

# 'Slogging my guts out' or achieving work-life balance?

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'I was in a meeting and I went to pull out this pen from my bag. I opened my bag and thought, 'My God, THERE'S THE DIRTY NAPPY!' The dirty nappy was there!

It was tied up really tight so that's why there was no smell, otherwise I would have ditched it earlier. And I thought, 'There's the reminder of what I'm trying to achieve here' . This is it, I am both of these things, trying to do both of them:  
PR professional and mother.'



## Our Research

- Interviews with 50 women and men working in PR
- Diverse ages, roles, and statuses
- Aimed to explore the meaning of PR work
- And its affect on the lives of individual practitioners at work and home



## What is work-life balance?

- Different things to different people
- Depends on your identity
  - 'PR professional, father, cyclist'
  - 'Wife, friend, PR consultant'
  - 'Business owner'
- Depends on your future aspirations
- And where/how you work



- Most people have an intuitive sense of what it means to 'balance' the different spheres of their lives



## Generational and career-stage differences

- Gen Y determined to separate home and work
- Except for many women in their twenties: home-work boundaries blur while they acquire capital



'Once you prove yourself, you have enough scores on the board, you don't feel so much that sense to really have to hit the big goals. By your 30s and 40s, you can back off and get a bit more of a balance'.



## Generational and career-stage differences

- More experienced practitioners consider Gen Y are more assertive than they were and are about lifestyle and career choices, and more instrumental in their WLB strategies
- Does seniority and more responsibility => less ability and inclination to 'balance' work-life?



# What are the work-life challenges? (1)

## How to deal with the physical and psychological repercussions of work role choices

- Emotional spill-over (home-work; work-home): stress, moods, sleeplessness, inability to switch off, guilt
- Ill-health
- Impact on family relationships



'It's a constant state of stress. I can't continue at this pace and retain a happy marriage. That's the nub of it. I can't do it.'

'Sometimes I go home, and I'm in a shit, and it's all disastrous, and all I want to do is go to bed and cry, because it's been awful at work.'



## What are the work-life challenges? (2)

- **How to manage time**

- Overwhelmed
- Manoeuvring bits of time
- Trading time
- Drawing the line

- BUT depends on role, organisation and sector
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## Particular issues for mothers

'When my child was young, I used to stress during meetings that everything was ok at home with my child. So, I'd be in the meeting but all these other thoughts were going through my head. I once had no choice, I had to take her to a meeting, and breastfed whilst taking notes, and the client was very family-friendly and said no to rescheduling the meeting. They were fine with it, but I felt very uncomfortable, because I couldn't focus.'



## A professional issue?

'We have this kind of attitude of being servants, of not being quite a profession yet ... Sort of apologetic. Scrambling to prove that we can be useful. Not sufficiently assertive. Not sufficiently proud of our capacity to make a contribution.'



## 'The respectable addiction'

- Opt out
- Go freelance/set up own business
  - Requires access to material/family resources
  - Friendships and supportive relationships
  - 'Suck it up'
- But gender differences





## Cultures and clients

- Organisational cultures can undermine formal policies
- 'Consultant availability' (and media demands)  
'I left the birthing suite while my wife was giving birth, to do a job.'
- Time zones
- Technology



## Broader implications

To what extent have PR practitioners bought into – and perpetuate – the global myth that success equates to achieving materialistic goals ('having it all') and independence

at the cost of personal/community/professional relationships and individual wellbeing?





And what does that mean for you as  
you reflect on your own career  
decisions?



Thank you

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