

## Time in work-life conflict: The case of academic women in managerial universities

### El tiempo en el conflicto trabajo-vida: El caso de las académicas en la universidad managerial

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#### Background

In recent decades, the university and academic work have been reorganized under the guidance of Neomanagement, cultivating a new ethos in its culture and subjects. International studies show an accelerated, hyper-productive, competitive, and hyper-individualized academy with important consequences for the lives of academics (Gill, 2009; Jenkins, 2020; Slaughter, & Leslie, 1997). In this regard, the literature consistently reports increased stress and anxiety; intensification, extensification, and diversification of work; job insecurity; feelings of lack of recognition and hyper-responsibility (Gill, 2009; Langford, 2010; Shahid et al., 2016).

The academy, accelerated and competitive, is configured as an absorbing and demanding work space, while seducing through promises of success and recognition. In this way, the subjects, trapped in the academy, recognize that they are under pressure to successfully fulfill the goals of their work while developing vital non-academic projects (Langford, 2010; Shahid et al., 2016). Likewise, a series of investigations show how academics associate subjective discomfort with the daily difficulty of reconciling work and life demands (Metcalf et al., 2008).

This difficulty is particularly accentuated in academic women (Ivancheva et al., 2019; Jenkins, 2020; Shahid et al., 2016). While probity and meritocratic systems at the base of academic management have mitigated arbitrariness and historical gender gaps in universities, successful female researchers have assumed a high personal cost. This personal cost is related to the so-called work-life conflict (Pérez, 2014), and its dimensions such as: the double workday, the choice between a scientific career or forming a family, as well as social pressure and individual responsibility for reconciling the demands of academia and family life.

The dimension of time is a central aspect in this conflict and its study has been reduced to the unequal use and value between men and women (Ivancheva et al., 2019; Jenkins, 2020), neglecting subjective and qualitative aspects.

#### Aims

In this paper we propose to understand, in a specific and situated way, how academics build time and its relation to the work-life conflict in a context of managerialization of Chilean universities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Flick, 2004).

#### Method & procedures

Twenty researchers from different disciplines and Chilean universities (private and state) participated in this study, with funded research projects and scientific production in indexed journals (Scopus or WoS). Likewise, all of them are perceived as women who have dependent relationships (children or other people to care for).

For the production of data, we opted for the technique of active interviews, whose distinctive quality is the production of discourses, through the fluid and flexible interaction between interviewers and interviewees (Holstein, & Gubrium, 1995). The analysis of the data was guided by the strategy of interpretive repertoires (Potter, & Wetherell, 1987).

#### Results & discussion

In this section we present three interpretive repertoires, which do not seek to give an account of a particular pattern for each participant, but to show the construction of time and to identify recurrent subjective positions around the work-life conflict.

The first repertoire is an analytical category that groups multiple stories about unfinished tasks and work, and demands that emerge again and again. The overload of activities in the stories of the scholars are a central axis to represent time as a dimension that urges and governs the experience of the researchers. This repertoire then refers to how speakers construct time as infinite, demanding and overflowing, while taking a subjective position in which time is suffered.

The second repertoire identified refers to the construction of time as an object to be administered. This repertoire shows a definition of time as a resource to be measured, calculated, managed and optimized. As opposed to and simultaneously with the previous repertoire, where time is constructed as a continuum of activities without limit, this second repertoire shows a contained time, limited and circumscribed to manipulable units.

The third repertoire groups a series of stories where the scholars show creativity and alternatives to the conventional modes of organization and use of time. In this repertoire, time emerges as a dynamic conformation of heterogeneous and multidirectional units, disassociating itself from its linear order that only moves forward or backward in one direction. Thus, this category - above all - questions the experience and universal meaning of time, where women and men are subjected to a standard and universal time (Wajcman, 2017).

### Conclusion

The results presented show that the construction of time and the subjective position in the face of the capital-life conflict is crossed by gender dimensions. Thus, in the face of an imposing academic work, it is possible to construct a rhetoric of suffering time and simultaneously another around time as a resource that must be rigorously administered in order to construct the temporal, spatial and symbolic borders between work and life. These stories of control and the establishment of limits appear to be crucial for organizing everyday life and show an active subjective position that seeks to respond individually to the capital-life conflict. The third repertoire opens lights on a polyphonic and alternative feminine temporal experience, which positions itself creatively to articulate and reconcile times, challenging the canonical model of social time in work. In this way, this work is, above all, a comprehensive exercise of time from the feminine experience and how through it the hegemony of the temporal dimension is cracked, which not only hides a vision centered on masculine experiences, but also a perspective proper to Western capitalist societies.

Although the times of life and (academic) work appear to be irreconcilable and confrontational, the stories analyzed show how academics continually attempt to articulate them and to weave a bridge between the two. The repertoires make visible from the everyday, an active search that provides continuity to the spheres of work and life; allowing levels of agency in this scenario of intelligible time, where alternate subjectivities are filtered and resisted.

**Keywords:** time, university transformation, women scientists, work-life conflict

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