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Time and the Negotiation of Work–Family Boundaries
Autonomy or illusion?

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ABSTRACT. The article reproblematizes time in relation to the concept of the 'extended present' by drawing upon empirical material from a methodological study of work–family boundaries, the article examines the effects of workplace change in a call centre on employees' negotiation of these boundaries. Through detailed analysis of one of the cases discussed it shows how a female employee and her partner blur the boundaries between work and family life and how the woman concerned felt that she exercised control over time but also felt driven by it. The article sheds insight into the conditions that generate feelings of autonomy and its illusory nature. KEY WORDS • care • organizational change • time • work–family boundaries

Introduction

The study of the work–family interface invites a focus upon time and the notion of time as having a plurality of meanings (Brannen, 2002). Many employees expect and are expected to use time purposefully – 'time is a project'. In contrast, as people enter territories outside paid work, they may draw upon different concepts of time such as taking 'time out'. Time here is used less purposefully: it passes or is 'spent' with children, partners, relatives and friends. In short, there is less of an emphasis on measuring time in informal contexts governed by care relations (Davies, 1989; Glucksmann, 2000; Brannen and Nilsen, 2002). Indeed, in informal care relations, to measure time goes against the very ethos of care (Land and Rose, 1985; Finch, 1989; Graham, 1991).

In this article I will first address the reproblematization of time present in relation to the concept of the 'extended present' (Nowotny, 1994). I will draw upon empirical material from an organizational case study of a call centre which sought to examine how the experiences of workplace change shaped employees' negotiation of the boundaries between work and family life. I will focus in particular upon the experience of one woman employee: the ways in which she experienced time and how she came to feel both that she exercised control over time but also felt driven by time.[1] I will suggest how organizational change contributes to this experience of time and the consequences when the individual concerned and her partner blur the boundaries between work and family life. The case sheds insight upon the conditions that generate feelings of autonomy and its illusory nature.

Changing Experiences of Time

Time has been reproblematized in recent years (see Adam, 1990; 1995; Nowotny, 1994; Harvey, 1999; Glucksmann, 2000). With increasing pressure upon employees to engage in multiple work tasks simultaneously, time is fragmented and is experienced as 'speeded up' so that tomorrow never seems to arrive (Nowotny, 1994). People live in stretched-out time or, as Nowotny has termed the experience, in the 'extended present'. In a constant state of busyness, employees fail to notice time passing and have no time in the present to plan for the future. This stretching out of the present is, I will argue, both insidious and seductive.

The workplace

Time is a scarce resource for working people even though, historically, British employees have developed an entitlement to having limits upon their working time: the working day, holidays and weekends off. It needs to be remembered that the idea of a standard day's work, a norm that applied largely to male bread-winners, arose in the context of political struggles. Today many of the structures which succeeded in controlling the amount of working time that employers expect from their employees have weakened (Deakin, 2002). Moreover, the 'standard' working time that prevailed for over half a century has been disrupted by the arrival of new production regimes, new types of employment contract, new technology and new ways of working such as teleworking.

Changes in working time and in the experience of time are affecting different groups differently. Today it is those in higher status jobs who spend longer hours in paid work compared with those in lower status jobs. Once this situation was reversed (Gershuny, 2000) and it was the least skilled who did overtime and

extra jobs to augment family income. In the UK, hours in paid work have ratcheted up among both women and men, including mothers of young children (Brannen et al., 1997). The working hours of British fathers have been at a high level for some time (O'Brien and Shemilt, 2003) and remain the highest in (western) Europe. National survey research shows a dramatic decline in job satisfaction over the 1990s with the greatest drop in satisfaction relating to working hours (Taylor, 2002). Today this dissatisfaction is most marked at the top, among managers and professionals, and, at the bottom, among manual workers (Taylor, 2002).

Changes in working lives are not only affected by working hours but by work intensification – the experience of having to work faster and to fit in more and more (Brannen and Moss, 1998; Esping-Andersen et al., 2002). This is manifest not only in longer hours at work but also in the feeling of being under pressure (Burchell et al., 1999; Cully et al., 1999; Webster, 2004). Such experiences are no longer confined to those on piece rates and working on assembly lines but are experienced by higher status workers.

Yet many employees and workers continue to say that they enjoy their work. As recent research suggests, over half of a representative sample of workers admit that they worked long hours *because* they found the job interesting while also reporting long hours as a requirement of the job (Taylor, 2002; see also Nolan, 2002). What are the reasons for this apparent contradiction? As some suggest, modern management methods have a part to play. For, among some groups of workers, the time they are contracted to work, while being defined by employers, is for employees to organize and dispense, that is as long as they meet the targets set by management. Among increasing numbers of professional and technical workers, but also among less-skilled workers particularly in the service industry, there is a trend whereby workers seemingly have autonomy while having to dole out their time in tightly defined time modules. This meting out of time augments rather than detracts from an individual's autonomy while intended to make the individual more efficient and productive. Yet self-regulation and the modularization in the workplace are undermining normative ideas of what is a 'reasonable amount of time' to spend at work. Paradoxically, it seems that the more autonomy employees are given over organizing their time *in* work seems to mean that they are spending longer and longer *at* work or working.

Much of the busyness of paid work has to do with multi-tasking; as employees, we spend less time on a single focus and the time it takes us to check the email or reach for the mobile phone gets ever shorter. A downside to these technologies is that the email, internet and mobile phone are no respecters of boundaries between home and work. They ignore the natural time rhythms of sleep time and awake time; they eat into family time, routines, rituals and other social commitments. Technology has given people the facility to be forever on

call, never off message (Daly, 1996). It allows people to pack more and more into their lives in a nonlinear way so that they are constantly integrating different activities into present time.

For an increasing number of people, the division between their work and non-work lives is no longer bounded by clear time markers. At one extreme of flexibility, especially those in higher status jobs, people work from and at home (as well as at work), and when they are on the move. Modern communications have severed the link between time and space (Harvey, 1989); for example they enable employees and self-employed to ignore country time zones so that they communicate in real time and work when once they slept (Daly, 1996). In managing their time, the working experience becomes individualized, leaving people in a state of uncertainty about what others may be doing. So people check and recheck their emails in fear of what they may be missing. In this stretched-out present, individuals *seem* to act autonomously; at least they have little sense of being externally controlled.

Flexible workplace practices offer employees individual solutions to manage their busyness whereby employees have to meet productivity requirements with the trade-off that it is up to them to manage their time away from the surveillance of management. Flexibility is typically sold to employees as enabling them to connect their work and non-work worlds; these are sometimes described as 'win–win solutions' tailored to individual needs whereby both work demands and family demands can be optimally addressed (Lewis et al., 2003). Working from home is typically associated with achieving a 'good work–life balance' (Felstead et al., 2002) enabling people to continue working if the transport network is not functioning or if parents need to be at home to look after sick children. However, the appeal of flexibility may be gender specific, an issue which in this study we were not able to explore. Men have been found more likely to value flexibility such as working from home to escape workplace authority and enhance working efficiently while women may seek flexibility in order to juggle different work demands such as childcare and paid work (Felstead and Jewson, 2000).

The flexibility to decide where and when employees work, while being a support for employees as well as a benefit to employers, is a double-edged sword. While being an attractive benefit to individuals, among other things (see Felstead and Jewson, 2000; Felstead et al., 2002) it confers enormous responsibility upon them to negotiate and also to police their time and the boundaries between work and life outside it. And here is where the concept of the extended present fits in – as I have said, the sense of the future never arriving. For the individual, the present is filled to the brim, never hanging heavy on our hands (Nowotny, 1994). Moreover, the busyness of work follows people home while the demands and concerns of family life remain in the foreground. A constant state of busyness leaves little time or space to contemplate what lies beyond the

present. It not only stops people from imagining the future; it stops them from doing anything about it or creating changes in the future. It also has another consequence; it disconnects them from the *shared* or collective experiences of time, for example community and family rituals and celebrations. For each person is compelled to create their own time schedule, live in their own time world, deciding when to stop work and when to begin again.

Family lives of the 'work busy'

Those who are most 'work busy' are those in dual income households who have care responsibilities for children. Such working parents stand in marked contrast to those whose present time hangs heavily – those with no jobs to go to and fewer resources to enable them to fill their time (Bauman, 1998), such as unemployed lone parents and the poor elderly. As Bauman says, those in the 'work world' live *in* time while space matters little to them as they have the resources to transgress it. By contrast, those in the workless world live *in space*; in their time 'nothing ever happens' and space dominates time.

Yet even for the 'work busy', there is an inherent contradiction between time in work and time devoted to care (Daly, 1996). On the one hand, the dual income lifestyle is driven by Marx's notion of 'time as commodity' (Daly, 1996): time here has an economic price aimed at the production of profit and efficiency and high income generation in order to bring in the resources to sustain a lifestyle, especially in a society like the UK where childcare is provided by the market.

On the other hand, family life and care responsibilities are construed in relation to notions of morality (Finch, 1989; Finch and Mason, 1993; Tronto, 1993; Ungerson, 1997; Smart and Neale, 1998; Daly and Lewis, 1999; Sevenhuijsen, 1998). In the 'moral economy of time', time ought to be given freely and should not be costed or measured. 'Family time' and 'quality time' are today's symbols of a 'proper' family life (see Daly, 1996). Whether these existed in the past, some historians argue, is a matter for debate (Gillis, 1996). Even so, family time has connotations of process rather than commodity; for social interaction *is* the purpose as well as the outcome of spending time and is not simply a means to an instrumental end. Yet commodity time – what Daly (1996) calls 'a new kind of impatience' – seems to be the kind of time that is winning out among families, increasing numbers of whom are driven by work. As Hochschild (1997) claims: work environments for some professional couples were seen as preferable to the increasingly onerous, 'taylorized' character of family life.

Both work and care imply ethical codes and practices about how, in moral terms, people believe they ought to live their lives. However, these two ethics shape experiences in both contexts and may cross the work–family boundary. For caring is a moral practice (Tronto, 1993; Finch and Mason, 1995) which is

not contained within family or kinship contexts. Likewise, the business ethic is also transgressive as I have suggested when work–family boundaries are weakened. Moreover, the business ethic may permeate family life more easily than the reach of the care ethic into working life. For much of family life is subject to economistic notions of time, notably via the pressures of the market and consumerism. Family life is increasingly shaped by consumerism and becomes a 'project' as parents subscribe to notions of 'the child as project' (Hallden, 1991). Caring, however, is a practice and a moral activity which involves relationships and reciprocity; thus it does not readily accommodate economistic notions of time – how much time can be spent on a particular activity and with what cost implications.

   In some families, economistic notions of time may be more dominant than in others. In some work contexts, as in the call centre to be described, the basis for the development of caring relations between workers is weakened through the intensification of work. As people spend less time in social interaction in the workplace and are treated individualistically, so workplace cultures generate feelings of individual insecurity. Moreover, in the context of the blurring of boundaries between work and family life, the business ethic crosses the borders into family and caring responsibilities. Where this happens the contradictions or disjunctions become stark. Without any institutional or group mechanisms to defray or diffuse these, the individual is left to 'cope' alone. He or she must negotiate on an individual basis with their employers, for example to work flexibly, and must draw upon their own sources of support

A Case Study of Workplace Change and its Effects on Family Life

The research I draw upon in this article involves two case studies of companies providing banking services which used qualitative methods (Brannen et al., 2001). The first case focused on the modernization of 'pre-modern' banking, in particular the transformation of branch banking, while the second case – the telephony department in a call centre – reflects a development in 'modern banking', in which physical location and face-to-face contact ceased to play a part in bank–customer relations. The study was concerned with workplace change *and* its implications for family life. Its aims were to develop a theoretical understanding of the negotiation of work–family boundaries and to develop a methodology for use in further research. The case studies were done consecutively and the theory, research design and methodology developed iteratively. It is not therefore our intention to use the case study approach to make generalizations about the banking sector nor indeed about work–family lives in general but rather to apply and develop a theory to be tested in further research.

   The methodology of the call centre case included five focus groups with

employees which were structured according to whether they were 'old hands' or 'newcomers' to the bank;[2] males or females; and level and type of care responsibilities. Six managers representing each level of the organization were interviewed. The focus groups provided a sampling frame for selecting a small number of couples with family responsibilities who were to be interviewed separately at home. In terms of developments in methods, in the call centre case, the interview concentrated upon a particular theoretical concern – the ways in which people as employees and as family members described and experienced the negotiation of work–family boundaries. In the workplace focus groups, the moderators encouraged participants to reflect on each of the different aspects of their jobs and to consider how each of these impacted upon their lives outside work. To some extent this worked well, although the focus remained more on work than on family life. To address the work–family interface, the research team decided to do home-based interviews with employees and their partners (interviewed separately) and to use biographical and narrative methods. Each interview began with an initial invitation to the respondent to talk about him- or herself; this was followed by questions about the history of their family, care responsibilities and their employment. In addition, a 'time-sensitive approach' was adopted in which interviewees were encouraged to give a 'blow by blow' account of a typical day in their past working week: focusing not only on the content and structure of the day and the informant's social interactions but also on feelings and reflections at transitional moments in the day, particularly in transgressing physical and mental boundaries between home and work. Thus, the method broadened the horizon of the interviewee as informant and extended the focus beyond the workplace. Before turning to evidence from the couple cases, a few comments about organizational change are in order.

Workplace change

The head of the call centre was brought into the company as a change manager and he set in train redundancies at middle and lower management level. Change, he said, was necessitated by a number of connected forces: new technology, customer demands, product changes and operating costs. The changes underway were intended to make the whole operation more flexible, more productive and more customer- and sales-oriented. This involved wide-ranging reforms. New contracts were being introduced for new entrants throughout the bank, which removed shift allowances for working 'unsocial hours' (meaning that the concept of 'unsocial hours' would disappear). With fewer managers, more emphasis was put on team work, a rhetorical or motivational device rather than bringing devolved decision making into practice (Webster, 2004). Shift patterns were in the process of being 'rationalized down'. New technology was being introduced, which had meant no new recruitment. Staff were expected to get

through more work: most obviously, new targets were set for the telephony workers – with an average 200 seconds per call to be achieved, a target suggesting a significant reduction from the previous target of 235 seconds. Looking ahead, telephony workers would also be required to take on new tasks and roles, become 'multi-skilled', both to deal with a wider range of telephone enquiries as a result of amalgamating the different telephony operations in the company, and more generally to enable the bank to match people's skills to the work that needed doing.

Negotiating Work–Family Boundaries: the Family-based Interviews

Three couples were interviewed in depth in each case study. In the call centre case study, each of the three couples demonstrate different strategies for managing work–family boundaries. As others have found (Nippert-Eng, 1996), the integration /segmentation lens is conceptually useful here although, as Felstead and Jewson (2000) and Tietze (2002) suggest, these represent polarities on a continuum. In one case in our study, work–family boundaries were treated as broadly impermeable by the couple. The male call centre worker, a father of two young children, was an 'old hand' in the bank and had once been highly committed (Sennett, 1998). However, with the changes happening in the workplace, he had ceased to connect emotionally and cognitively with the bank once he left the building each night. At the other extreme, a couple maintained a constant state of connection, connecting and juggling their work and family lives often with some personal discomfort and stress. The third couple comprised a connector and a separator.

First, I turn to the couple who separated work and family life, or rather, to the male partner did so. The wife had formerly worked in the call centre but had not returned to work after the birth of their second child. A. A., her husband, was a call centre telephonist. To cope with the pressures of the increasing time targets in the centre and the pace and intensity of the work, over time he seems to have distanced himself from work and constructed home and family not only as 'a haven' but also as the main source of meaning in his life. A. A.'s alienation from work was evident in the way he described the experience of working time and in the strategies he deployed to keep work and home separate. For example, he described avoiding answering the phone at home if he could help it. He tried not to talk to his wife about the call centre even though they had both once worked in the same office and instead sought a period of solitude when he got home from work in order to switch off completely. He explicitly refrained from transmitting ideas about his work to his children – 'that is the one thing that both (of us) are adamant on is that neither of them is gonna work for the bank' – and told a story about his son finding the bank's logo on an advertising gimmick for

children and how he had banished it from the house. A. A.'s wife confirmed his account, for example noting how they made a point of no longer attending the Christmas functions at the bank.

A. A.'s biographical account also provided evidence of this growing alienation. He recounted an earlier experience of being downgraded when his work changed, leading to a loss of dignity and self-respect. He also referred to the couple's failure to gain a nursery place for their older child in the bank's crèche despite putting a 'business case' to the bank (both he and his wife were working there at the time). He also described his growing reluctance to be 'always on the job' recalling how his own father had been work-focused during his childhood (the family lived above their shop).

The second couple – M. M. and her partner – represent a wife who was a connector and a husband who was a separator. M. M. continued to work for the bank after the birth of her first child but with reduced hours. Yet she continued to shoulder most of the organization and workload relating to childcare and domestic life. Although M. M.'s husband's pro rata pay was similar to his wife's, the husband saw himself as the main breadwinner by virtue of working long hours (more than full time). However, his wife, a supervisor in the bank, was more ambitious than her partner in terms of employment and professional development and considered that she had the ability to become a manager in the bank. Before the birth of her child she went to evening classes to gain educational qualifications and wanted to do more classes in the future. She sought to manage work and home by keeping them connected. For example, she brought work home to think about or finish, describing how she often had to rush off at the end of the day to collect their son from daycare, thereby leaving behind work that was unfinished. By contrast, her husband disconnected himself from his job almost completely when he got home and harboured dreams of doing completely different type of work and of moving out of the area. While M. M. liked to talk about her job at home to her husband, her husband was much less inclined to talk about his to her.

The third case will be described in more depth; it graphically demonstrates how, in a workplace marked by rapid change, time is experienced in a particular way when there is a blurring of boundaries between home and work by both members of a couple. A state of self-reinforcing busyness leads to the experience of time present being stretched out, reaching and overtaking the future (the extended present). J. J.'s work in the call centre as a supervisor had expanded considerably with J. J.'s active compliance. The way J. J. and her husband respond to this, connecting work and family life, further serves to erode the work–family boundaries and suggests how through this experience the contradiction between feeling in control and also out of control is sustained.

The case of J. J.

I first encountered J. J. in the call centre through her participation in a focus group which comprised several supervisor colleagues; we also interviewed members of the shrinking layers of management above J. J.. Then I interviewed J. J. at home and my colleague Peter Moss interviewed her partner. J. J. was married to a sales director who was similarly driven by his job. The couple were both full time and had supervisory/management responsibilities. Both worked long hours. They travelled to and from work together. They took their work home and they discussed it. They both voluntarily engaged in care work in the workplace and the husband volunteered for care work in the family context. Their concern for each other and for others spilled over into work just as work spilled over into home life. Yet the intensification of work – of never being able to switch off, together with its growing volume – made work somewhat of an addiction or compulsion for each of them. Together and separately, they transgressed the work–family boundaries, seeking to connect the worlds of work and family life in both contexts.

J. J. was in her late 40s. During her time in banking, J. J. had seen many changes: the disappearance of the old protective paternalism of the bank manager; the demise of 'jobs for life' which in former days were secured in return for employee loyalty; the replacement of the ethic of service with the ethic of sales; the introduction of individual responsibility for staying employable. J. J. thought her employer better than most. She readily took responsibility for keeping up to date. As she said, these days 'there is so much to know.' She was currently doing a 30-session course in the evenings at the same college as her daughter. Her promotion to team supervisor occurred at a particular moment in the call centre's life. The pressure to retain a competitive edge in the globalized world of banking demanded continual cost cutting: whole layers of management had been removed and J. J. had taken on board some of the responsibilities of management; and target times for answering calls at the call centre were constantly being reset.

J. J.'s daily life, as she described it, was a constant state of busyness – outside work and inside work. J. J. was a mother and a daughter. They had two daughters, one of whom was still living at home. As an only child, J. J. had responsibility for her frail elderly mother who lived nearby. J. J.'s account of her life has many of the qualities of the extended present – a sense of busyness combined with a feeling of autonomy. Yet she often felt that her life was 'out of control', as her account of a day in her life graphically suggests:

> I woke up early and I thought: 'I should get up now and get lots of things done'
> . . . About quarter to seven . . . made the tea. We usually take it in turns . . . take the
> girls one each, making sure we knew where we were going . . . what time we'd be
> home and what was happening this evening and my daughter was in there shower-

ing. So of course I was thinking: 'Right, well, I can't get up there so I might as well do a few bits here.' So I was writing out a list of things that I wanted to do (at work). At the moment I'm doing a collection for my second-from-last boss, although I think of him as my boss. He's leaving this week so I'm doing a collection. So I was counting out money. That's right. . . to see how much we'd got for him. . . got dressed and then we're getting stuff ready and putting the stuff in the car and my husband'll take it in the car for me, my box of things that I'm going to take in (to work). I start at 8.30 but like to be in by 8.10 – well in advance. . . (*she is now at work*) I think I hadn't even put my box down . . . and I got queries straightaway . . . thinking what I've got to do. (*J. J. then describes making the collection round for her ex-boss.*) And I'm thinking: 'please hurry up' because I've got to get back. . . I ran down to office. . . so many things to do…I feel out of control sometimes, yes I do. I had to do some pacing[3] as well. . . and even when I was having a sort of mini conference I was having people referring to me (*this involves looking up work manuals*). I mean she (*one of co-workers*) commented: 'This is manic, you know'. . . you've got to be bright and breezy but to be honest I wanted to say: 'Go away!' . . . on and off the phone all morning. And I was supposed to go to lunch . . . if I was to go to lunch it had to be one o' clock but I couldn't because I was waiting for a call back from this customer (*who upset J. J.*) which is not like me (*long description of way she sorted problem and how she never got to lunch but ate at her desk while listening to other calls*). So, I thought: 'Well that's it. I missed it!' . . . three o'clock I had to pace. I'd finished the query by then (*her next problem is a personnel issue and J. J. takes the difficult route and seeks help from elsewhere*). I'm my own worst enemy really because I just want to help all the time. . . but anyways I sorted it out. . . I'd done the feedback before the pacing . . . between the pacing and looking up and down to see if anyone needs me I went to my machine and did some calculations. . . so really trying to do a couple of things at once. I'm due to finish at half past four and my husband rang to say he wasn't ready. . . So I thought: 'I might as well carry on doing a few more bits' . . . ('*So you hadn't had a break all day?*' we asked) No . . . in fact, quite often I don't go to the toilet.

At the start of her day, J. J. described being already mentally at work as well as attending to domestic matters. At work J. J. had to answer calls from the public as well as supervise her team's performance. Such was the pace of the day, she said she often forgot to take breaks, ignored lunchtime, and even put off going to the loo. Yet, though the pressure left J. J. little time at work, she still took charge of collections for colleagues when they retired or left the bank for other reasons. In taking on this extra work, J. J. sought to observe the time markers which had regulated the old bank and to inject the sense of care and community which once typified it. Each night J. J. stayed late at work; when she got home she cooked supper, did some housework and then visited her mother. Most nights she also swotted up on work manuals and memos since she had no time to do this at work. These J. J. transported home each night in a large box which symbolized the close connection she had forged between her home and her job. Moreover, J. J. and her husband were a close couple; each night they spent time

talking over their work and care commitments. In effect, J. J.'s experience of time was subject to a process of intensification both at home and work. Moreover, work and care flowed across the boundaries into both settings. In Nowotny's (1994) terms, J. J.'s expectations of time exceeded what was realistically possible to do.

   In this case, the boundaries between work and family life are weakly drawn. Work and care were a compulsion in both contexts. J. J. experienced this sense of compulsion as emanating from the *self* rather than from any external source. Significantly, J. J. blamed *herself* for not managing her time better. Why did she do this? One explanation is that the new management system of the bank depended *less* on visible modes of control, that is, bureaucratic control and traditional forms of authority, and *more* upon what Basil Bernstein (1996) conceptualized as invisible forms of control. A key medium through which such invisible control was exercised is the language of human resource management and a set of techniques which depended upon communication rather than bureaucratic authority. The new bank offered individuals like J. J. a feeling of autonomy on the job – she could decide within limits how to manage her time and how to organize her different work tasks. This autonomy appealed to J. J.. It generated a commitment to work which in turn created a sense of self-actualization (Rose, 1990). However, the background to this is that the call centre's senior management retained power centrally, chiefly through its control over call-time targets; J. J. had to ensure that her team strictly adhered to these targets. While she felt fulfilled in her work, she also felt driven. J. J.'s work practices were infused by the experience of stretched-out time. But in practice, J. J.'s power in the workplace was rather limited; it resembled the time autonomy she also experienced as a carer and domestic worker and which Oakley (1974) identified in her 1970s study of housework. J. J. felt caught up in a present which is crammed 'full to the brim' and where the job was never done. So much so that she felt she has no proper 'family time'. Yet while feeling under pressure, J. J. was not a dissatisfied person for she felt highly committed both to family and to work, typifying herself as a 'caring person'.

   Significantly, the work–life and family friendly policies, which the bank advertised and offered its employees, played conspicuously little part in enabling J. J. to meet her caring responsibilities. Seduced by her busyness, J. J. found it difficult to set her mind to thinking about the future and to taking time off. Moreover, an internalized sense of responsibility for care as well as for her job prevented her from feeling entitled to take advantage of the bank's work–life policies (Lewis et al., 2002) which constituted a key aspect of the bank's way of making their individual workforce members feel in control. For these family friendly provisions had to be individually negotiated by workers with managers. They were not rights. J. J.'s ability to envisage a different way of organizing work and family life or for moving out of the fast lane was

impaired by the process of juggling an individualized, demanding, and multi-faceted present (Daly, 1996). In this context the increasing sense of control over work and the feeling of being increasingly dominated by it does not seem so paradoxical.

As well as focusing upon J. J.'s current traversal of the work–family boundaries in everyday time, it is also important to tease out the gendered patterns of J. J.'s life course and the connections between J. J.'s work career and her career as a wife and mother. (This is not say that gender did not also shape her work career and workplace experience which I might also have focused upon.) J. J.'s life course pattern may also be contrasted with that of her mother who belonged to a very different generation.[4] It is possible to see how the strategies that J. J. and her husband currently deploy also had their origin in their biographies, in particular in their family careers. The couple were both in their second marriages. This seems to have made them both reflect on the need to communicate and to share experiences: 'We both said you've got to work at things, you can't take for granted each other.' They both talked about being very much 'a couple' right from start: 'We always say "we"'. They met through working for the same company although they no longer do so. According to J. J. they shared the household work even though she felt 'it's my job to do everything'; her husband, she says, did not accept this and participated voluntarily: 'He doesn't say "I'll help you".' Although J. J.'s husband earned more, they did not look on it this way: 'It's just our income. I don't think his job is any more important than mine.' However, she added that 'if anyone gave up it would have to be me'. The history of this relationship is that J. J. was at home for several years looking after their two children. When the children went to school, J. J. first returned to work at the bank on a part-time basis. This was just before the period when her husband was made redundant; subsequently, she moved to a full-time job in the bank. J. J.'s husband took on responsibility for picking up the youngest child from school, on the grounds that he was more mobile and more flexible in his job as a sales manager. When J. J.'s father became ill, she stayed in her full-time job and her husband was very much involved. J. J. managed to continue working full time even though her elderly mother was becoming frail. However, although J. J.'s husband was supportive, both J. J. and her husband were in no doubt that J. J. was the one more committed to caring for the family. A difficult act to juggle, they talked about downshifting on account of care responsibilities. Both J. J. and her husband also dreamed of retirement and the leisure they would enjoy together if they were to step off the 'treadmill'. But as yet they had done nothing about it.

Discussion and Conclusion

Some sociological theorists have suggested a general process of individualization occurring across societies (Beck, 1992; 1994; Beck-Gernsheim, 1996). The structures which once constrained the shape and direction of people's lives are said to give way to the power of individuals to construct their own trajectories. As Giddens (1991; 1994) and Beck-Gernsheim (1996) have argued, in lacking external referents notably of kinship and place, people make their own projects and plans. As Giddens (1991) conceptualizes it, individuals construct their trajectories through a process of reflexivity in which the self achieves 'mastery' over social relations and social contexts.

These theories have widespread currency and relate to concepts of risk (Nilsen and Brannen, 2002). They fail to reflect the tenor of J. J.'s experience. J. J. had internalized the business ethic and saw no alternatives offered by other employment. But there are places in J. J.'s account where she suggested she had a choice in how she 'directed' her life. Moreover, J. J. finds considerable satisfaction from work. Yet, in her everyday experience her life at work and outside work has a rhythm and direction of its own which often seems out of her control. Thus, while not feeling overtly constrained her sense of autonomy was limited; she did not feel able to act differently, for example by taking the leave and time off which were due to her and she did not resist taking work home.

On the other hand, the absence of traditional external sources of authority – J. J. had witnessed the demise of the old paternalism of the bank, did *not* mean that the old order has been entirely swept away. Taken-for-granted forms of conduct relating to the care of colleagues which characterized the bank in its former guise still to some extent applied. It is notable that J. J. continued to take on a caring role in the workplace even though the work pressures made this difficult. As Belt et al. (2000) suggest, much call centre work involves emotional labour which is gendered and Taylorized. J. J. saw herself as acting voluntaristically for much of the time, but she also felt driven in both her work and family life, especially by time.

Despite the fact that the bank had policies which encouraged flexibility and 'family friendly' working, there was little evidence from those studied that they felt able to make the time trade-offs that were theoretically available in order to create a better 'work–life balance'. This was so in J. J.'s case despite the fact that she was feeling pressurised both at work and at home.

It is also important to note that, like workplaces, family life is in flux, not only in structural terms but also as everyday lived experience. Hochschild's (1997) conceptualization of the 'Taylorization' of family life – the extent to which family time is speeding up, resonates with the pressurised workplace. Such Taylorization is also part of the processes of consumption and consumerism and includes ways in which bringing up children has become a

'project'. Thus Hochschild contends that the workplace has become 'a haven in a heartless world' for many working mothers, although not in the case of J. J. discussed here, much in the way that home was once defined as a place of retreat for male breadwinners.

As the article has demonstrated via the cases presented, the idea that work–life balance constitutes any kind of equal or 'settled accommodation' between work and family life is contested (Taylor, 2001). In the case of J. J., the present time was extended so that the future was subsumed into the present and never seemed to arrive, preventing her from working out a better way of accommodating work and family life in the future. At various points in J. J.'s family career, her care responsibilities required changes to her working life as when her children were small and when she took time off for a hysterectomy; in the future if her mother becomes infirm, change may be required again. In the meantime she was caught on the treadmill of the extended present. Whether the call centre will provide sufficient support if J. J. is forced to take time off in the future remains to be seen, although future changes mentioned by a senior manager suggested the removal of the call centre from the UK to the Far East, leaving J. J. with limited labour market opportunities in her locality.

To conclude, changes taking place in the world of work raise new challenges for maintaining and negotiating the boundaries between work and family life both in relation to practices as well as settings. Changes in the workplace and in the nature of work itself lead to the intensification of work which constitutes a pressure upon workers to blur the boundaries, with people carrying work home in their heads if not necessarily in their briefcases. While some may comply with the 'extensification' of work beyond the workplace (Rubery et al., 2000), others are likely to resist and manifest their resistance in forms of alienation.

Blurring the boundaries between work and family life is often presented to employees as an '*individual choice*' through the possibilities of time and spatial flexibility. These possibilities are embodied in work–life policies and practices, which point towards making trade-offs in work in order to accommodate family life. Blurring boundaries is also a product of 'new' management practices and the discourses of empowerment or self-regulation in the workplace. These bring a semblance of autonomy to employees – about where and when to work – that is designed to increase productivity. They therefore bring increased workloads and, as management is delayered, fewer managers to take responsibility. In the meantime, the traditional mechanisms, practices and discourses that once created markers between what is expected and legitimate to do at home and work are weakened. In their stead, employees are left to create their own 'work–life balance'. However, according to this exegesis based upon the experiences of these call centre workers, it is clear that creating a work–life balance is unlikely to be simply a technical matter, requiring the right tools. Moreover, it is unwise to assume that giving people more control over their

lives necessarily leads to an improvement in the quality of their lives. Contradictions and tensions between work and family life arise from different interpretations of ethics relating to work and care. They cannot necessarily be reconciled by individuals who are likely to struggle to subscribe to both. Such contradictions have always existed and take on different forms in different contexts and historical periods.

Notes

1. Studies of call centres have suggested employee burn out (Belt et al., 2000).
2. This sampling feature was imported into the second case in order to test whether, as Sennett (1998) suggests, expectations developed under former banking regimes shaped responses to change and affected work–family lives differently compared with those who came in following organizational change. However, it was difficult to find any new employees with caring responsibilities; most were young without such responsibilities and many were passing through – graduates still searching for higher-status work.
3. 'Pacing' involves walking up and down monitoring the telephony workers and taking referrals from them when they need help.
4. Comparing J. J. with her mother, there are some marked changes in the sequencing and content of the life course of the women. Over the generations and especially the post-war generations, women's employment careers became increasingly less piecemeal following childbirth with consequences for some aspects of their care trajectories as wives, mothers, daughters (see Brannen et al., 2004). In relation to the nature of work and the labour market, J. J. was working at a time in which there were increased opportunities for women especially in clerical work.

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