps took more care of the garage whereas his partner takes care of the garden and does the washing. However, he added jokingly,

"She sometimes goes away [as part of her job] and so then I do it all, and what I don't understand, I just wash one or two machines a week and it's done. She is somehow always washing something, I have no clue what."

Many of the women in our study also claimed to share the housework as good as equally with their partners. However, when discussing time-management, they apparently did not perceive that they had the same power over their time as the men did, partly because their time was so largely involved in the time of other family members. When the female interviewees expressed that they had an equal share of the household tasks, they usually, in a teasing way, stated something like: "I have been very lucky, he is very well behaved." For instance, Eva said: "It's actually quite remarkable, [...] it just works very well, and my husband is actually very diligent you know, well if you can say that, 'diligent,' of course he's supposed to." Eva also mentioned how, at the time of her doctoral studies, her excessive workload resulted in a turning point for her and her partner regarding household chores and childcare:

"This really happens during my studies. I don't know why, you know, but women somehow often want to have the control regarding the children and the home and such, but [...] during my last year, I just realized that I couldn't keep track of it all. All the kids' leisure activities, the doctor's appointments and all that [...]. At that point I just said, "Listen, you need to take over this and that."

Due to her inability to keep track of everything, Eva was forced to delegate parts of the home responsibilities to her partner. This was also a common theme among the women in our study, who described a certain point in their career at which they were forced to delegate the family responsibilities more evenly to their partners, due to either excessive workload or health problems.

Time-management

The interviewees were all, in one way or another, very conscious of time as a resource. Based on how they talked it was clear that time-management was an important part of their daily lives. However, the ones most likely to talk about the importance of time-management in their lives were the academics, of whom a majority works more than 60 hours a week. We also noticed a certain gender difference regarding the way the participants talked about time-management. The men in our study talked about the importance of it to get by, but it did not seem to be problematic to them. They seemed more in charge of their time-management, or as Kári said with quite a conviction, when talking about balancing work and family-life: “It is just the question of organizing yourself.” Arthur, an academic and a father of three young children, had also given time-management quite a bit of thought:

“Planning is the key to everything, it really is. It can, however, be the kind of planning you have internalized, so you just do it, you know. It's just like mixing a baby's bottle, you just, like, always do the same thing so you don't have to think about it [...]. It is this kind of planning that works, so it is no good in trying somehow to start planning things differently than you are used to.”

Like Kári, Arthur seems to have found a way to be in charge of his daily routine in the simplicity of internalized planning.

The female participants also stated that time-management was essential not only to getting “work done” at work but also to balancing work and family life. Contrary to the men, they did not feel as much as if they were in charge of their time. Moreover, many of them were riddled with guilt for not being able to manage their time the way they felt they were supposed to.

Although many of the women spoke about situations in their daily lives that clearly indicate their excessive workload, as well as challenges regarding frequently juggling the main responsibility for the family, many of them at the same time believe in meritocracy and assume their workplace is based on such a system. Therefore, when they feel as if they are not being able to keep up with their responsibilities, they do not want to complain about the situation. Instead, they internalize the situation by blaming themselves. This often appears as self-doubt in their ability to organize their time, thinking that they must be doing something wrong. Here Eva describes how she sometimes feels about her excessive workload, trying to balance both work and family life the best she can:

“Although the children are getting bigger now, it still has an impact on the family life. You are not spending time with your family while you are here. But how else are you supposed to

be able to finish the research work? I don't know, I don't know if I'm so unorganized or something. I don't get it.”

Eva feels guilty for not being able to manage all her responsibilities. In a way, she blames herself by wondering if she just lacks time-management skills. Súsanna, a mother of a young child, also spoke about how she needs in the future to be better organized, to be able to foresee the pressure points and work in advance so that she would be able to be present during her vacations.

However, at the same time many of the women were blaming themselves, they also sometimes showed a certain approbation for the system they quite obviously were disadvantaged by. Here, Hildur, a female academic explains why women often advanced more slowly through the system while at the same time admiring her male colleagues for their work ethic:

“But then there is also this thing, maybe it is a little bit difficult to explain, but the thing is that we women often take longer to release our work, partly because we are insecure and demand more of ourselves, I think. [...] What I have learned from watching my male colleagues is that they are way less frightened of not being taken seriously, so they allow themselves to be more reckless when submitting things, regardless of the quality. [...] and I'm trying to try to imitate them in that respect. Because, of course, they are the ones who manage to move forward the fastest, the ones who do not take themselves too solemnly”

However, despite their guilty consciences and their reluctance to complain, the women in our study also realize that their supposed lack of management skills was not completely to blame. Súsanna spoke about how she felt she was getting mixed messages from her workplace when she attended a stress-management course at work:

“I attended this course once, on how to manage stress, and there was this human resource manager who said exactly this—that we only needed to realize that we had this choice. And I thought to myself, yeah of course, I'm just not making the right choices, but then afterwards I began to think this over and like, wait a minute, what choice is that!?”

Súsanna realized after some time reflecting, that the alleged “choice” she had to build her career at her own pace—perhaps more slowly to accommodate the needs of young children—was more of a dream than a reality. Súsanna knows full well, despite what the human resource manager said, that if she wants to build her career as expected, there is no “choice” to go slower. This was only a choice for older employees who already have an established career.

However, the women are certainly not the only ones who feel pressured by time. The men also talked about time pressure and excessive work-loads, and some of them also feel as if their workplace is giving them mixed messages through old, engrained ideas. Örn, a father of three children, also mentioned a time-management course he had to take as a new member of his workplace:

“The first afternoon there was ‘time-management’ where some famous people were brought in from some company to talk about some trivial stuff on how not to waste time on Facebook and things like that, sure. Then this professor came to talk about how he planned his work, you know as this role model [takes a deep breath], and he gave his lecture, which was just him showing his calendar, and it was just like, working all day, of course, as well as evenings

and weekends, and he was extremely happy if he could maybe take the Sunday evenings off to watch a TV show or something.”

The message they were getting in this “time-management” course upset Örn. Most of all, he wanted to make a public complaint for being given old, engrained ideas of the “excellent researcher” that were presented as proper time-management.

However, the men, even when pressured by their workload and family responsibilities, do not seem to internalize the situations the way the women tend to. Whereas the women do not want to complain too much about the structures of the workplace, the men are less frightened to point out certain flaws that upset them. This corresponds with Elva’s notion of her workplace, a business firm. She believed that the men were more likely to be listened to: “I can also see that it’s harder for women than it is for men to say, it’s too much. If they complain, they are quicker to get back-up to relieve them of the workload.”

Discussion

From the perspective of time as a gendered structure, this article discusses how doctorate holders in Iceland perceive their own time-management as a factor in their career development, or more concrete how they make sense of their own agency regarding their time use and work-life balance. We found that the men in our study generally felt a higher level of agency regarding their work-life balance and time-management than did the women, who more often expressed difficulties finding a proper balance and seemed generally more stressed about the often fragmented time they had to combine their career and family obligations successfully.

As mentioned earlier, a significant body of feminist scholars has discussed the gendered nature of time (Adam, 1990; Adam, 1995; Bryson, 2007; Davies, 1989; Everingham, 2002). Although, in many ways, different scholars with different ideas, they all find common ground in the idea that time is inevitably linked to power and that gendered time norms indeed play a “key role in maintaining oppressive gender differences” (Bryson, 2007: 57). Our interviews with both male and female doctorate holders support this perspective.

We found that although all our interviewees felt the often enormous pressure that comes from fitting all their needs and obligations into daily life, whether bound to work or family, the men and women still had quite a different relationship to time in general. In many ways, the women’s accounts resonates with what Everingham (2002) said about how time needs first to be made before it can be spent. Both the female interviewees and the male interviewees’ partners handled the communication with their children’s schools to a greater extent and maintained the overall planning regarding the children’s extra-curricular activities, doctor’s appointments, and other arrangements around the family life. Additionally, it was not uncommon that the women in our study and the men’s spouses took a part-time job at some point in their career to accommodate the family’s needs. This was never the case for the male

interviewees or male partners. As Dex (2003) points out, despite the ever-increasing egalitarian attitudes, especially among younger and more highly educated men, and the increased contribution by men to housework and childcare, the interviewees and Nordic research (Haavind and Magusson, 2005; Johansson and Klinth, 2008; Thorsdottir, 2012) show that Davies's 30-year-old claim that women's "time more than any other family member's—becomes others' time" (38) still rings true for female doctorate holders in the over-all egalitarian, family-friendly Iceland.

Various measures toward a more gender-equal society have been taken in Iceland over the last few decades. Policy implementations, such as applying quotas to balance the gender representation on boards of larger companies (Axelsdóttir and Einarsdóttir, 2017), together with legislation on parental leave, reserving 3 months out of 9, exclusively for fathers, has resulted in Iceland being ranked highly on both the Global Gap Index as well as UN assessments of gender equality for years (United Nations Development Programme, 2018; World Economic Forum, 2018). Consequently, Iceland has been portrayed in mainstream media as a gender equality paradise where equality has more or less been reached (Jakobsdottir, 2018; Lindberg, 2017). However, despite the positive changes that have occurred over the years, we argue, drawing on Gramsci et al. (1971), that the hegemony of masculine domination as well as the deeply embedded gender stereotypes still prevail, and the covert forms of discrimination, which in a way have been "negotiated" as gender-neutral conceptions have created the perfect environment for ideas like meritocracy to blossom and has created a situation in which women feel they have failed as individuals if they do not master their time well enough.

The women in our study expressed feelings of guilt associated with thinking that they were not able to keep up with their responsibilities to a much greater extent than the men. However, they did not want to complain about their situations or blame it on systematic disadvantages; on the contrary, they tended to blame themselves for lacking time-management skills. This resonates well with what Rafnsdóttir and Heijstra (2013) found in their study on parents working in Icelandic academia. According to their study, some of the interviewed women felt as if it were not appropriate for them to complain about a heavy work-family workload because it was their "choice" to have children. None of the interviewed fathers referred to their own liability for having children when discussing the combination of work and family life and long work hours.

Moreover, we found similarities between our interviews and the study done by Thorsdottir (2012), which indicated that, although men indeed are participating in housework to an increasing extent, women still bear the main responsibility for the home. The interviews show that, although some of the men and women claim they shared the housework evenly, the women nevertheless, handle the communication and responsibilities regarding the organization of everyday life in most cases.

Despite mainstream media's portrayal of Iceland as an alleged gender equality paradise, the issue of gender equality in the home has been given very little attention. Thus, it is not unlikely that the accepted notion of the over-all gender-equal Iceland among the general public has served as a mask behind which

the more accepted, traditional gendered functions disappear. In such an environment, deeply embedded structures and cultural habits like the traditional division of labor in the home are easier to portray as individualistic choices or agreements between partners. Consequently, women who bear the main responsibility for the home are possibly not eager to admit to that status, thus simultaneously admitting to their own “failure” in not sharing the responsibility of household tasks evenly in a country where an even distribution of housework must be the norm.

The study provides a picture of how societal time norms among highly educated people are indeed very gendered and how time is still inevitably linked to power when it comes to career development.

Strengths, weaknesses, contribution, and future studies

The strength of the study is its context, namely that it is conducted in a country considered to be in the forefront regarding gender equality. Thus, it could be expected that no gender pattern would be found in time use and time-management in career development.

It is important to note, that although we endeavored to reinterpret the interviews in the manner truest to what the interviewees said and meant, it is still a reinterpretation. Additionally, the interviews were conducted by two women, which possibly influenced how the interviewees talked about gender. Furthermore, performing interviews in a small community like Iceland is challenging, and the interviewees’ “freedom of speech” was based on our commitment to anonymity. In order to strengthen anonymity, only information on whether the subjects were male or female and on the number of children were presented. To give the reader further information could have risked the anonymity of the interviewees. The contribution of this study to prior studies is that women still experience time differently from men in terms of personal autonomy. In other words, men are still in a better position to utilize their time for their own interest, even when comparing highly educated people among whom it is more likely to find higher levels of egalitarian attitudes in a country where gender equality is assumed to be at a higher level than in many other countries. We hope that future studies aim to shed light on close relationships between partners that produce and reproduce this gender power of time in organizations and families.

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