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Who's Ideal Is It Anyway? Men and Women Professionals' Response to the Ideal Worker
Norm

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An abstract of
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James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
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Abstract

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By Julie L. Armstrong

As a cultural strategy of control, the ideal worker norm is acknowledged to be an effective means of directing and eliciting the work efforts of professionals. Much as the organization of work is gendered, the ideal worker norm is also widely regarded to be a masculine norm. In this study, I examine both men and women professionals' subjective experience of the ideal worker norm. Through in-depth interviews with urban professionals' working in high-status occupations, I investigate their perceptions of the ideal worker norm as manifested in their workplaces, demonstrating professionals' awareness of a pervasive ideal worker norm which spans across a variety of work organizations. According to respondents, the ideal worker norm defines the meaning of worker success and dictates various demands and expectations, which, when fulfilled, communicate professionals' commitment to succeed. The intensity of such demands and expectations often leads to conflict between professionals' work and non-work spheres of life. As such, I examine professionals' response to the ideal worker norm. My findings show that professionals' response takes two forms: a practical response and an attitudinal response. Specifically, professionals' choose to actively conform to the ideal worker norm, fulfilling its demands and expectations, while simultaneously maintaining an attitude of ambivalence towards it. Moreover, my findings demonstrate that men and women professionals both choose to conform to the ideal worker norm and maintain an attitude of ambivalence towards it. However, I also find that distinct gender differences emerge within this attitude of ambivalence. These gendered patterns reveal the ways in which cultural expectations for the gendered division of paid work and unpaid domestic work shape the experiences of men and women professionals working in demanding careers.

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I.   Introduction

Strategies of work control are a common theme in the sociology of work and occupations. While much research has focused on direct strategies of control (such as those employed in manufacturing settings), more recent research has focused on the manner in which workplace cultural norms elicit the work efforts of employees. Such cultural strategies of control are thought to be particularly true of white-collar professional work settings.   The ideal worker norm, which gives primacy to paid work obligations over unpaid work obligations, functions as such a strategy of control, prescribing what it *means* to be a successful worker and what one must be willing to do to show their pursuit of such success. The ideal worker norm, its definition of worker success and the demands and expectations that it places upon workers can create a significant amount of strain on workers trying manage both their work and non-work lives. Work/life conflict is typically salient to professionals' work experiences, as they generally work in demanding careers characterized by high work intensity, over and above other types of workers. Moreover, the ideal worker norm is considered, much like the organization of work as whole, to be a masculine norm. As such, men and women professionals' work experience may vary in a variety of ways.

This study focuses specifically on understanding the subjective experience of workers in high-status occupations and, in particular, how these workers respond to the demands of their work and the consequences that work expectations may create in their lives beyond the office walls. I first examine their workplace culture, eliciting workers' perspective on the cultural norms of their workplace and any associated demands and expectations. More simply put: I seek to understand the ideal worker norm, from respondents' perspective, as it manifests itself in their workplaces. Then, I explore these workers' response to the ideal

worker norm. Finally, I examine whether workers' response to the ideal worker norm varies by gender.

II.   Theoretical Background and Empirical Literature

II.A *Workplace Culture*

Work organizations are not only situated in cultural contexts, but possess internal cultures themselves (Griswold 2004). Whether the dominant, management-supported organizational culture (Kunda 1992) or the smaller, work-group subcultures that may develop within an organization (Fine 2006), workplace cultures shape work experiences and outcomes. Moreover, workplace cultural norms are used to elicit the work efforts of employees – or more frankly put, to control employees.

Indeed, among all bureaucratic organizations, the question of control must be addressed.[1] A central theme in the sociology of work and occupations is the study of the dynamics of control between employers and workers. Largely rooted in Marxist approaches to work (Abbott 1993), important works in the field such as Braverman's (1974) *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, Burawoy's (1979) *Manufacturing Consent* and Edwards' (1979) *Contested Terrain*, each trace the development of industrial and monopoly capitalism, examining the ways in which capitalists endeavour to appropriate the labor process from the worker, thereby exerting increasing control over the labor process and its profits.

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[1] The question of control "must" be addressed by organizations that, I assume, are situated within the larger capitalist system that defines work as we know it. I am not making a value judgement about whether this is the way work *should* be, but rather starting from the assumption that this is the way work is and therefore, organizations "must" address the issue of control if they are to meet their organizational goals (which, more abstractly defined, are to secure more and more profits, or, surplus labor).

II.A.i. Strategies of Direct Control

Braverman's (1974) thesis focuses on the deskilling of labor,[2] in which the conception of work and execution are separated. He carefully details the direct control strategies used by organizations to exert control over the labor process and their workers, securing more and more profits. While Braverman examines the ways in which workers are coerced and controlled, Burawoy (1979) asks why workers work as hard as they do. Burawoy's ethnography of shop floor activities challenges Braverman's assertion that workers are entirely disempowered, demonstrating that the intensification of workers' efforts is not simply a matter of coercion but also of workers' consent to the labor process and to management's requirements.[3] Yet, while certainly granting a measure of agency and voice to the subjective experience of workers, Burawoy still argues that a subtle, albeit powerful, form of coercion is at play. This form of coercion is masked by cooperation, as workers' consent obscures their role in securing surplus labor for the organization.[4]

Like Braverman, Burawoy also details direct control strategies (e.g., the piece-rate system) that workers actively manipulate to create a seemingly more empowered work

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[2] I should be careful not to reduce Braverman's book to simply his deskilling thesis. It is a very important and central argument, however, Braverman also offers significant insight into the all-consuming force that is monopoly capitalism. Braverman argues that no aspect of social life (e.g., family, education, etc.) is left untouched by monopoly capitalism which, he asserts, has absorbed all of society.

[3] Burawoy argues that consent is garnered at the *point of production* – during the day-to-day work activities of the shop floor, via the game of "making out." The game of "making out" organizes production on the shop floor. In this game, workers (as individuals, i.e. 'industrial citizens,' not members of a class) play the game and strive to 'win' by producing at a certain output level (which is beyond a set expectation). In doing so, workers receive various rewards, both tangible and intangible (e.g., bonus wages, prestige for 'making out', avoidance of boredom/tedium at work). Of course, workers additionally contribute to the company's profits. Given the incentives for playing the game, the interests of workers and management, while not necessarily the same, can nonetheless be aligned.

[4] While workers give their consent to the labor process, Burawoy is very careful to point out that, even to the extent that workers have agency, this consent obscures workers' role in securing surplus labor and the exploitative capitalist system. Burawoy argues that the construction of consent is a matter of *obscuring and securing surplus labor and value*. Consent helps to reproduce the relations of production; thus coercion is not direct coercion, as largely exercised under the system of competitive capitalism, but is rather a much more subtle coercion, masked by cooperation. Workers, according to Burawoy's argument, are *unknowingly* reproducing exploitative work relationships

environment. However, direct control strategies may be better suited to industrial[5] settings

(e.g., manufacturing), where work tasks are discrete, quantifiable and predictable. Work, in

the "postindustrial" United States, has undergone significant changes (Powell and Snellman

2004, Smith 1997), in which there has been a shift from a largely manufacturing-based

economy to an economy characterized by the provision and production of services. While

there is not singular definition of the knowledge economy, Powell and Snellman (2004)

define it as "production and services based on knowledge-intensive activities…[including] a

greater reliance on intellectual capabilities than on physical inputs or natural resources,"

(201). In knowledge organizations, work tasks are not as easily standardized or measured.

They can be vague, often require creativity on behalf of the worker and are more complex

and analytical in nature than other types of work tasks. Thus, direct control strategies are

not an effective means of eliciting workers' very best output in knowledge organizations.

II.A.ii Bureaucratic Control in Knowledge Organizations

Edwards' (1979), in his historical analysis of the transition from industrial to

monopoly capitalism in the United States, argues that the subsequent transformation of the

workplace necessitates the development of new types of control. Identifying three types of

control strategies used by organizations, of which the first two (simple and technical control)

are akin to direct control strategies, Edwards' third type, *bureaucratic control,* addresses the

matter of how bureaucratic organizations, including knowledge organizations, elicit the work

efforts of "non-production" workers.

Like Braverman who argued that the transition to monopoly capitalism has led to a

rapidly growing class of clerical workers and "middle layers" of management, Edwards

similarly argues that, in the era of monopoly capitalism, the pool of non-production workers

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[5] Both industrial organizations and knowledge organizations are bureaucracies.

in bureaucratic organizations has grown dramatically. These non-production workers represent an army of low-level clerical workers and administrative staff, supervisors, managers, sales and marketing teams, middle-level and upper-level management (e.g., "professionals" or "white-collar workers"). Firms, Edwards' argues, are presented with the challenge of controlling these workers, who are not easily controlled by direct strategies of control (see also Hodson 1996).

Bureaucratic organizations are characterized by an elaborate set of rules and policies, job titles and pay scales, departments and divisions, roles and responsibilities, formal promotion and reward procedures. According to Edwards, control is "embedded in the social and organizational structure of the firm" (1979:131). *Bureaucratic control* "establishes the impersonal force of 'company rules' or 'company policy' as the basis for control," (Edwards 1979:131). Consent is obtained by this system of rules, polices, titles, rewards and so forth, because the system details what it means to be a good, successful worker. Edwards regards this system as an "elaborate system of bribes" that "like all successful bribes, are attractive" (1979:145). By describing what it means to be a good, successful worker, the organization not only demands the worker's labor but also requires that the worker begin to *internalize* the demands, and potential rewards, of their work: "Hard work and deference are no longer enough; now, the "soulful" corporation demands the worker's soul, or at least the worker's identity," (Edwards 1979:152).

Edwards' conceptualization of bureaucratic control is particularly useful in examining how organizations direct, manipulate and "extract" hard work from professional, white-collar workers; it is not, however, entirely sufficient. While Edwards explains that organizations' use definitions of a good or successful worker to elicit the hard work and commitment of white-collar workers, he does not elaborate on the process by which rules

and polices become internalized in the worker or how it garners the worker's loyalty and commitment. Further, he does not address *workplace cultural norms of success which are not contained in formal rules and policies*. These cultural norms, as more recent research has demonstrated, act as modes of control themselves, often underpinning bureaucratic control (Perlow 1998).

Thus, as various typologies of control have been developed (Edwards 1979, Hodson 1996), the general distinction between a strategy of direct control, which relies on the ability to achieve compliance by threatening, coercing or overtly exercising authority, and a strategy of control which is more diffuse and decentered, persists (Evans et al. 2004, Smith 1997). As Smith (1997) says, "cultural strategies of control in professional, white-collar settings…decenter power by locating it in the fabric of everyday life," (325). So what do we mean by workplace culture and how might workplace culture serve to direct and control workers?

II.A.iii Eliciting Workers' Efforts: Workplace Cultural Norms

Perlow (1998) defines workplace or organizational culture as "built from underlying values and beliefs about what is important, valued and rewarded within an organization," noting that it "assumes and caries *crucial control functions*," (328, emphasis added). Kunda (1992) defines *normative control* in the workplace as a "diffuse" type of control which "attempt[s] to elicit and direct the required efforts of members by controlling the underlying experiences, thoughts, and feelings that guide their actions," (11). Workers are not coerced via purely "economic rewards and sanctions…rather they are driven by internal commitment, strong identification with company goals, [and] intrinsic satisfaction from work," (Kunda 1992:11). As Etzioni (1961) asserts, the stronger the internal commitment of the worker, the less the need for formal or direct control becomes. According to Kunda, strong workplace

culture is the "latest stage in the historical evolution of managerial ideology toward an emphasis on normative control – the desire to bind employees' hearts and minds to the corporate interest," (1992:217-218).

Several examples of workplace culture illustrate the ways in which it directs and elicits the desired behaviours, actions and efforts of workers. Hochschild's (1983) study on emotional labor argues that airlines aptly instilled their organizational culture in flight attendants, who were encouraged to provide a friendly, caring and emotive stance toward passengers. Pierce's (1995) study of emotional labor in the law profession clearly demonstrates that formal rules and rewards are not the only mechanisms of control in law firms. She describes a workplace culture in which lawyers are required to have an "adversarial" working style. The "Rambo" litigator is expected to be aggressive, hard-hitting, intimidating and competitive. A "good, successful" litigator appropriately fills these expectations, particularly if they are to reach the upper echelon of the law firm (e.g., achieve partnership). Paralegals in law firms are also subject to a particular organizational culture. A "good paralegal" is expected to be nurturing, caring, calm and deferential – those who do not fill this cultural norm in law firms, even if they perform the actual duties of the job well (e.g., drafting a legal document), are regarded as "difficult" workers.

In her ethnography of Wall Street, Ho (2009) attempts to draw connections between Wall Street culture and its influence on corporate America. Ho's description of the internal workplace culture of Wall Street finance firms reveals that the prevailing cultural norms extract intense work efforts from firm staff. Largely recruited from elite social circles (e.g., Ivy League academic institutions), Wall Street workers operate in a workplace culture characterized by prestige and privilege, in which their self-perceptions of superiority, smartness, competitiveness and ambition are fostered and encouraged by the organization.

Ho terms this a culture of "smartness." Many Wall Street workers readily attest to the intense work practices to which they are subjected (e.g., the fast pace of the daily "grind," which includes extreme volumes of "grunt" work and long hours). Yet, their willingness to engage in these practices is precisely due to the fact that their work, while gruelling, is *believed* to be superior, both in content and quality, to the work performed by the rest of corporate America's workers. In the view of Wall Street workers, one must be very smart to be able to do such work well. Actively participating in their firms' intense work practices, mandated not by policy or rules but rather by the workplace culture, signals one's drive to "make it" on Wall Street.

Several studies of tech companies, quintessential knowledge organizations, also reveal the use of workplace cultural norms to elicit the work efforts of employees. Cooper's (2000) interviews with men employed in Silicon Valley high-tech firms reveals that workplace notions of masculinity, which coincide with the "culture of Silicon Valley" (387), function as mechanisms of control. In these firms, Cooper identifies a "new masculinity" – a workplace cultural norm not only about what it means to be a good worker but also what it means to be a man in male-dominated Silicon Valley. This "new masculinity" requires workers to not only possess technical knowledge and expertise, but to do so with an air of confidence, competitiveness and a "go-getter" mentality.[6] Workers compete with one another over who's the most innovative, can work the most hours, and "cut the best code," displaying a "readiness" and "stamina" to be the "go-to guy," (382).

Cooper's interviewees spoke about the "glamour" of an 80 hour work-week spent on a project for which an individual *volunteers* and the badge of honor one proudly wears when ordering pizza for dinner at the office, readying for a long night of work. Cooper

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[6] See also Kendall (2000) for more on "nerd masculinity."

demonstrates that the internalization of these cultural norms, and workers' commitment to work, is evidenced, among other things, by men's common explanation that many of their working practices are driven by their own internal pressure. Of course, as Cooper notes, the pressure may be described as internal, but it is also described via a comparison to an external standard, which pervades the industry. She says "these normative beliefs are so shared and internalized that the control strategy has no obvious or definite point of origin. Eerily, coming from everywhere and nowhere at the same time," (389). The workplace practices of these high-tech firms are "so entrenched that interviewees often used the term Silicon Valley as shorthand for…a clearly defined way of being and of doing," (387). As Kunda says, work efforts are elicited not "based on explicit supervision and reward, but rather on peer pressure and more crucially, internalized standards of performance," (1992:90).

Cooper's data do not permit her to definitively determine where workplace cultural norms originate, but she posits that Silicon Valley culture is diffuse, spanning across organizations. To that end, individual organizations do not necessarily need to intentionally cultivate this culture. While this may be true, Kunda's (1992) widely-recognized study of a high-tech engineering firm does show that the organization itself actively created, maintained and promoted the workplace culture through a variety of means (e.g., formal communications, training and education workshops, and presentations). Much like the culture of the Silicon Valley firms that Cooper describes, the culture at Tech[7] values creativity, innovation, hard work, and autonomy (e.g., ownership over one's career and work projects). The work week is pressure-filled and intense (e.g., 80-hour work weeks and many deadlines to meet).

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[7] Kunda's fictional name for the study setting.

A *successful* Tech engineer or manager is able to meet these requirements, signalling

his willingness to push oneself at the risk of "burn-out" and yet also proving that one can do

what it takes to get the job done without *actually* "burning-out." Tech's professionals are to

embrace the member role's opposing elements – the supposed freedom and autonomy of

their work and the work's intensity and pressure – at the same time. Kunda points out that

to be successful, Tech's workers ultimately face a dilemma: status versus autonomy.

While workplace cultural norms are most often *not* contained in the formal rules and

policies of an organization, they nonetheless complement or underpin bureaucratic

mechanisms of control. Perlow (1998), in her study of *boundary control*[8] in a high-tech

company, says "bureaucratic control is…premised on cultural understandings of success,"

(354). At the company Perlow studies, professional workers are subject to various informal

modes of control, which attempt to control the temporal boundary between work and non-

work.[9] While there are no formal rules about how late one must stay at work or how many

hours of overtime an employee must clock or what types of non-work commitments

employees must rearrange to accommodate work demands, cultural norms of what it means

to be a *good, successful worker* dictate that, if one is to be a success, one should accept and

comply with these various modes of boundary control. Thus says Perlow, "achieving this

form of boundary control depends on affecting the values, loyalties, sentiments, and desires

of employees that determine how they respond to demands on their time," (354). However,

managers also draw upon modes of bureaucratic control to manipulate employee's work

efforts and time spent at work. Promotions, financial compensation (e.g., raises and

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[8] Boundary control is how managers try to "cajole, encourage, [and] coerce" (Perlow 1998:329) employees to spend significant amounts of time at work.

[9] Managers frequently impose demands (e.g., schedule last-minute meetings at odd-hours, make last-minute requests for extra work, cancel/re-schedule employees' vacations), monitor staff (e.g., stand over them, observe employees' arrival and departure times, take note of which employees' stay late), and model behaviour (e.g., work long hours themselves or come in very early to fit in extra work).

bonuses), and the assignment of interesting projects are used to reward employees who are good, successful workers, that is, those who comply with the imposed demands and expectations for time spent at and on work. As Perlow summarizes, "career advancement, higher pay, and interesting assignments – rewards that go to those who work the longest hours – are all powerful motivators for…employees," (354).

Together, cultural norms of worker success and mechanisms of bureaucratic control (e.g., promotions) combine to extract long work hours and the prioritization of work over non-work life by Ditto[10] employees. Thus, a worker who accepts boundary control may act purely out of self-interest (e.g., motivated by bureaucratic control) or out of genuine commitment to the organization and what it means to be a good worker. Regardless, "the bureaucratic control at play relies heavily on underlying cultural controls" as "bureaucracy aligns engineers' self-interest (in being a star employee) with company goals that, when met, provide reward and recognition," (Perlow 1998:354).

II.B *Professionals and Work/Life Conflict*

Edwards' (1979) application of bureaucratic control to non-production workers captures a wide-range of workers (e.g., low-level clerical staff to upper-level management). In this study, I am interested in the work experiences of *professional workers* in high-status work occupations. To be sure, I have referenced studies which show that even workers excluded from this 'professional' or 'high-status occupation' category are subject to cultural strategies of control (e.g., Pierce's analysis of paralegal workers). Nonetheless, Kunda (1992) makes a clear distinction between types of workers in his study on normative control and workplace culture in a high-tech corporation. Kunda identifies two categories of workers: "full members" (e.g., professional staff such as software engineers and business line

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[10] "Ditto" is the fictional name given to the high-tech organization that Perlow studied.

managers) and "marginal members" (e.g., secretaries and administrative support staff). Marginal members are not fully subject to the organizational culture and pursuant member role; their work is regarded as much more of an economic exchange. Maintaining more detachment from the organization and expressing fewer positive feelings towards it, they have clearer temporal boundaries (e.g., work form 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.) but neither do they reap the rewards of full membership (e.g., handsome financial compensation and upward career mobility). The work of professionals in knowledge organizations is of the "open-ended, creative, individually styled, and highly demanding sort that cannot be standardized or fully planned out in advance," (Perlow 1998:328). As such, a different kind of control is warranted. Thus, while both lower level clerical workers and professionals are all subject to company rules and policies, professional workers are particularly subject to cultural strategies of control which seek to elicit their commitment, loyalty and ambition.

II.B.i Professionals' Intense Work Efforts

What I have not explicitly pointed out, but what is unmistakable in the studies of professionals' work lives is the *intensity* with which they work – long hours, unpredictability in work schedules, and pressure-filled days. (Cooper 2000, Kelly et al. 2010, Kunda 1992, Perlow 1998). The implications of needing to "continually 'own' and 'manage' one's job to the maximum extent possible for the good of the firm" are "numerous," (Smith 1997:334). Workplace culture clearly serves to elicit not just the work efforts but the *intense* work efforts of professionals. While not necessarily mandated by formal policies or rules, professional workers are expected to work long hours, to be willing to travel as needed, and prioritize work over responsibilities outside of work – many operate in a "24/7" or "on-call" work environment (Bailyn 1993, Perlow and Porter 2009). Professional workers have long been expected to work more hours than non-professionals and the number of hours professionals

are required to devote to work has increased over recent decades and continues remain high (Kanter 1977, Jacobs and Gerson 1998a, Perlow 1999, Schor 1991). Driven by the pressures of a workplace culture which dictates worker success, and their own desire to succeed, 60-plus hour work weeks are not uncommon (Cooper 2000, Hewlett 2006, Perlow and Porter 2009).

Furthermore, professionals' hours are frequently unpredictable (Cooper 2010, Kunda 1992, Mennino et al. 2005, Perlow 1998, Perlow and Porter 2009). Professionals in tech organizations are expected to work very long hours and drop other responsibilities to give undivided attention to an unexpected project or meet a deadline which has been moved up (Cooper 2010, Kunda 1992). These work demands and expectations are pervasive at other knowledge-type organizations such as professional services firms (e.g., accounting and consulting) (Kelly et al. 2010, Perlow and Porter 2009) where work time, both the number of hours and the ability to work whenever necessary, are often used as a measure of performance, particularly for professionals whose output is otherwise difficult to measure (Perlow 1998).

These demands and expectations are deeply intertwined with workplace culture – *with what it means to be a good worker*. Worker success is equated with commitment and devotion to one's career (Blair-Loy 2001, Blair-Loy and Wharton 2002, Kay and Hagan 1998, Kelly et al. 2010, Perlow 1998). Meeting expectations for long work hours and immediate responsiveness to work commitments signals one's devotion to work and their pursuit of worker success. This workplace cultural notion of what it means to be a good worker, and the associated demands and expectations, are often referred to as the ***ideal worker norm***. (Kelly et al. 2010, Williams 2000). The ideal worker norm defines worker success as commitment and devotion to one's career, in which one is expected to fulfill work demands

at the expense of other non-work demands. In short, the ideal worker norm gives "primacy to paid work obligations over unpaid…work" and commitments (Kelly et al. 2010:281-282).

Intense work demands and expectations have consequences both at work and in professionals' personal lives (Jacobs and Gerson 1998a, Jacobs and Gerson 1998b, Perlow 1999). The work environment itself can be very stressful and pressure-filled (Cooper 2010, Blair-Loy 2001, Hewlett 2006, Perlow 1999).   And as Hochschild (1997) writes, "the more attached we are to the world of work, the more its deadlines, its cycles, its pauses and interruptions shape our lives and the more family time is forced to accommodate to the pressures of work," (45). Consequently, negative "spillover" between work and home can occur when work and non-work spheres of life collide. "Spillover" represents the "process whereby behaviors, moods, stress, and emotions from one realm of social life affect those in another," (Mennino 2005:107). For example, a home problem can make it difficult to concentrate at work or receiving a call from work in the evening can make it hard to spend time with family members (Mennino 2005).

Advances in technology such as email and cell phone use allow for work to be completed wherever, whenever (Perlow and Porter 2009). On the one hand, we might see these technological devices as enabling greater flexibility in managing one's time, yet they may also create more work pressure by enabling work commitments to invade non-work life (Powell and Snellman 2004). Chesley (2005) examines media technologies such as email and cell phones, finding that they blur boundaries between work and home, leading to negative work-family spillover. Spillover in turn leads to higher distress levels and lower family satisfaction. Thus, the demands and expectations of professionals' work make meeting non-work responsibilities, demands and wants very difficult (Coltrane 2004, Hochschild 1997,

Stone and Lovejoy 2004, Jacobs and Gerson 1998a, Padavic and Reskin 2002, Williams 2000).

Measures taken to accommodate the demands of both work and non-work, such as the use of work-life balance policies which can include flex-time schedules and work hour reduction programs, might alleviate some of the conflict between work and home but this does not necessarily lead to a reduction in the experience of stress or pressure. Professionals fear, rightly so, that there may be career consequences such as a stall in career progression for opting to use such policies (Blair-Loy and Wharton 2002, Kay and Hagan 1998, Kelly et al. 2010, Stone and Lovejoy 2004). Workers who use such policies are less able to fully the meet the demands and expectations of the ideal worker norm. As such, their commitment and dedication to work may be questioned.

Thus, professionals find themselves in the midst of opposing forces – autonomy versus success – and therefore face hard choices. Of this reality, Kunda (1992) says that in organizations characterized by normative control, "the central experience of membership is not only that which the ideology seeks to instill, but also the experience of the *struggle* with it," (221, emphasis added). Workers hang in the "delicate balance of both seductiveness and coercion," (224). Professionals may be drawn in by work that is intrinsically satisfying and challenging and that is coupled with more tangible benefits (e.g., financial compensation or social prestige). However, their private lives, indeed, their private selves, are infringed upon.

II.C *Research Questions 1 and 2*

In order to understand professionals' experience of the ideal worker norm, this study

explores the following two research questions:

> *Research Question 1*: According to the professionals interviewed, how does the ideal
>
> worker norm manifest itself in their workplace? What are their perceptions of the
>
> ideal worker norm?
>
> *Research Question 2*: How do professionals' respond, both in practice and in attitude,
>
> to the ideal worker norm?

Recognizing that ideal worker norm is not gender-neutral but rather is regarded as a

masculinized norm (Kelly et al. 2010, Williams 2000), I also seek to understand and examine

differences between men's and women's experience of the ideal worker norm. I now review

the gendered organization of work, the ways in which the ideal worker norm is masculinized

and the implications this has for women and men professionals.

II.D *Gender and Work*

Several important theoretical accounts of the organization of work, such as those put

forth by Braverman (1974), Burawoy (1979) and Edwards (1979), have given little regard to

gender's place in the socio-historical shift to monopoly capitalism, the transformation of the

labor process and the evolution of strategies of control. Others, however, have attested to

the gendered organization of work (Acker 1990, Kanter 1977). To be certain, gender is a

central feature of work relations – a "master status" which is salient to the structure of the

workplace and the differential outcomes men and women experience at work. Much of the

sociology of work and occupations research has been focused on gender, wages and

inequality (Abbot 1993, Leicht 2008). The sex segregation of occupations has also been

widely acknowledged (Bielby and Baron 1986, Reskin et al. 1999), whereby men and women

often perform jobs that are consistent with cultural assumptions about appropriate work for men and women – work itself may be a way to "do gender" (Steinberg 1990, West and Zimmerman 1987).

It is not just particular aspects of work performance that are masculine, *but the sphere of work in and of itself is masculine.* Industrialization resulted in the separation of work and home (Acker 1990, Glass 2000, Hochschild 1989, Padavic and Reskin 2002, Williams 2010). These separate spheres are not just drawn along work/non-work lines, but on gendered lines, whereby work (i.e., paid labor) is men's sphere and home (i.e., domestic, unpaid labor) is women's sphere. These gendered spheres are, of course, hierarchically arranged, such that work is valued over home and the domestic labor associated with this sphere of life (Glass 1990, Mennino et al. 2005, Padavic and Reskin 2002). Moreover, in addition to paid work being socially more valued than domestic work,[11] male occupations tend to be more highly compensated than women's occupations (Bielby and Baron 1986, Steinberg 1990) as skill itself is a socially constructed concept. The definitions of skill and the determinants of unskilled labor are *male definitions of skill* (Steinberg 1990), wherein men's work is more likely to be regarded as skilled work, and women's work, precisely because it is women's work, is more likely to be regarded as semi- or un-skilled labor[12] (Steinberg 1990).

Even when both men and women are employed within a given occupation or organization, men tend to enjoy greater rewards (Acker 1990, Elliott and Smith 2004, Kay and Hagan 1998, Kanter 1977, Pierce 1995). Men are the recipients of higher salaries and more promotion opportunities and achieve higher positions with greater workplace influence

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[11] The very fact that paid work is *paid* and domestic work is *unpaid* reveals the devaluation of domestic work.
[12] For example, paralegals and secretaries in law firms must know how to navigate a complex organization, manage angry clients, and handle the demands and expectations of lawyers with deference, friendliness and a caretaking sensibility. This "emotional labor" and the organizational knowledge paralegals and secretaries possess is overlooked, not rewarded, and of a low status (Pierce 1995).

and power (Elliott and Smith 2004, Williams 2000). Such rewards are not given solely due to tangible, observable differences in work performance. For example, while women represent nearly half of all law school graduates, they are far less likely than their male peers to achieve partnership status, the mark of law firm success (Kay and Hagan 1998). Kay and Hagan (1998) find that unlike men, women may not possess the same cultural resources or dispositions which are required for advancement in law firms. Moreover, Kay and Hagan reveal that while both men and women are required to meet various performance measures (e.g., bringing in clients) and should both endorse firm culture, women must display a commitment to the firm over and above their performance and that of their male colleagues. It is as though men's commitment is assumed, and women's is questioned, therefore requiring women to "convince disbelieving partners that aspiring women are suitable for partnership," (Kay and Hagan 1998:741). When women do achieve positions of higher status within an organization, their "token" status may lead male co-workers to stereotype or exaggerate differences between the two groups, placing women at a disadvantage to succeed in their positions (Kanter 1977).

As a highly masculinized role, the adversarial style of litigating (the "Rambo" litigator) that is required of successful litigation lawyers places women in a double bind (Pierce 1995). As litigators, women are expected to perform the role of a successful litigator; however, to do so denies women's "appropriate" roles as women (e.g., to be nice, friendly, deferential, caring, etc.). Women lawyers are routinely criticized for being "too nice," "not tough enough," or "not aggressive enough." However, when they adopt the "Rambo" litigator role, women are judged as "shrill," "uncooperative," and "too aggressive." Thus, to embrace the cultural norms of her work, a woman rejects her "appropriate" gender identity and yet to fulfill her "appropriate" gender role she undermines her chances for workplace

success and advancement (Pierce 1995). While women adopt various strategies to negotiate this double bind, even women who in their *behaviour* and *action* suppress their gender identity and adopt a masculine work style, express internal misgivings about the difficult choices they must make to meet the expectations of these opposing roles.

The implications of this ideology of gendered separate spheres are significant, particularly for professionals who are subject to identity based forms of control and whose intense work efforts are elicited by their internal commitment, motivations and desire for success. Granting primacy to paid work over unpaid work, the ideal worker norm upheld in organizations complements the hierarchically, gendered arrangement of work and non-work spheres of life. With its characteristic long hours, unpredictability, sense of urgency and requirements of immediate worker responsiveness and availability, the ideal worker norm is *theoretically* gender-neutral to the extent that all workers are subject to it. However, it places women at a distinct disadvantage relative to their male counterparts because of expectations that women should perform family caregiving and emotional work at home (Coltrane 2004, Cooper 2010, Ely and Meyerson 2000, Hays 1996, Hochschild 1997, Kelly et al. 2010, Mennino et al. 2005). Further, men can feasibly fulfill their family or home commitments via their work commitments – by being a "good provider" or "breadwinner" (Coltrane 2004, Padavic and Reskin 2002, Townsend 2002, Williams 2000, 2010). Thus, the ideal worker norm is a masculine norm – one that may be difficult for all workers to fulfill, but is all the more difficult for women to fulfill as they may face increased demands and expectations outside of work. Furthermore, cultural beliefs that women's "appropriate" role is in the domestic sphere of life is a source of bias and discrimination, used to question the commitment and productivity of individual women in their respective organizations (Coltrane 2004, Correll et al. 2007, Kay and Hagan 1998).

No doubt, all professionals, men and women alike, experience the strain of the ideal worker norm (Gerson 2010, Padavic and Reskin 2002). Historically, men with wives that did not work outside the home, had greater leeway to meet the demands and expectations of a professional's working life. Yet, unlike previous decades, dual-career couples are not the exception but the norm, as the majority of mothers participate in the paid labor force in some capacity (Bianchi et al. 2006, Cohaney and Sok 2007, US Department of Labor 2010). This can create significant tension between the competing demands of work and home for couples (Gerson 2010, Hochschild 1989, 1997).

Studies such as Hochschild's *The Second Shift* (1989) have detailed the unpaid labor that working women perform, above and beyond their male partners. This "second shift" of work entails both childcare and household chores; work that is both tangibly (e.g., financially) and culturally devalued (Padavic and Reskin 2002). More recent research, however, has shown that over the past several decades, men's contribution to childcare and household labor has significantly increased (Bianchi et al. 2006, 2009). Men's and women's total workloads (i.e., combined paid and unpaid labor) are now remarkably similar (Bianchi et al. 2009). Nonetheless, while the gap between working husbands' and wives' contribution to household activities has shrunk, it has not disappeared (Bianchi et al. 2009). As a proportion of their total workload, women perform more unpaid labor while a greater proportion of men's total workload is spent on paid labor, further underscoring the persistent gendered division of labor. Women have fewer hours of adult-centered leisure time (e.g., leisure time not spent with children) than do men and more frequently report feeling "frenzied," "harried" or "rushed" with their time (Bianchi et al. 2009). Perhaps such feelings are exacerbated by the "mandatory" nature of women's domestic labor.

Despite the resources that enable professional women in high-status occupations to transfer the burden of housework and childcare onto hired help (largely female help) (Glass 2000), they are not exempt from the pressures and strains of meeting the demands of both work and home. Coltrane (2004) suggests that professionals in high-status occupations may face even greater challenges than working class families in their attempt to balance the competing demands of work and home. The intensity of work demands in high-status occupations, and the definitions of worker success in which commitment and dedication to work are of the utmost importance, make for very difficult choices for women in these occupations.

While popular media have argued that women in high-status occupations have left the workforce because they choose to do so after becoming mothers (Belkin 2003), researchers have revealed that the reasons for this apparent "choice" are far more complex than a straight-forward desire to devote oneself to full time caregiving (Stone and Lovejoy 2004). Stone's (2007) study of high-achieving professional women who had left their careers to stay at home with children shows that these women had made a "choice" because they had no choice at all. Rather, these women reported being "pushed" out of the workplace. Women discussed the inflexibility of work environments, which made it very difficult to the meet the extreme demands of work while also caring for children. Stone's respondents explained that the use of flexible work arrangements rarely worked, and that, for example, if a woman worked part-time, she often ended up working more than part-time while not being compensated accordingly.

Just as importantly, women's commitment to work is called into question when they become mothers, as it is assumed that women will provide the care and emotional work that families require, thereby undermining perceptions of their motivation at work and their

dedication to work (Coltrane 2004, Stone 2007, Stone and Lovejoy 2004). Women may find themselves "mommy-tracked," experiencing stalled career advancement altogether. As one woman in Stone's study stated:

> "So, I decided to quit, and this was a really, really big deal ... because I never envisioned myself not working. I just felt like I would become a nobody if I quit. W ell, I was sort of a nobody working too. So it was sort of, 'Which nobody do you want to be?'" (Stone and Lovejoy 2004:70).

Professional women are sometimes faced with the choice of whether to bear children at all (Blair-Loy 2001, Glass 2000). In Blair-Loy's (2001) study of women in high-finance, nearly 2/3 of the women in her study – each of whom have reached the upper echelons of, and achieved great success in, their finance careers – remained childless. Blair-Loy asserts that the choices of these women regarding work and family are shaped and constrained by two pervasive cultural schemas: the "work devotion" schema and the "family devotion" schema.

The "work devotion" schema is a "middle-class, masculine, twentieth-century model of devotion to a managerial career that helps shape managers' commitments and employers' expectations," (690). A masculine schema, the work devotion schema "calls men to consuming professional careers," (690) facilitated, in part, by the expectation that their wives will fulfill domestic care responsibilities. Conversely, the "family devotion" schema "assigns responsibility for housework and childrearing to women," (690) and is predicated on the assumption that women can and will rely on their husbands for their income and social status. Buttressing the "family devotion" schema are cultural expectations for mothering (Hays 1996). Requiring constant parental involvement, engagement, and supervision, the "ideology of intensive mothering" (Hays 1996) places great demands and responsibility on mothers. Indeed, studies have pointed to the measures undertaken by parents of the middle

class (who are more likely to work in professional occupations), to instil social and cultural capital in their children, often requiring not only the financial means to do so but time and involvement on the behalf of the parent (Aschaeffenburg and Maas 1997, Lareau 2002).

As highly successful, ambitious career women, Blair-Loy's respondents revealed the inner conflict they experienced as they attempted to negotiate the contradictory expectations of devotion to work and devotion to family. Many women, particularly those who graduated from college prior to the early 1970s and the mass feminist movement, remained childless and many had failed marriages. Their adherence to the work devotion schema was simply incompatible with the requirements of the family devotion schema, and thus, to some extent, necessitated a rejection of the family devotion schema and, consequently, of domestic duties and caregiving. Women in the study who had graduated after the feminist movement took hold (e.g., between 1974 and 1980) were more likely to have intact marriages and have children. These women had marriages which were more egalitarian, granting these women some flexibility in adhering to opposing schemas. Moreover, these women somewhat redefined the family devotion schema, outsourcing domestic work to housekeepers and nannies, sending children to private schools and adopting a more distant parenting style. However, Blair-Loy points out that while these women crafted situations in which one is both a successful career woman and a wife and mother, her respondents remained deeply conflicted about their choices and their inability to completely fulfill their domestic caregiving roles. The family devotion schema still constrained and limited Blair-Loy's respondents' choices, as they, unlike their husbands, remained ultimately responsible for the domestic work and childcare needs of home.

The inner conflict of women negotiating the gendered separate spheres of work and home is acutely felt in the words of the woman deciding "which nobody" she wanted to be

(Stone and Lovejoy 2004:70). Not only do the separate spheres of work and home have consequences for the life choices workers make, but there are emotional consequences as well. The demands of the ideal worker norm may cause distress for both men and women, but particularly so for women who, unlike men, experience feelings of *guilt* (Glavin et al. 2011) – an emotion elicited on the understanding that one has "done something wrong" or has somehow violated normative behaviours (Glavin et al. 2011:45). In this way, we see how the gendered nature of work shapes not only the choices women (and men) make, but how they *feel* about those choices, and perhaps as well, how they feel about themselves.

II.E *Research Question 3*

In sum, the literature clearly demonstrates that gender profoundly shapes work and the experience of it – the organization of the workplace, the definitions of success, the rewards granted, the consequences for life outside of work. Due to the pervasive social construction of paid work as masculine, the implications for women's experience of work are numerous: lower rewards, being held to higher standards, subject to subtle and informal forms of discrimination, and difficult choices regarding the contradictory demands of their work and non-work lives. It is reasonable, then, to expect that the responses professional workers have to the masculine ideal worker norm are gendered. Thus, the final research question investigated in this study is:

Research Question 3: How does the response to the ideal worker norm vary by gender?

II.F *Theoretical Background and Empirical Literature: Summary*

In the preceding pages, I have reviewed the literature on strategies of control in the workplace. Setting aside direct control strategies, I have specifically focused on "normative control" or "cultural strategies of control," in which cultural norms in the workplace (in particular, what it means to be a successful worker) elicit the work efforts of professionals.

Such strategies are particularly salient to *professionals'* work experiences, as the type of work they perform (creative, autonomous, open-ended, analytical) and the organizations in which they work are better suited to cultural strategies of control. Professionals' internal commitment, dedication and their desire to succeed motivates them and elicits their work efforts.

The definition of worker success, while often not contained in the formal rules and policies of an organization, underpin modes of bureaucratic control. Workplace cultural norms, when coupled with formal rewards such as promotions and bonuses, serve to elicit the *intense* work efforts of professionals. Demands and expectations placed upon professionals require them to work very long hours, function under high-pressure and a sense of urgency, manage unpredictability in their schedules and be continuously responsive and available to meet work demands. Thus, the ideal worker norm, with its definition of worker success and its associated demands and expectations, can lead to conflict between work and non-work spheres of life

Moreover, the ideal worker norm is a *masculine* norm, which advantages men in the workplace by complimenting the gendered division of labor, or the ideology of gendered separate spheres, in which men's place is in the paid world of work and women's place is in the unpaid world of home. To the extent that women are now highly integrated into the paid world of work, they face difficult choices as they attempt to pursue devotion to work and yet are still expected to pursue devotion to home. While the demographic make-up of workforce has changed, the ideology of separate spheres remains pervasive. Gender continues to serve as a powerful force shaping the workplace and the subjective experiences of workers.

It is within these bodies of literature that my three research questions are situated:

1. According to the professionals interviewed, how does the ideal worker norm manifest itself in their workplace? What are their perceptions of the ideal worker norm?

2. How do professionals' respond, both in practice and in attitude, to the ideal worker norm?

3. How does the response to the ideal worker norm vary by gender?

To ascertain professionals' perceptions and experiences of the ideal worker norm, the response they have to the ideal worker norm and the ways in which such a response is gendered, I interviewed 22 professional workers in high-status occupations, primarily in professional services firms.

III.   Methods

III.A *Research Design*

To understand the answers to my research questions qualitative methods were best suited. Qualitative research allows for the in-depth investigation of social processes and interactions; it seeks to provide a "thick" description of the "how" or "why" things occur as they do as opposed to focusing on making predictions or drawing inferences to larger populations (Miles & Huberman 1994, National Science Foundation 2004) For both practical (e.g., the in-depth, intensive nature of the research) and theoretical (e.g., the sample is not intended to be statistically representative of a larger population) reasons, qualitative research generally involves a small number of cases.

As I was interested in professionals' own perspective on, and experience of, the ideal worker norm and their response to it, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 22 professionals working in high-status occupations (Lofland et. al. 2005, Miles and Huberman

1994). While ethnography, or participant-observation[13] would have been useful in seeking some of the answers to my research questions, for practical reasons it was not possible. Time and other circumstances would not have easily allowed for my "employment" at an organization. Additionally, because I sought to understand workers' own perspective on the demands and expectations they face at work and their response to these demands, interviews were necessary. Finally, because I wanted to understand how a *type of worker* (highly-educated professionals working in high-status work occupations) experiences and responds to the demands and expectations of their work, as prescribed by the ideal worker norm, it was important to study more than one organization. Interviews allowed me to sample a type of worker across organizations. The results of the study show remarkable consistency and similarity of the workplace culture, demands and expectations in a variety of high intensity professional organizations, revealing a pervasive *ideal worker norm* to which this type of worker is subjected.

III.B *Sampling*

Just as my choice of qualitative research methods was driven by the research questions, the sample was as well (Lofland et. al. 2005, Miles and Huberman 1994). My sample was selected in order to illuminate theoretical issues and processes around workers' experience of workplace cultural norms and the control they exert. Thus, I chose both men and women who work in high intensity professional service-type organizations within a particular age range whereby these issues are most salient.

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[13] Having worked for 2 years in an occupation similar to that of my study participants, I have "insider" knowledge of the realities of working in the types of organizations in which my respondents work and in understanding the realities of work facing my respondents. In my role as a consultant for a large professional services firm, I was immersed daily in a similar work environment to that of my respondents. While my observations were not made as a researcher, nonetheless I often observed the events and situations around me with eyes of a sociologist. Not only did my previous work experience give me credibility with my respondents, it also allowed me to "speak their language" which proved to be helpful when conducting interviews. Of course, I recognize that the benefits of being an "insider" can also present challenges, chiefly that of my ability to maintain objectivity as a researcher. Nonetheless, in my role as a research my insider status proved useful..

The sample was initially comprised of 22 individuals, 11 women and 11 men. Only 20 of the interviews were included in the data analysis, as 1 male interviewee would not allow the interview to be recorded, thereby significantly limiting the quality of data collected. A second male interviewee served primarily as a practice-run interview and the quality of recording was quite poor, again limiting the completeness and quality of data collected. I therefore excluded these two interviews from the sample for a total 20 interviewees, 11 women and 9 men.

As has been previously mentioned, participation in the study was limited to workers in high-status occupations such as finance, law, consulting and accounting. Both men and women were interviewed, allowing me to compare the gendered response to the ideal worker norm.

Participants were between the ages of 27 and 37 years. I specifically targeted participants in this age range for a variety of reasons. Age was not a variable that I was interested in investigating, so it was important to keep this variable somewhat "fixed" and to compare the answers of respondents within a similar age range. I specifically chose the general age range of the "early thirties" because this tends to be a very important age for one's career. These are the "make-or-break" years or the "fast-track" years, in which an individual begins to climb the career ladder, build a reputation and position oneself for such roles such as "partner" (Hewlett and Luce 2005). These years also commonly coincide with life changes such as marriage and childbearing. Thus, I felt that interviewing workers in this age range would provide for particularly rich data as they face pressures both at work and outside of work and are "in the thick" of attempting to manage these two spheres of life. Respondents in this age range would also most likely have several years' work experience,

and therefore would not be in entry level positions. They would also be more likely to have earned an advanced degree than younger workers.

At a minimum, participants were required to have a bachelor's degree. Half of the sample held at least one advanced degree such as a JD or MBA. Several respondents attended elite academic institutions. Most respondents held professional certifications such as a CPA (Chartered Public Accountant) or CA (Chartered Accountant) designation. While not an advanced degree, such professional designations typically carry an equivalent amount of value and importance in their fields. Much like an MBA would assist an individual in accessing particular types of jobs or demand a certain level of salary, so does a CPA designation. Additionally, these types of designations also confer prestige on the individual.[14]

All respondents lived and worked in a major urban area, specifically New York City or Toronto. Like age, I was not concerned with whether responses to the research questions varied by geography. Nonetheless, the location choices were driven by the research questions. I purposefully sampled in cities where both the demands *and* the rewards of work are great. In the United States and Canada, New York City and Toronto, respectively, are regarded as prestigious, competitive, rewarding and intense work locations. They are both the largest metropolitan areas in their respective countries and are both regarded as financial and cultural "hubs" not only within North America but globally. One might reasonably raise the point that New York City and Toronto are in different countries and that the work cultures and public policies affecting work conditions would vary between the United States and Canada. While I do not disagree with this assertion, my choice of sampling respondents

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[14] In Canada, for example, a CA designation is considered to be difficult to obtain and is regarded as a prestigious professional designation. It is also required to practice public accounting and would grant access to elite industry positions such as chief financial officer (CFO) at a company.

in these two locations proved, I believe, to be a strength as the results showed a great deal of similarity in the work experiences of respondents in these two cities, underscoring the salience of being a working professional in a high-status occupation, irrespective of geography.

Neither marital or parental status of the respondents was specifically selected for. I did, however, record the marital status of respondents or, if unmarried, whether they had a partner. I also recorded whether they had any children. See Table 2 for a summary of sample characteristics.

III.C *Recruitment*

Using my personal networks in these two cities (including a former colleague), I contacted, via email, potential respondents. I used snowball sampling, asking actual respondents for suggestions of other potential respondents. While I regarded interest in the study and willingness to participate to be generally good, confirming participation and scheduling interviews proved to be a challenge. I had difficulty scheduling interviews with many participants, frequently due to the unpredictable nature of their jobs. One participant even informed me that he could not confirm the interview time until the hour prior to the time we had tentatively set!

III.D *Interviews*

The interviews were conducted in respondents' offices, homes or in a public place such as a coffee shop. Informed, written consent was obtained from each participant prior to beginning the interview. With the permission of the respondent, interviews were recorded. The interview lengths ranged from 45 minutes to 1 hour and 47 minutes. The average time was 1 hour and 8 minutes; 14 interviews lasted over 1 hour. This did not include time spent before, and particularly after, the formal interview. Typically,

respondents would want to talk casually about the issues, often asking how they compared to other respondents, expressing just how hard it is to "find that right balance" and requesting that if my "research revealed the answer to how to make it all work" that I let them in on the secret!

During the interviews, I began by asking respondents to walk me through their educational and career history. I asked respondents to discuss what initially attracted them to their line of work and to tell me about their work likes and dislikes. Respondents were asked to talk about what a "successful" or "ideal" career path at their organization looks like and whether this was something to which they ascribed. I asked about what it took to "get ahead" in their line of work, including the qualities of a "high-performer." I asked questions pertaining to the demands and expectations placed upon them at work, how these demands and expectations are communicated and I asked about the perceptions of workers who don't fulfill demands and expectations. Respondents were asked to discuss their lives outside of work, including their responsibilities, demands and wants and whether they experience any stress or conflict due to competing demands between work and non-work spheres of life. I asked respondents to reflect on how they "balance" competing demands, how they make choices between competing demands and how they feel about the competing demands in their life. Respondents were asked to discuss whether they believed their co-workers and supervisors are respectful and understanding of their lives outside of work and whether their workplaces offer any policies to help individuals manage the demands of work and non-work.

The interview guide was used during each interview, however, based on the flow of conversation, I deviated from the guide or changed the order of questions. I concluded each interview asking the respondent whether they had any questions for me or if there was

anything they wanted to tell me that I had not asked about or that they had not been given an opportunity to share. See Appendix A for the Interview Guide.

III.D *Data Analysis*

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and stripped of any identifying information (names, company names or other information that might reveal a respondent's identity). Interview transcripts were imported into *MAXqda,* a qualitative data analysis software used to facilitate the management and analysis of the data. Both deductive and inductive approaches to data analysis were used (Miles and Huberman 1994). Starting from my "research process table," a document in which I mapped research questions, theoretical concepts, indicators and measures (i.e., the interview questions), I developed an initial coding scheme, using mostly descriptive codes (describing themes at face value) along with some more interpretive codes (interpreting underlying motivations in line with theoretical concepts) (Miles and Huberman 1994: chapter 4). Additionally, during the transcription phase of data collection and analysis, I made notes on emergent themes in the data. I used these notes to assist with developing some inductive codes which were incorporated into the initial coding scheme. Thus, the initial coding scheme included both deductive and inductive codes, at the descriptive and interpretive level. Interview transcripts were then coded, line by line.

After 8 interviews were fully coded, I revised the coding scheme based on emergent themes in the data. These 8 interviews were re-coded with the revised coding scheme and coding on the remaining transcripts was completed. Once data was fully coded, I sorted, categorized and collapsed codes into more interpretive, abstract codes. I then analyzed the data looking for patterns within and across groups.

IV. **Results**

The study's findings are presented in the order of the research questions. I first detail professionals' perception of the ideal worker norm, as they experience it in their professions and workplaces. Next, I present the response professionals have to the ideal worker norm, revealing the way they respond in practice (i.e., via their actions). I also show that professionals have an attitudinal response to the ideal worker norm. Finally, I discuss the ways in which these professionals' response to, and experience of, the ideal worker norm is gendered.

IV.A *Research Question 1: Professionals' Perception of the Ideal Worker Norm*

Of the 20[15] professionals interviewed, 18 of the respondents provided a detailed description of the ideal worker norm as they experience it in their places of work. Two respondents provided not so much a description of the ideal worker norm in their specific workplace, but rather a pervasive ideal worker norm in their chosen profession, law. There is remarkable similarity across respondents' perception of the ideal worker norm, despite the fact that they work in a variety of organizations. While respondents do not explicitly discuss an ideal worker norm (in other words, they use no such term), according to their explanations of their work experiences, a pervasive ideal worker norm permeates the workplaces of professionals in high-status occupations.

The ideal worker norm has two aspects. The first is a definition of worker success (what it means to be successful) which dictates the qualities of a high-performer and prescribes an ideal career path. Second, the ideal worker norm has various demands and expectations that, when fulfilled, communicate one's pursuit of worker success. When the definition of worker success is not seemingly pursued or the demands and expectations of

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[15] Recall that while 22 interviews were conducted, 2 were excluded from data analysis and, as such, from the study results.

the ideal worker norm are not fully met, respondents perceive that negative career

consequences may ensue.

<u>IV.A.i Definition of Worker Success: Higher Performer Qualities</u>

IV.A.i.ii Dedication and Commitment

In order to achieve success, one must know what it takes to be a "praiseworthy"

worker. As such, I asked respondents to describe the qualities of a high-performer in their

workplace. The most commonly discussed quality was demonstrating dedication or

commitment to one's work. For respondents, this means that one is willing to "put the time

in" or "do whatever it takes to get the job done." While respondents explained that their

organizations would never say that one must be willing to put work first in their lives, this is

often what's expected of you. One human resources (HR) professional at a major bank in

Toronto paused after I asked her to describe a high-performer, stating that it's a matter of

dedication:

> **Caroline:** I think they're somebody, who, like, I think it's dedication. I think it's, they put in the time in, they put in the hours…

Kate, a former public accountant now working in consulting at a large firm, explained that

her own success as a high-performer is attributable to her dedication and commitment to her

work. In her own words, Kate is "dedicated," "motivated" and "not necessarily 9 to 5." She

referred to these qualities as her "work ethic." Again, Kate, like other respondents

emphasized that to be successful – to be seen as a high-performer – one must be willing to

"rise to the challenge," despite the fact that demonstrating your willingness to do whatever

work asks of you may involve working long, hard hours:

> **Kate:** Oh definitely, yeah. Yeah, definitely, yeah. So kinda falling in with the go-getter type of mentality, you have to be willing to be that person to take on the work, to rise to the challenge, um, and sometimes that comes with a lot more work and a lot more hours…But I think it's just demonstrating that you're willing to, you know, take that next step and take that even…if it's gonna be a challenge, right?

IV.A.i.ii Dedication and Commitment via Taking Initiative

Taking initiative is also an important quality of a high-performer. Very similar to

being willing to do whatever it takes to the get the job done (and often talked about

interchangeably), it is, in some sense, a way of taking one's dedication and commitment to

work up a notch. Not only does one need to do anything work demands, but a high-

performer also needs to go "above and beyond." This means one will actively seek out new

work, take on work that may be beyond one's responsibilities, or invest in developing one's

skills, talents and career. Patricia, a public accountant in Toronto, articulated this subtle yet

distinct difference when discussing the qualities of a high-performer. She described "putting

in the hours," and then continued to explain that putting in hours is just one-half of the

equation. A professional must also be willing to take on extra work, beyond one's role and

responsibilities:

> **Patricia:** Cause like the other thing you get approached to do, other stuff, so if
> you're…not just putting in the hours. So, I think there's two different parts to it. So
> there's putting in the hours, you know, seeing a job to the end. So it can't, it
> wouldn't be just saying 'You know what, I've put in my 9 to 5 and I'm done,' it's like
> whatever it takes to get that job done, you do it. And then there's also, you now,
> 'Oh here's an opportunity.' Maybe this partner just got a new client, I'll volunteer to
> do it sort of thing. So it's kind of two fold, so it's not just working for the sake of
> working, but taking on additional stuff or being willing to put in the hours to get the
> stuff done.

Lucy, a consultant in Toronto, discussed the notion that a high-performer should take the

initiative to go above and beyond the expectations of one's job. Lucy explained, as did other

respondents, that this is a matter of stepping "outside the box":

> **Lucy:** You need to be, um, willing to step outside the box. In that, so, like, put
> yourself out there, and say like, 'Look I don't have anything to do, what can I do?'
> So like showing that, like, I may not have a project at this point in time or I'm in a bit
> of a lull but I want to work, so what can I, like how can I help? What can I learn?
> So taking that initial extra step to learn about something that you don't know.

Taking initiative often involves long hours, as taking on extra work requires putting in extra hours. Additionally, taking such initiative is thought of in comparison to peers. Taking initiative should, ideally, differentiate oneself from others in the office. Elliot, who works in high-finance in New York City, echoed this sentiment. He recalled his resourcefulness in researching a topic which would allow him to provide, from his perspective, superior advice to his client. Elliot emphasized the notion that differentiating oneself by taking the initiative to deliver superior service to his clients involves significant dedication to one's work, as it is not feasible to be "sufficiently different" from co-workers if one only works during traditional business hours. Rather, Elliot puts time into work in the evenings and on the weekends – in some way, his work never really ends:

> **Elliot:** Um, and so, there's nothing that, you know, that tells you 'You need to go home on the weekend and do work and figure out how you can get an edge,' but you realize 'How do you differentiate yourself?' and the only way to differentiate yourself is by doing different work, and sometimes you're going to figure that out in the office, and sometimes you're going to figure that out on Sunday morning at 6 am. So there's nobody that tells you, 'Do it this way' you just realize that if you're going to differentiate yourself you gotta do something sufficiently different.

As Austin, a finance professional in New York City, succinctly put it:

> **Austin:** Yeah, you gotta produce everyday. And you gotta find stuff [work] to do.

IV.A.i.iii Business Development Skills

Respondents explained that oftentimes, taking initiative may manifest itself through business development activities, in which a professional seeks to generate new business for the organization. While often beyond their role and responsibilities, taking the initiative to engage in business development activities is also a mark of a high-performer. Mike, a public accountant in Toronto, after discussing the importance of dedication and commitment as a high-performer quality, stated that business development skills are important as well, differentiating you from others in the workplace:

> **Mike:** But it's other skills that say, you would need, such as client relation skills, business development skills, things like that that would distinguish you from other people at your level.

Similarly, other respondents explained that one's ability to generate new business for the organization becomes even more important as "you progress through the ranks," in the words of one investment banker. Even before one is actually expected to deliver a certain amount of new work for the organization, one should be demonstrating a willingness to hone their business development skills, further reinforcing one's overall dedication and commitment to work.

IV.A.i.iv "Soft Skills" and Networking

Presumably, business development activities require relationship-building skills. A professional's interpersonal skills, or "soft skills," was noted by respondents as a quality high-performers should possess. Such soft skills may be important to the extent that competing interests can exist within an organization or between organizations and their clients. Soft skills allow one to negotiate such conflicting interests. Audrey, a lawyer in Toronto who functions as in-house legal counsel reflected on this issue, which she regards as a quality of a high-performer. In Audrey's estimation, soft skills allow one to manage conflicting interests between various parties at work, an important skill for lawyers to possess. Lucas, an investment banker in Toronto, when asked what a high-performer looked like, discussed co-workers above him that he viewed as high-performers (individuals who had "made it"). Lucas believes that their interpersonal (or soft) skills are important factors in their success. Lucas referred to these skills as "smarts."

Justin, a consultant within the corporate offices of a major bank in Toronto, emphasized the ability to build relationships, which presumably one needs adept interpersonal skills to do, as being key to one's success. Justin's emphasis of this issue was

different from other respondents who emphasized the important of dedication, commitment and the willingness to just get the job done. Justin spoke about what it means to be a high-performer by saying that it is "all about relationships and developing relationships." Justin believes it's important to advocate on one's own behalf, letting others know who you are, so you will be thought of when opportunities arise:

> **Justin:** I think its all networking. I think it's all about relationships and developing relationships, letting your name be known out there. That's what I see as the number one thing. You have to be your own advocate. And get out there, and let people know who you are. Yeah, so that when an opportunity does come up, people think 'oh, what about Justin?'

While Justin differs from other respondents in seeing networking as the key to being a high-performer, and thus a successful professional, other respondents still note that being good at building relationships, or networking, as they call it, is important to one's success. For respondents, networking – just as Justin stated – is a type of relationship building which is somewhat "opportunistic." Networking can be a way to build business contacts, and thus potential sources of revenue generation. Networking is also opportunistic in that it is a way to promote, and thus ultimately advance, oneself. It allows one to gain visibility, not the kind of visibility one garners from putting in hours at the office, but rather presence in front of, or exposure to, the right people in the office. In other words, to be a high-performer who will be thought of for advancement or other rewards, the right people above you must be aware of you.

Some respondents, when emphasizing the utmost importance of dedication and commitment as key to one's success, also explained that others in the organization need to be *aware* of one's dedication and commitment to their career. Thus, as respondents explained, one should cultivate their reputation as a high-performer. Above all, the high-performing, successful professional demonstrates dedication and commitment to their work.

However, it helps to have the right people be aware of this dedication and commitment – this ambition to make it to the top – and speak to this quality on your behalf.

IV.A.i.v Technical Competence

Finally, respondents described a high-performer as being technically competent. However, technical competence is not a primary focus of the discussion around workplace success. Rather, technical competence is regarded as a "given" – to some extent, it is simply *assumed* that one will be technically competent. In this way, respondents' views of technical competence only serve to underscore the importance of what *it truly means to a be a good, successful worker* – one who is willing to do whatever it takes to get the job done, and even then, take the initiative to go above and beyond what one's job expectations. As Mike, a public accountant said, technical skills are a "required base":

> **Mike:** No, I mean, it seems to, I mean technical skills is always a required base, but I mean there's levels of, I mean, you've got the people who understand accounting inside and out. But then you've got people, you know, like myself who are probably running right around the median, so that's kind of, it doesn't hold you back, but it's other skills that…would distinguish you from other people at your level.

IV.A.i.vi Summary

In sum, to be a successful professional, one must, above all else, be committed and dedicated to work. This involves both a willingness to do whatever it takes to get a job done but also a willingness to go above and beyond what's necessary, taking the initiative to deliver more than what's expected. In addition, one must should engage in business development activities, possess savvy interpersonal skills, build relationships and network with the right people to garner oneself the right exposure. Finally, one must also be technically competent – be able to do their actual job well. But, according to respondents, one's technical competence is ultimately an assumed quality, a necessary minimum of sorts – not something that alone will obtain a professional workplace success. Rather,

professionals' explained that ultimately dedication and commitment are central to what it means to be a successful professional. As Jessica, a lawyer in New York City summarized:

> **Jessica:**…you're expected to bill, you're expected to do supreme work-product, and be available. Basically, do anything the firm asks you to do.

IV.A.ii Definition of Worker Success: The Ideal Career Path

According to respondents, an ideal career path is evident in their places of work. This ideal career path is the step-wise progression (a "corporate ladder") that the successful worker will aspire to and pursue. Whether respondents actually aspire to move along, or up, this career path or whether they take actions to pursue it, is not my concern in this portion of the paper. Rather, I sought to garner respondents' perception of a general career path that was the recognized ideal in the organization's view – the one that the successful worker would pursue.

Bethany, a professional working in high-finance in New York City, understands that "climbing the ladder" is *equated* with "success" in the workplace:

> **Bethany:** I mean…I think that one way to identify success is climbing the ladder. And that could be, you know, reaching a partner status, [or], um, starting your own fund…but kind of reaching that upper echelon.

For respondents, the ideal career path involves attaining a series of successive positions (via promotion), ultimately culminating in reaching the highest level possible (e.g. partnership). Jessica, a lawyer in New York City, described the career progression at her law firm, which she described as "very lock-step." She explained, as did other respondents, that one starts at a given level (e.g., associate), and over the years progresses through the various levels until one reaches the highest level attainable. As we talked about this ideal career path, I asked Jessica what would happen to a lawyer who was very resistant to fulfilling the demands and expectations placed upon them by the firm. She responded by saying "they're asked to leave." Like other respondents, Jessica referred to her law firm as an "up or out" model. In

other words, if one isn't promoted to the next level within the standard number of years, they are no longer with the organization. Jessica continued to on explain that there are some exceptions, which provide for an alternate career path, but this is neither common nor the *ideal* career path:

> **Jessica:** There's a few exceptions, where somebody might have, you know, maybe they're a very good writer, or whatever it is, they have a certain connection to a client – they want them to be…I think it's a career-killer, if you don't meet the firm's expectations. There's another set of people that meet the firm's expectations in terms of billables, and work product, um, and attitude, but they're just not quote unquote 'partnership material.' So they would be asked to stay on as a career associate. But they still fit the mould, the, the firm just doesn't want to make them partner. And some people choose to stay and do that and they're okay with that. And other people choose to say 'That's insulting,' and go elsewhere.

While a particular number of years are often spent at each level, there is some flexibility in the number of these years. For example, respondents such as Charlotte and Kate have both achieved early promotions to the next level. While moving up the ladder is the mark of success, doing so quickly is seen as an added mark of success. Josh, a public accountant in Toronto, discussed the ideal career path (reaching partnership at the firm) and the timing of promotions, saying that reaching partnership quickly fosters the perception that one is a "stronger person."

Of the 20 respondents, 4 do not have an ideal career path within their place of work that they could clearly articulate. Both Julia and Audrey, lawyers in Toronto, practice as in-house legal counsel within an organization. More specifically, Julia and Audrey work in "crown corporations." Crown corporations are pseudo-government agencies which function more closely to private sector organizations. For example, they are not unionized. However, as we will see in the section on demands and expectations at work, the ideal worker norm is not nearly as extreme in their offices. Accordingly, neither Julia nor Audrey had the same sense of an ideal career path in their organization in the same way other

respondents did. When asked about the existence of an ideal career path, Audrey responded

by saying, "Oh my goodness…I have no idea!" Likewise, Julia said:

> **Julia:** So, I guess it's a weird thing…Um, it could be that I become my supervisor, and that I eventually become general counsel. But, um, that would probably be your successful career path, except you're sort of blocked by things like age. I would think that my supervisor would become general counsel, but if I waited for him to take that position, that's, I don't know…when would this woman retire? Like in 15 years. So it's not really, I don't know…in our organization, I don't know, it's not really career development, you just, continue working.

Oliver and Austin, both working in New York City, also do not have clear ideal

career paths in their organizations. Both work in very small organizations (unlike the other

respondents). Thus, for Austin, who works as a finance professional, there were not any

other positions he would move into, latterly or upwardly. However, prior to his current role,

Austin worked as a finance professional in a major bank in New York City. He was thus

quite familiar the ideal career path at his previous workplace. Oliver works at an

organization which is quite entrepreneurial in nature. Oliver explained that he will likely not

be with his company long-term. For him, the next step in his career is to potentially start his

own company, after getting a few more years experience in his current role. Oliver

expressed some excitement over the lack of clear career path ahead of him. From his

perspective, he has the opportunity to direct his career, doing what he wants to do. For now,

he is content to gain some more experience and explore future opportunities.

Overall, an ideal career path is apparent to professionals. Involving a series of

promotions into successive positions, eventually the successful professional will presumably

reach the upper level of their organization. As Bethany stated, success is equated with

moving along the ideal career path – a *successful* worker pursues and navigates the ideal career

path. Alternatives are sometimes available, such as in Jessica's law firm where a lawyer can

be a "career associate." But Jessica herself noted that these alternatives are few and far

between. Moreover, such an alternative career path is less prestigious – being told one has the potential to be a career associate but not a partner is, in effect, "insulting." Thus, an ideal career path not only provides rewards (e.g., promotions) to professionals who pursue success, but the pursuit of the ideal career path denotes worker success in and of itself and is an integral part of what it means to be successful.

IV.A.iii Demands and Expectations

The ideal worker norm that respondents experience involves various demands and expectations for professionals. These demands and expectations are to be fulfilled or accepted by the successful worker. Respondents' spoke of expectations around hours worked, "face time" pressures, expectations for worker responsiveness and availability and demands which create unpredictability in professionals' schedule.

IV.A.iii.i Hours Worked

The average hours worked per week for each respondent ranges from 45 hours to over 100 hours. Both Julia and Audrey, the two lawyers previously discussed, work 45 hours per week on a consistent basis. Again, Julia and Audrey work as in-house legal counsel in "crown corporations." Consistent with Julia and Audrey's own understanding that the ideal worker norm for most lawyers and professionals does not apply in their workplaces (a point which will be discussed in a following section of the findings), neither Julia nor Audrey work as many hours as other respondents in the study do.

When asked to provide the number of hours they worked each week, all respondents (excluding Julia and Audrey) provided a *range* of hours. According to respondents, it is not possible to provide an average number of hours per week, as their hours vary week to week. Additionally, they experience "slow" periods and "busy" periods. For some respondents, busy seasons are predictable, timed with various events in their organization or industry,

such as the end of the fiscal year or regulatory deadlines for filing and reporting financial

information. For other respondents, busy periods coincide with projects, cases, deals and

transactions. As such, they can not necessarily know in advance what weeks and months of

the year will be peak periods regarding work hours. The ranges for work hours are

presented in the following table:

Table 1: Respondents' Range of Hours Worked Per Week		
Respondent Pseudonym	**Respondent Occupation**	**Range of Hours Worked Per Week**
Julia	Lawyer	45 hrs.
Dylan	Accountant	50 – 70 hrs.
Audrey	Lawyer	43 hrs.
Lucas	Investment Banker	75 – 80 hrs.
Caroline	HR Professional	50 – 65 hrs.
Justin	Consultant	45 – 60 hrs.
Thomas	Investment Banker	100 hrs. (more possible)
Jessica	Lawyer	60 hrs. (70 – 80 hrs. some weeks)
Austin	Finance Professional	60 – 65 hrs.
Bethany	Finance Professional	60 – 90 hrs.
Charlotte	Accountant	48 – 60 hrs. (75 hrs. possible)
Oliver	Engineer	50 – 60 hrs. (100+ hrs., infrequently)
Josh	Accountant	50 – 80 hrs.
Marissa	Consultant	50 – 55 hrs. (up to 80 hrs. at times)
Patricia	Accountant	45 – 60 hrs.* (up to 75 hrs. infrequently)
Kate	Consultant	50 – 60 hrs. (100 hrs. possible)
Mike	Accountant	50 – 60 hrs. (70 – 75 hrs. infrequently)
Natalie	HR Professional	50 – 60 hrs. (above 60 hrs. possible)
Lucy	Consultant	55 – 75 hrs. (additional time spent travelling)
Elliot	Finance Professional	60 – 70 hrs. (more possible)

Refer to Table 2 for the table of respondent information for additional information on respondents.
*Note that Patricia is on a part-time work schedule, reducing her work week to 60% or 80% depending on the time of year. I have pro-rated her work hours accordingly to reflect a full-time work schedule, providing an appropriate comparison to other respondents and to appropriately demonstrate her work hours, over and above a standard, full-time 37.5 hour work week in Toronto.

Clearly evident from the range of hours worked per week provided by respondents is the

high number of hours respondents' work. Averaging the middle point across the ranges

provided by respondents, we can estimate that these professionals, on average, work around

60 hours per week. Again, we must be careful not to focus on this average, as respondents emphasized during the interviews that there is not really an "average" week. Rather, a range of hours more appropriately captures the time professionals spend working.

Interestingly, when asked about their hours worked respondents sometimes paused, needing time to think about how many hours they worked, doing calculations in their head. Respondents would provide fairly lengthy answers, as they thought about how many hours it might be and the waxing and waning of peak periods, explaining the ways their work hours vary each week. In other words, they weren't always sure! After I asked how many hours Oliver worked each week, he responded:

> **Oliver:** Too many. You know, I, uh, I haven't really sat down and counted it up. It varies quite a bit because [my] business is one that has a great deal of flexibility, so I don't punch a clock and I don't keep timesheets so I don't know exactly what the range is…

Being unsure of one's work hours is partly due, as Oliver explained, to the sheer number of hours respondents work, as they feel like their work hours never really end. Indeed, working long hours is often equated with dedication and commitment – a *successful* worker is *willing* to fulfill *expectations* for long work hours. Charlotte, an accountant, explained how she believes working long hours is perceived in her office and the potential rewards associated with hours worked. She, like other respondents, believes that working long hours are worn as a "badge of honor." Even though her organization is working towards decreasing overwork among its professional staff, Charlotte noted that work hours have a lot of visibility in the organization, implicitly communicating that the organization values long work hours. Moreover, she believes that even though her fellow professionals frequently complain about the hours, being tired and overworked, that they must receive some sort of "gratification" or "personal validation" from working such hours. Again, this communicates to Charlotte that

somehow, long hours are being rewarded, or that in the very least, her co-workers perceive there to be rewards for working such long hours.

Charlotte explained that even though two co-workers were recently promoted for being high-performers, she believes these co-workers perceive that their long work hours contributed to their promotions. What Charlotte expressed, then, is that high-performance is often equated with long hours. Charlotte explained that workers who work long hours are perceived as committed to their careers:

> **Charlotte:** Yeah, yeah [said very thoughtfully]. For sure [they're perceived as committed]. They're ambitious, they're committed, they'll do what it takes, they're…you know…versus, someone who's [on the lower end] is a complete slacker, obviously focused on other things.

Charlotte was pregnant at the time of interview. As such, she suspected that working fewer hours than she usually does (although, still working long hours) would be more acceptable. However, she feels that her single, male co-workers would be viewed negatively if they worked a similar number of hours.

Marissa, an accountant now working in a consulting role, described how "natural" the focus on working long hours feels, explaining that individuals who are low on overtime hours are "regarded as performing at a lower level," something she has seen happen during meetings where she reviews staff below her level. Much like other respondents, Marissa explained that working long hours is "100% a badge of honor." Marissa explained:

> **Marissa:** And like it's so ingrained – you learn it from the get-go. You learn the sort of pride that comes from working on, like, a challenging assignment, and challenging often means long hours. And so that gets really ingrained, and so if I don't check myself, if I see a list of managers and I see that some, certain people, have worked less over time, my head instantly goes to that place of 'Well, what are they doing? Why aren't they…' Which is so annoying. Because I find it annoying, yet my head already goes there, because it gets so ingrained in you.

Expectations for working long hours are a common feature of professionals' work experience. In many ways, respondents explained that there is really no end to one's work.

In fact, one respondent, Elliot, who works in high-finance in New York City stated that his

work hours are not even entirely quantifiable. Elliot explained that he is always thinking

about work. For example, he may be on a news website and an article may be relevant to his

work, which leads to Elliot to make use of the information for work purposes. While he

said that he would have no idea how to add up the minutes spent on work in these ways,

Elliot is emphatic that it is *work* he's performing:

> **Elliot:** And so there's those hours as well, that I wouldn't even begin to know how
> you quantify them…I think when you're in a business where you're always trying to
> find any little piece of information to help add more and better color to [something],
> you don't stop thinking about those things. And how do you quantify that as work
> you're doing…? But it's 100% work that you're doing.

IV.A.iii.ii Face Time

While respondents spent more time talking about the number of hours they worked,

they did nonetheless mention "face time" pressures. Thomas, an investment banker in New

York City, described his experience with "face time," which he finds himself engaging in:

> **Thomas:** And there's this concept of face time, where, you don't want to be the first
> guy to leave, right? Cause there's a perception of maybe laziness, or that you're not
> as connected, or you're not getting the work done, which is kind of funny, because
> presumably if you were the fastest person there, you would get your work done the
> fastest. So, have I been done at 10 pm and wanted to leave and have I stayed and
> kinda screwed around on the internet and tried to appear busy until midnight? I've
> done that before. Um, that's not great, but you know…so…I will say, there is some
> of that on the weekend, but it's a little bit more flexible.

Like Thomas who understands that "face time" is senseless, other respondents noted that

face-time should not be equated with working hard. As Josh said, when "you actually drill

into it," face time is just the impression that one is working hard, "even if you're not doing

anything." Respondents feel that one should always be giving the impression that they are

busy and overworked. Moreover, one respondent, Dylan, an accountant, explained that

"face time" in his workplace has parameters around it. Dylan explained that coming in early

to the office does not garner a worker any "credit" or "recognition," whereas staying late

does. This is because his Chief Financial Officer (CFO) comes in the office around 9:30a.m., therefore if one arrives at work before 9:30 a.m., the CFO is not there to notice. However, if one stays late in the evening, the CFO will notice, and often asks the next day, "So how late we're you guys here till last night?" Staying late is a badge-of-honor in Dylan's office and is even a way to compete with co-workers. Ultimately, Dylan stated that one is expected to be visible in the office. As he said:

> **Dylan:** Working from home is not the same as being there. Being there, it's like…you're doing the right thing by not going home and logging in or something like that…

Respondents feel that being present in the office demonstrates one's commitment to the pursuit of worker success and thus has potential rewards. For example, Caroline, an HR professional at a major bank, believes that "you have to be in the workplace if you want to be promoted." While one might be permitted to work at home, it will not help one advance in their careers. She has seen how co-workers who do work at home frequently are not regarded as high-performers. Rather, Caroline feels that those co-workers are perceived as treating work not as a "career" but just as a "job":

> **Caroline:** So for me, if you want to be – and this is only is you want to be upwardly mobile – you need to be in the workplace…So this HR associate on our team takes every Monday that she works from home. That's only 1 day a week [but]…you don't see her staying above and beyond. So she has that perception now: 'Nope, she's just happy where she is, she doesn't want to go to another job, she's got a family that she doesn't want to do that…' And I do, I believe that…you have to be in the workplace if you want to be promoted. So if you're working form home all the time, you're not there, they don't see you. You know?...You need to be there, for people to see you, so that you can get promoted. It's all about face time. So I do, I think there [are] perceptions. So if someone's always working from home, that's fine – they may be doing their job, and they may be getting things done. But they're not the next leader.

While "face time" – being physically present in the office – is an important way to demonstrate working long hours, and thus commitment to the job and pursuit of worker success, some respondents noted that one doesn't necessarily need to be in the office to

demonstrate such commitment. Rather, there are other ways to demonstrate one's commitment and pursuit of success. Patricia, an accountant, noted that "being online" is also a form of "face time." Professionals often have software installed on their work computers which allow them to communicate with other co-workers via instant messaging. Thus, one might be at home, but if one appears online, others will assume they are working.

Jessica, a lawyer working in New York City also noted that the quality of being dedicated and committed is not necessarily closely tied to one's physical visibility or presence in the office. Rather, one can work long hours anytime, anywhere. As Jessica put it, one needs to "basically do whether the firms asks of you," but you may do that from a variety of places – working on your computer late at night, sending emails from your Blackberry device, or rearranging commitments to make room for unexpected work demands. Jessica noted that, to some extent, co-workers don't necessarily assume you're not working just because you're not at the office. For example, co-workers might think you are at a deposition. Thus, Jessica explained that irrespective of where one is, one should always be working. Further, one should portray that they are always working to others, talking about how "busy" one is. In fact, Jessica feels that there is a sense of "elitism" around devoting one's time to work, in which one is perceived as "better" for spending all of their time on work.

IV.A.iii.iii Professionals' Responsiveness and Availability

In addition to working long hours and demonstrating this work ethic to others in the organization, respondents face expectations regarding their responsiveness and availability to work. Respondents are expected to be constantly available and highly responsive to work, even outside normal work hours. Bethany, a finance professional in New York City, explained expectations for responsiveness at her office:

> **Bethany:** Um, I think it's a general rule that you want to be somewhat responsive, unless it's known that you're going to be out of pocket for a while. So, I mean I

think growing up in the business it just, like, I don't, I don't, like I don't have like time limits or whatever. Um, but you know, I think the general rule is you want to be fairly responsive and the norm is that people just expect you to be somewhat plugged in.

Bethany's statement about "growing up in the business" is a reference to her years of experience in finance, the industry in which she has worked since graduation from college. Bethany started in the industry as an investment banker. She thus compared expectations for responsiveness and availability at her workplace to that of investment bankers, saying that expectations for her responsiveness and availability are not as bad as they are for investment bankers. Such a comparison sheds some light on the somewhat "relaxed" tone regarding availability that Bethany expressed, as investment bankers are perceived by their industry peers as working under the *most* intense conditions. Both Thomas and Lucas, investment bankers, expressed the intense expectations for availability and responsiveness. In fact, Thomas almost sarcastically wondered if it was possible to be "on-call" if one is always at work. He said:

Thomas: So, is it on call if you're there all the time? I don't know if that counts [joking tone].

He then said, more seriously:

Thomas: Unequivocally, yes. I feel on call. Like I said earlier, my father was a physician growing up, and you know he was on call with a beeper, a different type of on call, presumably, lives are at stake. But, uh, yes. Have I responded to emails at 3am? Yes. You know, it's…yes, is the short answer.

Likewise, Lucas reflected on the level of responsiveness and availability he saw around him. He explained that he is often amazed at quickly he receives responses from co-workers – and how quickly he is expected to respond to work demands as well. Lucas feels that there is a constant urgency to all of his work tasks. Even when respondents are on vacation, they explained that there is "just an expectation" that one is in communication with work, most frequently in the form of checking emails. Respondents also noted that there are

repercussions for not fulfilling expectations of worker responsiveness and availability. When

I asked Kate what would happen if she didn't check her emails while she was on vacation,

she paused, at first not really knowing the answer, and then she said it would simply not

bode well for one's career. Slow responsiveness and limited availability reflect poorly on a

professional, and respondents explained that one will be told to improve upon

responsiveness and availability in performance reviews if they are not fulfilling such

expectations.

Blackberries, in particular, are synonymous with one's responsiveness and availability

to work. Blackberries enable a professional to check email anytime, anywhere.

Professionals' noted that Blackberries – the physical device itself – imparts expectations.

For example, Dylan, at the time of the interview, did not have a Blackberry. He was also

one of the few respondents who does not experience strong expectations for quick

responsiveness and constant availability (although, he does experience intense expectations

for prioritizing work over non-work, such as the time he cancelled a special vacation due to

work pressure). Dylan, however, explained that it was only a matter of time until he was

going to be required to get a Blackberry, and then he will be constantly available to work.

He has been asked on 4 occasions to order a company Blackberry, but is resisting doing so

because of the "expectations" that will come with it:

> **Dylan:** [My boss] keeps telling me I need to order one [a Blackberry]. But I am
> resisting because I feel like it's bad enough now, that I don't need to be out, you
> know…like in the mall, constantly looking at it or things like that, which I'm pretty
> sure is what's going to happen...I know that the next time I try to take a week off, it's
> coming. I've been told that. So my boss said that I either take it now, or the next
> time you book a week off, you're getting it a week before you leave. And then once
> you get it, you don't give it back when you come back from vacation. So, it's just a
> matter of time.

Sometimes, respondents sheepishly laughed when I asked about their Blackberry usage – a

reference to the shared understanding of the meaning Blackberries carry among

professionals. Several respondents referred to the "red flashing light," the small light that blinks when a new email has come in, explaining that they either dread seeing the light go off or don't like to have it flashing, and thus constantly check incoming emails. Despite the expectations that come with a Blackberry, several respondents also feel that Blackberries give them an added amount of flexibility. Natalie, an HR professional described the benefits (and expectations) of owning a Blackberry:

> **Natalie:** So, I only got a Blackberry in December. It's, it's, it's hard to get a way from. Um, it's good in a way, because it allows you to take, you know, in its most basic form, if I wanted to go an have a 2 hour lunch on Friday, I could still know if there's anything that came up that's urgent that I need to be there for, you know, if something happens that I need to know about, it's good in that way. But it also sucks, because, because of the expectation that goes a long with it.

Thus, Natalie understands the "expectation" that goes along with owning a Blackberry for work purposes. To her, "it sucks," however, she also views the Blackberry positively. She said that her workload simply cannot be completed during regular business hours. Thus her Blackberry gives her some autonomy from the physical office while also enabling her to manage her workload.

Professionals experience significant demands and expectations for seemingly constant availability and responsiveness to work. Blackberries, as a device closely linked to these expectations for responsiveness and availability, appear to be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, professionals enjoy the apparent flexibility and autonomy from work that a Blackberry affords. On the other hand, Blackberries simultaneously reinforce and strengthen professionals' connection to their workplaces and the expectation that they are connected to work all the time.

IV.A.iii.iv Unpredictability

In addition to working long hours and expectations for availability, respondents experience unpredictability in their work schedules. Jessica, a lawyer in New York City, said

"absolutely" when I asked if there was a measure of unpredictability to her working hours, which she is expected to accommodate. She explained that sometimes she just doesn't know until Friday whether work is going to "spill" into the weekend. Despite her plans for leaving the office, if something comes up, "you have to stay to get it done." For Jessica, as for other respondents, unpredictability is a significant work dislike. She finds unpredictable demands to be "annoying" and "obnoxious." Jessica, like other respondents, also questions whether most last-minute requests are truly legitimate.

Not only are unpredictable demands frustrating, unpredictability makes it very difficult for professionals to make commitments outside of work. Kate, a consultant, discussed unpredictability in her job, which often makes it hard for her to make other commitments outside of work:

> **Kate:** [My inability to commit], it's a function of the fact that you are expected to be on-call all the time and drop things…Yes, the unpredictability. Cause I could be gone for a couple of weeks travelling. And then, not even travelling but in the office and something has to get done one night, like this happens a lot. Like lately it's been better but, the last year…last summer I had to cancel so many vacations, right? So it's, it's really tough to know where you're gonna be, and I don't want to make a commitment and let people down. Because they don't always understand – 'Oh work, well why work? Just throw it to the side.' Right? But it's not like that here in our group, you're expected to do something and stay till it's done. Um, and kind of waive those other commitments if you have to.

Not only do unpredictable demands infringe upon one's life outside of work, but unpredictable demands during the work day can make working stressful and pressure-filled for respondents. Lucas, an investment banker, discussed the unpredictability in his job, saying that it was the "toughest" aspect of his work. Even though Lucas might have his day mapped out, unplanned requests can effectively hijack his work day and planned work tasks are left undone:

> **Lucas:** I think the toughest thing is like…the unpredictability, that's what kills me…It's just like not knowing what's coming up around the corner…this [job], is like, I can come in and think I know what I'm going to have to be doing that day and

stuff's like coming in left, right and center. That comes out of nowhere. And that takes all my, basically takes all my attention for one day…and then, you don't know, because of Blackberries you're not really safe. It could be 5 o'clock on Friday and think you have nothing coming up and then they throw you something. So that's probably the toughest thing. You get like these heart palpitations, right, it's just like, these shocks…cause you just don't know what's coming, what's lurking around the corner… And that's what I think the most stressful thing. So I could be leaving, like a few times this week around 7 o'clock, and 'Oh by the way, we've got this, this and this…'

Thus, respondents experience unpredictability in their working hours and are expected to accommodate the unpredictable nature of work demands. Such unpredictability can infringe upon life outside of work, yet even during the work day, work tasks themselves can be unpredictable, quickly changing, and serving as a source of stress for professionals when at the office, not just when they are at home.

IV.A.iv Consequences for Not (Seemingly) Pursuing Success

Workplaces may offer policies to alleviate the conflict between work and non-work spheres of life for their professional staff. Such policies include flexibility arrangements in which a worker may reduce work hours (e.g., work at 80% of full-time), alter working hours (e.g., start very early), or take extended leaves. Policies are intended to help professionals manage work and home, thereby achieving greater success at both, and are frequently used to attract potential workers or garner positive press for organizations. However, respondents believe that such formal arrangements (for which compensation is adjusted accordingly) can carry informal, but very real, consequences.

Charlotte, an accountant, is very successful in her place of work, well-positioned for advancement to partnership. After the birth of her first-child, she exercised a policy to take a reduced work arrangement for a few months once she had returned to work. Charlotte worked 80% of a full-time work week, thus taking one day off each week. Charlotte noted that she still received timely promotions and high-profile opportunities and assignments at

work – she has not, in her estimation, suffered any consequences thus far. Charlotte also noted that she is the "poster child" for balancing work and family in her office, frequently cited by the organization as an example of a professional who has exercised one of the organization's work/life flexibility policies. However, Charlotte expressed concern over her "poster child status." She feels that she is one of very few success stories, and that she suspects that there are far more stories of professionals (particularly women) who have suffered career consequences for using such policies. Additionally, Charlotte believes she is fortunate in that she has a very supportive partner backing her choices. Charlotte also explained that when she was on her reduced work schedule, she often worked more than 80%, came in on her scheduled day-off, and worked when she was at home.

Thus, Charlotte's reduced work schedule did give her some additional flexibility in her schedule, but Charlotte still fulfilled all of the expectations and demands placed upon the ideal worker. To actually work at 80%, Charlotte would have needed to maintain "rigid boundaries" which have, in her opinion, career consequences. Now expecting her second child, Charlotte plans return to work at 100% and she will not take another reduced work schedule. Of this choice, Charlotte said that she is concerned a reduced work schedule will ultimately slow her progression to partnership.

Kate, a consultant, discussed the career consequences she believes a co-worker experienced for using a reduced work schedule. The co-worker resigned, and Kate believes that her co-worker had ultimately been pushed out of the group and organization. She believes that partners in her group were not supportive of this co-worker, as in her group, Kate said that there is an "unwritten rule" that you "just don't take flexible work arrangements":

> **Kate:** I've seen there was no attempt to make the flexible arrangement work. In fact, it was almost the opposite, like they purposely try to make you…Like they tried

to make it not work…And to be honest [she] was quite flexible anyway, and often moved around things [for work], right? So it's really hard to understand why that wouldn't be supported.

Kate believes that using such a policy communicates that one is not "serious" about their career, and as such, one is not going to be supported when using such policies. She said:

> **Kate:** With the people we work for, um, that you're not as committed to this, you're more committed to your family… Um, but it would also be, I guess a concern that if a big job comes up, and you're not working on Tuesday. Well, that's, to me, that's manageable… It is, logistically it is a little more of a challenge, but my opinion is in an organization, you have to work through these things if you want to keep your women. But…there wasn't any respect.

Patricia, a public accountant, works on reduced work schedule, which she started after the birth of her first child. Patricia is the only person in her group to do so. She expressed concern over the consequences she might suffer, as she feels a reduced work schedule prevents her from completely fulfilling the demands and expectations a successful worker should meet. Making herself available to co-workers on her days at home, Patricia feels she needs to somehow "compensate" for something at work. This sense that she must "compensate" for something indicates that, in some way, she is falling short of expectations. Moreover, Patricia acknowledges that her co-workers are in the office 5 full days a week, completely available to work. She believes that "indirectly" she's "getting that comparison" to her full-time co-workers.

Even though Patricia is paid at 60% of a full salary, taking 2 days off each week ultimately puts her "behind" her peers, who *are* available and responsive all the time. Patricia noted elsewhere in her interview that taking initiative (seeking out new opportunities and assignments beyond one's role and responsibilities) is a very important quality of a successful worker. Thus, again, her reduced work schedule, she feels, might create problems for perceptions of her performance:

> **Patricia:**…because obviously I'm not able to give as much as someone who's at 100%. And like, not that I don't have the opportunity to take on extra things, but I think that's where I will say 'No' or I will not, you know, take on an extra project, because I know, I'm already, I already feel like I'm at capacity. Um, and then I don't, so I guess I think I'm one of the first people [to be 60%] in my group, so I don't know how I'm going to be perceived

I asked Patricia if she worried about this and the implications for her advancement. She responded with some resignation, saying:

> **Patricia:** I do. But, I think I'm accepting it – well, not accepting it, but I think for my sanity and for the fact that at least I can see my daughter, uh, those 2 days of the week, I think I'll, you know, I'll accept it, you know, for now. So…I, I, I mean I could have made the decision to do 5 days a week and keep it as is. But I think it's more important to have, to have some extra time with her and try to make it work

In sum, respondents perceive that using policies intended to create better work/life balance for professionals potentially have negative career consequences for workers. Using such policies can make it practically difficult to fulfill and manage the intense demands and expectations placed upon professionals. And when one does not fulfill such expectations it can communicate that one is not committed and dedicated to their career, pursuing worker success. However, using such a policy, in and of itself, irrespective of one's *actual* ability to fulfill the demands and expectations placed upon them, also communicates that one is not committed or dedicated to their career and the pursuit of worker success. This ultimately has consequences, or so respondents believe, such as stalled career advancement. In fact, Dylan, an accountant, suspects there might even be more serious consequences, such as job loss:

> **Dylan:**…so for sure promotion wise, it's like, you're not going to get promoted. But also…you can work really long hours, and make a major mistake, and um, they can choose to, sort of, look past it, you know, 'Learn from it, move on, and don't make the same mistake again.' But if they were looking for a reason to replace you with somebody who was willing to work those hours, I think that they would do it. I think that they would say, 'You know what, this wouldn't have happened if this person just spent more time on it. It happened because they're not spending enough time on it. They're not spending enough time in the office.' And they find a way to relate the two, and then, they have a reason to let you go.

Thus, the perception of consequences for using such policies reinforces the two aspects of the ideal worker norm that respondents described:

1) The definition of worker success (what it means to be a good, successful worker), in which one is ultimately committed and dedicated to their career, willing to do whatever it takes to get the job and done and go "above and beyond." Furthermore, a successful worker pursues advancement along the ideal career path, as aspiring to this path is equated with worker success.

2) The good, successful worker fulfills and accepts the demands and expectations upon them, including working long hours, logging "face time," being highly-responsive and continually available, and accommodating a high-degree of unpredictability in their work schedules. Fulfilling such demands and expectations, ultimately communicates one's commitment to their career and being a successful worker.

IV.B Research Question 2: Responding to the Ideal Worker Norm

Having provided a detailed explanation of the ideal worker norm as professionals in high-status occupations perceive it to be, I now turn to the response professionals have to the ideal worker norm. Why is the response of professionals of interest? Having positioned this study among the broader work and occupations literature, and in particular, among the theoretical accounts of strategies of control in the workplace, if in fact ideal worker norm is fundamentally a way in to elicit the work efforts of professionals, then exploring the degree to which professionals comply with and conform to the ideal worker norm is a logical next step. However, and perhaps more importantly, the ideal worker norm involves trade-offs. Conforming to the ideal worker norm, and its demands and expectations, infringes upon a professional's life beyond the office, causing conflict between their work and non-work

spheres of life. This potential conflict is highly salient to professionals' overall subjective experience of work and the on-going choices they face as they negotiate these two spheres of life. Thus, it was in the interest of understanding, from professionals' own perspective, how they navigate the potentially competing work and non-work spheres of life, seeking to enjoy the benefits and handle the challenges of both, that I investigated how professional's respond to the ideal worker norm.

IV.B.i Challenges Between Work and Non-Work Spheres of Life

What kinds of demands, responsibilities and wants do professionals have in their lives outside of work? Professionals described a variety of responsibilities outside of work in addition to things professionals simply enjoy and want to make time for. Sometimes responsibilities and wants are one and the same, being both something a professional "should" or "needs" to do but also something they want to do.

Of the respondents interviewed, 2 have young children and 4 were expecting their first child at the time of the interview. Thus, 2 respondents have child caretaking responsibilities. Charlotte discussed her childcare responsibilities by saying:

> **Charlotte:** Ok, so let's start with the needs. So, definitely, um, need to, just, provide basic care to my daughter. In terms of, you know, making sure she's clean, and fed, and clothed, and you know, has time to play outside. So, like, I consider those basic things – like just basic parenting. Um, and then, in terms of wants, for my parenting, like I want to be able to spend time teaching her things – teaching her how to read, teaching her songs, like, not just dealing with the basics, and then off to bed, and then just do it all again. Like I actually want to have a couple of hours where we're having quality interaction.

For Charlotte, and likewise for Patricia, childcare responsibilities involve both meeting a child's "basic" care needs and a different set needs which include involvement in activities such as swimming or engaging with their children in fun activities like singing songs.

Other respondents who do not have children also described caretaking responsibilities of some sort. In particular, respondents spoke of responsibilities regarding

family, including siblings and parents. Oliver, who is unmarried without children, and does

not have a significant other, explained that he had some caretaking responsibilities for his

parents, and felt that these responsibilities may increase in the future:

> **Oliver:** So, my, uh, my parents both have some health issues. That, uh, that, at times require, uh, me to be there. And, uh, that often will weigh on my mind and that I can see will require, uh, a lot more time in the future. So, you know, there's the sort of obligation to care for my parents.

Kate, who is not married but lives with her partner, described the responsibilities she took

on regarding her family, with whom she is very close:

> **Kate:** I've got 2 sisters, I'm the oldest. So there's a lot responsibility I take on to kind of make sure they're good…It's being the oldest kid in the family, so there's a lot of that, you know, responsibility there I take on. Um…Giving them advice, helping my sister find a job. Like one my sisters is 9 years younger then me so, you know…So you just have that responsibility…you know, my grandmother's really sick so I go to see her, like try to, I try to go once a week, it usually falls on the weekend. So I'm really close to my family and I do a lot of that stuff.

Often, the responsibility to family that respondents described is a matter of spending time

with family members and participating in the life of the family – attending gatherings,

supporting one another, being involved in one another's lives. Thus, family responsibilities

involve spending time caring for one another, maintaining relationships. For respondents,

this is both a responsibility *and* a want, as respondents enjoy family and want to spend time

with their family members.

Respondents also spoke of the importance of spending time with friends. As Oliver

explained, maintaining relationships with friends requires effort (and time). It is both a

responsibility, in that one needs to spend time or energy to maintain friendships, but it is

also a want, as friends are a source of pleasure and meaning to respondents. Bethany noted

that time with friends is important, saying:

> **Bethany:** Um, I think finding time to…spend, um, you know, with friends, just kind of catching up, and having a semblance of a normal life is important.

Bethany's statement suggests that friendships provide her with an important source of respite from the intensity of work. Other respondents emphasized the importance of friendships, saying they "felt robbed" of something when they had a hard time seeing friends because of work obligations. Respondents appear to highly values friends, and try to spend time and effort maintaining those relationships. A few respondents also participate in church or religious activities, an important way to recharge one's batteries.

Respondents stated that time with their spouse or significant other was an important responsibility outside of work. Much like family and friends, time with spouse or partner is both a "should" and "need," in that respondents understand that one needs to spend time with their partner, but that it is also something one wants to do. Caroline described her desire to spend time with her spouse:

> **Caroline:** Yeah, like I think that's a big thing for me. Like I don't want to come home every night and see my husband for an hour. And I think he has an expectation too – I mean like we understand that we go through busy periods – but if I'm staying at work to do things that I could easily do tomorrow…I don't now, I think he gets disappointed with me. Like it's sort of like, 'ok, come on, you…come home.' And yeah, I want to spend time with him, we're just married, you know, and you want to be able to spend some time together.

Many respondents have a partner or spouse who is in an equally demanding profession, noting that this shapes the time they spend together. Having a partner in an equally demanding profession can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, one's partner understands the demands and expectations placed upon professionals. On the other hand, equally demanding work situations can make it hard to find time together.

Respondents discussed the importance of exercising and working out. For respondents, this is a want, but it is also a need in the sense that exercise is a way to keep oneself healthy. In fact, for Bethany, exercise is important to help her sustain the intensity with which she needs to work:

> **Bethany:** Um, and going to yoga is very important, or just having or finding time to exercise, um, cause it's like a stress reliever for me. And it's just very hard to continue going constantly without that.

A few respondents participate in church or religious activities, also an important way to "recharge" one's "batteries."

Finally, respondents described having housekeeping duties, to varying degrees. This is very much a responsibility, not a want. Respondents explained that, even if one is single and living in a small apartment, one must spend time taking care of life's basic necessities.

For respondents, the responsibilities, demands and wants of their non-work lives are often hard to fulfill. This was already apparent in the preceding discussion of respondents' lives outside of work, as they noted the disappointment of not seeing friends, for example, or the difficulty of finding time to spend with one's spouse. Talking about exercising was a particularly revealing topic, as respondents explained the difficulty they experience exercising as often as they wish due to work demands:

> **Jessica:** Oh, and then exercise…I try to exercise, you know, 2 to 3 times a week. Ideally it would be 4 to 5 times a week, but it's just not practical.

Exercise is not the only responsibility, demand or want that professionals find hard to "fit in" or "commit to" due to the demands and expectations of work. Indeed, respondents also discussed times when they have cancelled or rearranged vacations to accommodate the demands of work. Respondents expressed wishes to socialize with friends more often or, for Lucas, to even have time to meet someone and cultivate a relationship, as he is reaching, in own his words, "the settle down phase" of life. Respondents recalled times when they have worked during vacations, have been late for various commitments or have worked through the holidays. Patricia, who is on a flexible work arrangement, discussed how she sometimes goes into the office on of one her scheduled days off or puts on a video to occupy her daughter while she takes a phone call at home for work. While none of these

choices are inherently "bad," the difficulty (which is felt to varying degrees depending on the respondent) lies in the fact that they are often chosen because the ideal worker norm requires it, not because it is a respondent's *personal* ideal.

Given the conflict that the can erupt between work and non-work spheres of life, how do professionals respond? Professionals respond, as is evident in choices made, by conforming to the ideal worker norm and its demands and expectations. This response, however, is not a simple, straightforward acceptance of the ideal worker norm, nor is it necessarily an embracement or endorsement of the ideal worker norm. Rather, professionals reveal a response that happens both practically in terms of what they actually *do* and they reveal the conflicted, contradictory *thoughts* and *feelings* they possess regarding the ideal worker norm. Thus, professionals respond by largely **conforming** to the ideal worker norm and simultaneously maintaining an **attitude of ambivalence** to the ideal worker norm. In response to the ideal worker norm, *what professionals' do and think are not necessarily consistent with one another.*

IV.B.ii Professionals' Response: Conforming to the Ideal Worker Norm in Practice

Of the 20 respondents, 18 conform to the ideal worker norm and 2 reject it. Both Julia and Audrey who, as previously mentioned, are lawyers working as in-house legal counsel at crown corporations, do not conform to the ideal worker norm. It is important to note that Julia and Audrey both resist the ideal worker norm in their workplaces, and also reject what they perceive to be the general ideal worker norm for the law profession as a whole. Both intentionally chose their positions at crown corporations to avoid the ideal worker norm that they believe lawyers are otherwise subject to in traditional law firms. Audrey explained:

> **Audrey:** Um, I knew when I went into law school that I wanted to work for the government. Um, I've never been attracted to the hours that private practice holds.

> And, I've never, um, I've always wanted to keep a work/life balance, and uh, from all the stories I heard, and from the perceptions going into law school, it was pretty clear that if you work at a law firm you're basically giving up - you make a lot of money - but you're giving up that work/life balance. And I had no interest in doing that. So I very specifically chose to go into government.

When asked how Julia chose her line of work, she said that she definitely did not want to be part of the private sector because "lawyers in the private sector work insane hours" and "devote their lives to their jobs." Julia continued on to explain how her choice was different from that of her peers in law school, who pursued traditional law firm positions. She explained that her law school peers sought coveted internships at Bay Street firms (Bay Street is Toronto's equivalent to Wall Street), in the hopes of being offered a full-time position after graduation. However, Julia "disregarded" the whole summer internship process, even though she knew it would eliminate any chance of employment at such a firm upon graduation. Julia said, "I knew that was just not what I wanted to do."

While both Julia and Audrey are well aware that traditional law firm positions, particularly those at Bay Street firms, are the most prestigious positions in law, they are also cognizant of the demands and expectations placed upon lawyers in those types of firm. Neither Julia nor Audrey are willing to comply with the ideal worker norm that they believe pervades the law profession, and therefore chose positions in organizations where the ideal worker norm, and in particular, the demands and expectations associated with it, are not as extreme as industry standards.

Even so, both Julia and Audrey still referred to aspects of the ideal worker norm that other respondents discussed. Julia noted that there is not really an ideal career path in her organization. However, Julia does believe that a co-worker's commitment, dedication, and willingness to work long hours (relative to others in the office) are important attributes which have led to his perception as a high-performer in the office. Julia noted that this high-

performing co-worker had previously worked in a traditional law firm, thus dedication, commitment and long hours at Julia's organization pale in comparison to his previous work experience. He came to Julia's organization looking for better work/life balance. Julia also explained that this high-performing co-worker takes on complicated files, something Julia is not willing to do, because of the increased demands such files may have. Thus, not only does Julia reject the ideal worker norm for her profession, she also resists any elements of the ideal worker norm as they exist in her organization, even in their more diluted form.

Audrey, much like Julia, did not describe an ideal career path in her organization that is similar to the other respondents' sense of an ideal career path. As Audrey reflected on whether being on high-profile assignments is a high-performer attribute, she explained that high-profile assignments come with increased pressures and demands. When I asked Audrey how one got put on those files, she said she wasn't sure. Audrey explained that, like Julia, she doesn't seek out those files, thereby showing how she both rejects the ideal worker norm of her profession and resists aspects of it in her workplace:

> **Audrey:** I don't particularly feel the need to work on those projects. Um, it's, you know, there are pros and cons, right? There's like the higher profile and prestige, but at the same time there's a lot of heartache, and long hours, and a lot of frustration. I've seen people working on those files that are just miserable, so…I don't know if that's just me, cause I'm not, like those are not things that I want…

IV.B.ii.i Career Choice, Work Hours and the Working Reality of Professionals

Unlike Julia and Audrey, who do not conform to the ideal worker norm in the law profession, nor to the much less extreme version of it in their specific organizations, all other respondents conform to the ideal worker norm. First and foremost, respondents' long work hours alone reveal their willingness to fulfill the ideal worker norm. Moreover, respondents' choice of jobs reveal that they are willing to conform to the ideal worker norm and its associated demands and expectations. As Julia and Audrey illustrate, if one is not

willing to meet such demands, choosing a different job altogether may be best. Respondents,

however, were aware of the demands and expectations placed upon professionals in the

types of jobs and organizations in which they work, *prior* to working there themselves. For

example, Bethany, explained that she was aware of the work intensity that would be expected

of her *before* she entered finance as an investment banker at the outset of her career. She

said:

> **Bethany:** Um, coming into finance, I think you kind of know from the beginning. Um, when I was in college, and you know, decided I was going to interview for analyst positions within in investment banks, like the first thing you hear about are the nightmare stories of working a 100 hours a week, not seeing daylight, etc. etc. And I think it's made very, very explicit, what is required of you, the sacrifice that comes with it. Like I think people know going in into it…

Respondents feel that high work intensity is simply the working reality of professionals today.

Josh stated that while he dislikes his long hours, they are common for professionals who

work in the client-facing practice of a professional services firm – it's just "the nature of the

client service business…work is the priority." For Josh, "equal work, equal life" are not

possible in a client-centric industry. Mike likewise explained that work demands and

expectations, in particular working hours and responsiveness and availability to work, are the

reality of being a professional:

> **Mike:**…like you're working hours aren't going to be from 9 to 5, quite often you're going to be, you know, doing things on the weekend or whatever it may be. Um, so part of the, like, of I guess the lack of hours [outside of work] would be more of an acceptance of this is kind of what I've signed on for. You know, [I was]…a naïve student thinking that you're gonna find the perfect job…and work shouldn't infringe upon my personal time. But I think, you know, the longer you come out of that, the more you kind of start [realizing]…those boundaries overlap and merge.

Like Mike, other respondents simply "accept" the fact that the reality of being a professional

involves working long hours and having intense expectations and demands placed upon

oneself. In fact, respondents also think that if one cannot come to terms with fact that

intense demands and expectations are simply part of the territory when one is a professional,

they should seek a different line of work. As Lucy explained, if she didn't want to subject to the demands and expectations of consulting, she "wouldn't be in consulting."

IV.B.ii.ii Day-to-Day Choices

Not only do respondents' awareness of the reality of the ideal worker norm and their subsequent career choices *irrespective* of this reality reveal respondents' conformation to the ideal worker norm, but their day-to-day choices regarding work and non-work also underscore their acceptance of the ideal worker norm and the demands and expectations placed upon them. As the previous section on work/life challenges demonstrated, professionals experience tension and conflict between their work and non-work spheres of life. Respondents', while wishing to exercise more often or more regularly, are not able to do so because of the time they devote to work or the unpredictable demands of work. Respondents' discussed finding it difficult to spend enough time with one's spouse or partner or make commitments outside of work, whether to a sports' team, volunteer activity or to relationships with family and friends.

Marissa spoke at length of the pressure, demands and unpredictability she accommodates at work. After asking Marissa about the expectations for her availability to work, she described a time when she worked through the Christmas holidays, something she had already raised during the interview when she talked about feeling burned out:

> **Marissa:** So let's talk about that [project] over the Christmas holidays. So, that's an example. So one of the pieces of work that we have to do around that [involves waiting] for it from the lawyers. And we didn't receive that…until probably around 3pm on New Year's Eve. Uh, and New Year's Eve happen to fall on a Thursday night. And so I was planning to take the Friday off and not work the weekend. And so I told the partner, I emailed the partner and said 'Just received this, I will look at it first thing Monday.' And he wrote me back and said, 'No, we need to do this over the weekend.' Even though there's no way anyone else was going to look at it on the weekend.

Thus, even though Marissa knew that this work did not need to be completed, as it was New Year's Eve, she was told to work through the weekend, and this is what she did, much to her dismay. Lucas described a recent weekend getaway to Chicago, in which he ended up working the entire first day of his trip and then worked intermittently through the rest of his 3-day weekend due to an unexpected request from work. Thomas stated that he limited time with family at the Thanksgiving holiday due to the unpredictable nature of his job and the expectations of constant availability and immediate responsiveness. Instead of spending the whole holiday weekend with his family (who live in a different state), he arrived home at midnight the evening before Thanksgiving day and flew back first thing the morning after Thanksgiving day. Kate, who has high expectations for her availability to work and talked about often working during vacations also talked about other activities outside of work which she has given up to accommodate the demands of work. She has given up hobbies, exercising as often as she wants, playing on sports teams and volunteering. Patricia, who is on a flexible work arrangement and works a 60% schedule, talked about how she sometimes goes in on her days off or finds way to occupy her daughter so that she can focus on work when she is at home:

> **Patricia:** Um, so I mean, my daughter, she's 2 now…and she has pretty good nap schedules and stuff. So that's why I'm usually pretty flexible at saying, 'I have half an hour available.' I'll look at email, I'm home anyway. So, um, it's not a big deal to me to do that. And, I've now had to resort once and a while to getting her to watch T.V., or Dora or a Diego type thing. So, um, you know, as long as, I don't want to make her unhappy, but as long as you know, she's not terrorizing the house or anything. And it's not the whole day, the time period I have to spend at work when I'm at home…And luckily because I have my parents, my mom, my father-in-law, who watch her on my days off, so if I need to come in on my day off, it's not like daycare where I wouldn't have had that arrangement.

These examples show how respondents, on a day-to-day basis, conform to the ideal worker norm despite the tension it can create between respondents' work and non-work spheres of like.

IV.B.ii.iii Pursuing the Ideal Career Path

For some respondents, pursuit of the ideal career path is a way to conform to the ideal worker norm. When I asked Charlotte about the ideal career path at her organization she said:

> **Charlotte:** I think I've actually been following it. I've been getting great feedback on that. Um…Yeah, um, I, it, it…I feel fortunate that I've wanted these things, like I've wanted to be proactive about my career…[since] when I was an associate, about what clients I was on, making sure I was getting good opportunities. That's just how I am. I've never been one to just sit back and let it happen…

Charlotte described some of the opportunities which helped her achieve success at work and move along the ideal career path. These opportunities often came with long hours and intense work demands. Charlotte took a "secondment" (an assignment in an office in another country for two years) which positioned her for early promotion to due to the intense work she did there:

> **Charlotte:** I did end up being on a, like a, big multinational restatement – we couldn't have planned it this way but it ended up being a great assignment. Insane overtime, um, for 2 years. And, um, almost killed me from the overtime standpoint, but was really great for my career. Because when I came back, [I was]…early promoted.

Charlotte continued on to say that upon returning from her secondment, and receiving a promotion, she continued to work on challenging assignments. After going on a maternity leave and returning to the office, Charlotte said she wanted to again push for an early promotion. To do so, she was placed on a high-profile assignment, working with a "top-tier, top-top-tier, one of the largest clients in the firm." Charlotte said that this was a very tough client to work for, and that the overtime hours were high. However, she also said that was a important opportunity for her, as it positioned her, again, to receive an early promotion, something that she described as "great."

Like Charlotte, Kate discussed how she to pursues the ideal career path and accepts the demands that come along with it. Kate explained that she is viewed as a stand-out among her peers, largely due to her commitment and dedication to the job and her willingness to take initiative, seeking out new challenges at work. Kate refers to this as her "work ethic" and "go-getter" mentality. As she thought about the ideal career path that she's on and pursuing early promotion, Kate explained that she likes the fact that the amount of time one has been at the firm is not important. Rather, demonstrating one's ability to take on new work at a higher level positions one for promotion – and because Kate does this, she knows it will help her get promoted. Kate also told me that work often takes priority over other things in her life, saying:

> **Kate:** How do I make the decision [between work and non-work]? A lot of the times work will take priority.

Thinking about how she feels about this, Kate explained that she is willing to accept the demands of work if she continues to experience the rewards of career advancement along the ideal career path. Kate stated:

> **Kate:** You know…[pauses]…it's okay if I keep progressing. Right?...Um, but the point, if I get to the point that I don't see I'm progressing, my compensation isn't there, then I will start to pull back, because it doesn't seem worth it. Right now it seems worth it, cause there's that next step, and that next achievement, right? So that's motivating. Um, but I do sacrifice stuff, and I'd say, yeah, I do sacrifice stuff.

IV.B.ii.iv Work Takes Priority

Other respondents echoed Kate's statement that work, broadly speaking, often takes priority in their lives. Josh said:

> **Josh:** In reality, work typically wins out, gets an extra hour of your time to get something done.

Likewise, other respondents reflected on the way that work simply squeezes and pushes other personal responsibilities and wants to the out margins of their lives. Respondents

didn't always give specific examples, but rather communicated the general sense that work takes priority in one's life. Bethany stated that she is "tied" to work demands. She explained that she does not work in a "9 to 6" business, where one leaves the office at 6 p.m. regardless of what one has on their plate. Ultimately, she said, "you have to deliver." Bethany is fortunate in that if there are no major projects or deals going on, her firm does not always expect her to work over weekends, although she does work through weekends when work demands it. As Bethany and I talked about whether there are things she would like to do outside of work, she said, "Oh yeah, tonnes." I asked whether these were things she made time for, and she explained that she goes through a "negotiating process" in which work is often prioritized over her non-work life. Once she has determined how much time needs to be devoted to work and sleep in a given week, the rest of her time is "allotted accordingly."

IV.B.ii.v Limiting Demands

When talking about the way work takes priority in his life, Thomas explained that "you set yourself up such that you don't have competing demands":

> **Thomas:** You set yourself up such that you don't have competing demands because it's not, it's just not worth it, because they're going to lose every time. Um, and so if there is a competing demand, it's, it's my wife and my dog. And that's what I want to do when I'm not here, I just want to be with them. And you know, for whatever amount of time I can be.

Other respondents take a similar approach towards the ideal worker norm: limiting demands in their non-work sphere of life. As has been detailed in this section of results, respondents often have a hard time making commitments outside of work due to work demands and expectations. Thus, they limit the demands placed upon them outside of work. Certainly, this can be viewed as a strategy to alleviate some of the tension between work and

non-work but it is also another way that respondents show their acceptance of the ideal

worker norm, prioritizing work obligations over non-work life.

Reflecting on the limited hours during the day, Charlotte stated that she outsources

needs at home, to help accommodate the demands of work, particularly as she pursues

partnership. For Charlotte, outsourcing helps to limit the demands on her at home, so that

she can focus on home demands that are her top priorities, such as spending quality time

with her daughter. A more common way of limiting demands is to *not* make commitments, a

theme repeatedly mentioned throughout the results already. Dylan quit his volleyball league,

which he quite enjoyed, to eliminate the stress the he felt when trying to get out of the office

to a game on time. Dylan, who is married, has extended family living with him as well. For

Dylan, this also limits the demands placed upon him – he depends on family members to

take care of household duties:

> **Dylan:** You know it would be nice to do all that kind of stuff, to be able to meet
> with friends on a week night, just to go out for dinner, or get chores done, go
> grocery shopping, like I've not gone grocery shopping for a year because my parents'
> do it, because I'm never home, things like that. So,…I don't really, during the week,
> I have no, I feel like I have no commitments in terms of the house or anything like
> that…because everybody else is doing it, except for me. Like when I come home,
> dinner's already made, all I have to do is eat.

Kate talked about the "alternative of not booking anything" to handle the demands of work.

While this is not necessarily the "best" alternative, it nonetheless allows her to better meet

the demands and expectations of work:

> **Kate:** It's [work demands] prevented me from, yeah, from you know, signing up for
> certain things, or making certain commitments, because I just don't know and I
> don't want to let people down. When you're always cancelling, you start to feel bad,
> and then people start to wonder right? Like, how can work be that important? So,
> maybe the alternative of not booking anything – it's probably not great either, but
> for now, as I'm trying, like I'm…trying to really establish myself, some things have
> got to be sacrificed…

IV.B.ii.vi Summary

Except for Audrey and Julia, respondents make it very clear that they conform to the ideal worker norm, practically speaking, through a variety of means. Respondents' choice of work, despite their awareness of the ideal worker norm as the working reality of professionals, is the first indication of their practical acceptance of the ideal worker norm. Respondents' long work hours also indicate their acceptance of the ideal worker norm. Furthermore, respondents' discussion of their work and non-work lives reveal that on a day-to-day basis, respondents' frequently prioritize work demands over non-work demands. This is by no means to say that respondents' do nothing outside of work or have nothing important and valuable in their non-work lives, but that work demands squeeze and push non-work demands, responsibilities, and wants to the periphery of their lives. Thus, respondents' find that as they work long hours, make themselves available and highly responsive to work, and accommodate unpredictability that they do not exercise as often as they either need or want, miss time with friends and family, eliminate wants such as hobbies, and limit the demands of their non-work lives.

Despite these practical choices – the things professionals *do* in response to the ideal worker norm – these choices are not easily made. For respondents, accepting the ideal worker norm via their actions does not necessarily mean they embrace the norm, endorse it, or believe their choices are necessarily best. Rather, respondents maintain an *attitude of ambivalence* toward the ideal worker norm, revealing the conflicting and contradictory thoughts and feelings respondents experience as they navigate the reality of being a working professional.

IV.B.iii Responding to the Ideal Worker Norm: Maintaining an Attitude of Ambivalence

IV.B.iii.i Expressing Misgivings

While respondents often prioritize work over non-work, they express misgivings

about doing so, unsure they have made the right choices. For example, Bethany talked

about how work is high on her priority list, and I asked how she feels about the way she

generally "balances" work and non-work spheres of life. She said:

> **Bethany:** Um…[pauses]…I mean, I mean, I think I try to balance as best I can, um, and…hmmm…I think I've tried to balance things the best I can, the question is am I prioritizing things in the right order? Maybe not.

Marissa explained that she is "miserable" about the way she tends to meet work demands in

lieu of non-work demands or wants:

> **Marissa:** Um, it tends to be work, it tends to be work that gets prioritized, and I'm miserable about it, you know? And so, and when I don't prioritize work and try to focus on the non-work – and this again goes back to compartmentalizing – I'm not good at putting aside the stress that's waiting. Like even right now we're meeting, and I'm enjoying meeting, and I'm glad to go through with this, but I'm stressed about what I know I have to do before 1 o'clock. You know what I mean?

Frustrated by the expectations placed upon her at work but more importantly by the fact

that she often meets them, Marissa explained that she wishes she could maintain more rigid

boundaries and wouldn't conform to the ideal worker norm as much as she currently does.

However, Marissa also explained that she just "can't get herself there," showing that while

she often conforms to the ideal worker norm, she doesn't feel good about it nor does she

necessarily agree with the decision she's made. Lucas expressed confusion over his

investment banking job, the demands it places on him and the way it has impacted his non-

work life. He explained that he finds his work to be "tough" and "struggles" with the

demands it places on him:

> **Lucas:** I mean, granted, some people we're probably better built for this stuff. They love it, they can do it. I'm definitely not naturally built for it, so I definitely feel like I'm trying to fit myself to this role…So, like, basically most of the reasons I've done

it are for the future…good or bad, because I don't really get to enjoy my present. [It] leads to the right opportunities down the road. Ultimately, I wished I like it better. But I find it tough. I struggle a lot of the time, and I don't feel really passionate about it. And I wonder if anybody does.

Kate talked about her on-going struggle to figure out a way to pursue success at work and have a life outside of work, something that she says is a constant challenge. However, Kate's career is very important to her:

> **Kate:** I'm still trying to figure it out. Um, it's constantly a challenge, but I am the type of person that, my career is really important to me. And I want to do well, and I can't, it's one of those things where if I don't make partner I want it to be on my own accord, not because someone told me I couldn't. Right? So it's that, you don't want to fail. Um, so sometimes that continues to push you forward, even when maybe it shouldn't. It's that A-type personality. Um, and I guess it's partly I like the work too. So it kind of sucks you in too, right?... So, it's a fine line, but, um, uh…I don't know. It's almost like day-to-day you manage it, because you don't what's going to come up…

Thus, respondents do not easily or eagerly accept the ideal worker norm and its demands and expectations. Rather, respondents' express misgivings, inner conflict and uncertainty over the ideal worker norm, the fact that they conform to it and the way this often leads to work being prioritized over their non-work sphere of life.

IV.B.iii.ii Critical Assessments

Respondents' also make critical assessments of the ideal worker norm as it manifests itself in their workplace, another way professionals' maintain an attitude of ambivalence. For example, as previously discussed, Kate criticized the way a co-worker was treated and subsequently "forced" out of her group for opting to use a flexible work arrangement. Kate also criticized the sense of urgency with which all tasks in her group are treated and the fact that one must always be available and responsive to work. After I asked Kate if she thought the unpredictability, constant availability and demands for responsiveness in her group are necessary, she said that it's a "real point of contention" for her. She feels her group at work doesn't manage client demands appropriately:

> **Kate:** Um…that's a real point of contention. I, I, think for certain engagements, yes. Um, [but], I don't think it always has to be that way. I think it's something we've created because we want to look responsive to clients…I think people are somewhat reasonable, and I don't think we push back enough. And I get it, you don't want to jeopardize anything, but people are reasonable. Um, so…we want to get something to the client the next day, but at the same time if you call the client and just say, you know, 'I'm swamped, can I get this to you the next day after?' Right? And try to manage it. 90% of the time I think they'd be okay with it. So I think there's a lot of room to improve there.

Kate is also critical of her group's poor planning during projects and client engagements. Kate feels that better planning will improve work flow and help to mitigate some of the work intensity. Reiterating that she dislikes the constant expectations of responsiveness to work and the urgency of work tasks, Kate feels that it is not always necessary to work in this fashion:

> **Kate:** I stop and say, 'Does this really need to be done right now?' Because no one is opposed to working long hours, but it's gotta be for the right reasons, right? So, um, I don't like the expectation that it's 24/7 and that it's, it's all the time. Cause it's not always that way. When you have massive [project], of course it is. But other things…you know, an engagement letter doesn't have to get out today. So there needs to be a little bit more thought into that. And that goes into the respect for people's work-life balance, too, right?

Patricia is critical of expectations for working long hours. Patricia is on a flexible work arrangement and explained that not all partners are respectful of her arrangement, as they sometimes expect her to come in on her days off, treating them as though it's somehow a special allowance she's receiving, even though Patricia understands these are not special days off. Thus, of work hours, and the fact that she needed to be on a flexible work arrangement to make work more manageable, Patricia said:

> **Patricia:** I, I, I mean I always think that whole 400 hours of expected overtime, I'm like who thought of that to begin with in the first place? Like if we were all at something more reasonable, like, for one, I wouldn't have had to come to that 60% to make things manageable. I think that's one of the big things, but I don't know

Marissa finds work hours to be "ridiculous" as well. She is critical of tracking work hours based on the number of hours "billed" to a client, as her team typically works on a fixed-bee

basis. Marissa also believes that the quality of her work is better when she is not working extremely long hours. Marissa also criticized the workplace culture, in which working long hours is seen as a mark of high-performance and worn as a "badge of honor," something that even Marissa finds herself unconsciously promoting, because the culture, in her opinion, "gets so ingrained in you." Josh is similarly critical of work hours, and more specifically, the "face time culture" that he feels is prevalent in his organization. Even though face time and long work hours are sign of commitment and dedication to work, Josh doesn't think that face time should be equated with commitment or being a successful worker. He said:

> **Josh:** I don't think you're any less committed if you're not putting in face time. The way I see it is if I've got everything done and I've done everything I can do for that day, then there's absolutely no need for me to still be sat in the office. I mean, I could do, but I'm not gong to bring in anymore business, because clients have gone home. I'm not going to solve anything else, because people I need to talk to may have gone home. So what's the point of that? Um, but yeah, the whole problem with face time is…there are some people who are convinced that's the way to go.

Justin, who stated that work demands and home demands are "sometimes…hard to manage," is like other respondents in having accepted this as the reality of work for professionals. However, Justin is even more accepting and less critical of the ideal worker norm than other respondents. Unlike Kate, who is critical of the lack of support professionals receive when using flexible work arrangements and believes that flexible work arrangements should not communicate that one is less committed, Justin is critical of those who use flexible work arrangements, explaining that he himself questions the commitment and dedication of such workers. For Justin, "at the end of the day," the organization is paying him, thus, he doesn't necessarily find work demands to be unreasonable or unfair. Nonetheless, even Justin criticized one aspect of the ideal worker norm, which is the need to go "above and beyond" one's role and responsibilities. Justin feels he is always expected to perform beyond his current level and responsibilities, and to Justin, this is unfair.

Critical assessments of ideal worker norm is a way that professionals maintain an attitude of ambivalence toward the ideal worker norm. Critical assessments display professionals' ability to be "in the know" – to assert their awareness of how their workplace culture functions and express the ability to critique it, thereby maintaining some distance from the ideal worker norm and minimizing the sense that one is fully absorbed by it.

IV.B.iii.iii Uncertainty Regarding the Ideal Career Path

While some respondents, like Kate and Charlotte, as discussed earlier in the results section, actively pursue the ideal career path, some also express uncertainty about the ideal career path. After Mike discussed what success looks like at his firm, particularly in terms of being a high-performer and the pursuit of the ideal career path, I asked him to tell me how he feels about what success means at his firm. Mike expressed his own uncertainty about whether he aspires to the ideal career path and achieving partnership, the ultimate sign that one is successful. In fact, he questions whether achieving partnership truly means one is successful. Mike explained that there are only so many partners at the top of the organization, thus it is simply not feasible for everyone who enters the organization to eventually make it to the top. As he said, the firm counts on there being attrition at each level. Thus, he's not sure that leaving the firm means you haven't succeeded. Mike is not sure whether he wants to achieve partnership, stating that he is "on the fence":

> **Mike**: Well, based on my experience, where I am right now, I've actually had the discussion [about partnership]. Like, you know, I've been on the fence with whether I want to stick around for a long time. I mean…it's one of these things that you continue to progress as you stay with the firm, otherwise, you know, you're gonna move on or the firm is going to move on without you.

Mike continued on to say that no matter what one does, it's really not within their control as to whether they will achieve partnership. Thus, Mike feels it's important to re-define success personally, explaining that one should certainly push their own limits, but ultimately

understand that as long as one is being challenged and growing, reaching partnership is not of the utmost importance:

> **Mike:**...I think when it comes down to it, it's, a lot of it is completely out of your control... I think, some people they're just never, like...if you could rewind time and change around certain things, there's still no guarantee that will get you to, ultimately, you know, being a partner or whatever the goal is. Um, so, if I'm going to give someone frank advice on it, I would say...push yourself to your own limits, but don't ever feel like you need to do more just to prove something if that's not within your comfort zone. If you feel like you're being challenged, and you're developing, and you're growing, then it doesn't really matter what you do, if you stick with the firm or go elsewhere.

Josh, when I asked him if he aspires to the ideal career path at his firm, did not give me a definitive answer, instead saying that he did not aspire to it if it came "at all costs." He, like other respondents, reflected on the various issues one must navigate as they make such a decision. Respondents, while open to achieving the highest positions in their organizations, are concerned about the costs they will incur in the non-work lives to do so. As Marissa explained, pursuing the ideal career path, which is to make equity partner at her organization, is a "source of confusion." In large part this is because of the intensity of demands and expectations that she currently accepts and will need to continue to fulfill, if she is to be successful in the organization's point of view:

> **Marissa:** I think the ideal career path...is to make equity partner... Um, do I aspire to it? That's a grey area right now. So for me, it's sort of another point of confusion for my job. Yeah, I don't know...those are things that are really enticing to me. But at the same time, I'm not ultimately happy with how much time I get for myself and my life outside of work...the lack of time I have to build the rest of my life... Yeah, the rewards...that'll come from being a partner are significant, [but] I don't know whether it's worth trading off the good life or the balance up to that point. So, I don't know.

After Bethany described the ideal career path in her organization (which is to reach the "upper echelons" of finance, for example, achieving "partner status"), I asked how she feels about this and if it was something she aspires to. Bethany, like other respondents, is unsure, saying:

Bethany: I don't know. It's debatable.

I probed Bethany on this, and she explained that achieving success as her organization defines it is a possibility that she allows for by doing good work now, but it is not something that she believes is the primary motivating force in her work. She explained that there are factors beyond her control which affect whether individuals achieve such success, including the fact that she is a woman in a male-dominated industry, something she raised elsewhere in the interview. Bethany said:

> **Bethany:** I guess I understand what the broad metrics of success are. Um, but I think that, like to reach that level is not necessarily based on your own merit alone. Um, and therefore while I'm focused on it, it's just kind of progressing step-by-step in my career, rather than looking at the end goal…

Thus, like Mike, Bethany also somewhat re-defines success by defining not just in terms of the organization's end-goal but by "progressing step-by-step" in her *own* career.

Respondents' uncertainty over whether they aspire to the ideal career path reveals their ambivalence towards the ideal worker norm. They are unsure and uncertain about how they feel about the ideal career path and whether it is something they wish to pursue. Of course, respondents are actually pursuing the ideal career path, as they largely fulfill the expectations and demands placed upon them. Further, respondents have already achieved some success along the ideal career path, as all are at the managerial level within their organizations. Respondents' uncertainty centers on whether they wish to achieve the ultimate end-goal of this path, and thus they are unsure about whether they wish to continue along this path. Indeed, respondents are somewhat unsure as to whether achieving the end-goal of the ideal career path is even possible, sensing that factors beyond their control shape one's attainment of the ideal career path's end goal.

IV.B.iii.iv Declarations of Autonomy

Respondents' attitude of ambivalence towards the ideal worker norm is also evident in the declarations of autonomy they make. Declarations of autonomy are respondents' expressions of the control *they* assert over their careers and choices, communicating the sense that they are not entirely coerced or forced into their work situations. Josh explained that he can become "detached" from work at times, which he otherwise identifies with and sees as a source of fulfillment. For Josh, this is a way of asserting his independence from work, although he is careful not to openly demonstrate this attitude to co-workers:

> **Josh:** Yeah, yeah, I can be quite detached from, yeah, I can detach myself and think 'Well, it's there to pay the bills and I just do what needs to be done and get out.' Um, it can be kind of a self-defense mechanism that kicks in. I think it's, if you were applying that openly and visibly to people, it could be pretty dangerous. So you've got to tread carefully if that mechanism kicks in a little bit. But, it can certainly help you, uh, break away and do what you need to do.

Expecting his first child, Josh discussed the fact that he does not like the way he has seen other co-workers with children negotiate competing demands between work and home. While Josh will continue to pursue success (even though he expresses ambivalence towards the ideal worker norm and the ideal career path), he allows himself "an out" should he feel that the tension between work and home becomes too great:

> **Josh:** I mean if I did find that it was starting to impact things, do I feel like, I absolutely am sort of tied to the firm and I would absolutely have to stay? No. I mean, I think if something that started to encroach on the things that I thought we sort of off-limits, then, yeah, I'd have to think twice about it…

Elliot, who is also expecting his first child, talked about the way he would handle work demands once his child arrived. He feels fairly confident he will make things work, even though he knows it will be difficult and that the majority of home responsibilities will fall on his wife due to his demanding career. Nonetheless, like Josh, Elliot provides himself with an "out" if necessary. He said:

Elliot: We'll manage. And, if it gets to a point where, you know, we have a frank discussion that it's not working, um, we'll have to make a change [leave his job].

Both Lucas and Thomas feel that their work (investment banking) is the kind of work experience which "opens doors" and leads to other opportunities. Thus, despite the intense demands and expectations, of which both were aware before accepting positions in banking, they feel they are getting something worthwhile out of their current jobs. Nonetheless, Thomas said that because of the lack of work/life balance he currently experiences, he is looking for an "exit strategy." Like other respondents, Thomas gives himself an "out" – permission to leave his job if and when he deems it to be necessary.

Charlotte is very clear that her career choices are *her* choices. Charlotte, while acknowledging the intensity of the demands and expectations of her job (she is even critical of some of the demands), also asserts that sometimes, fulfilling those demands and expectations are of her own volition. Charlotte has explicitly chosen to expose herself to high work intensity at times to position herself for quick career advancement. Charlotte recalled a time when she chose to submit herself to long, intense hours at work:

Charlotte: And I was basically on my own, fending, like, holding this client on my shoulders. Um, again, like couldn't have predicted it but what better opportunity. So it ended up being a little more in the way of hours, and some of the other client I got ended up being challenging as well, um, so I did – I worked quite a bit of overtime in those 3-4 months. But it was a choice, at any time I coulda put my hand up and said, 'This is too much.' But I could see that this was actually getting…gonna get me…And, low and behold, after only 3 months – January, February, March, and April – that's all you have, I was promoted to senior manager. So, that was great.

Charlotte, who was expecting her second child at the time of the interview, plans to return to work full-time, even though she could return on a flexible work arrangement, which is what she did after her first maternity leave. Charlotte's career advancement or perceptions of her pursuit of worker success have not been hindered or questioned due to the flexible work arrangement. In fact, Charlotte became the "poster child" at her firm for work/life balance.

Even so, she will return full-time as she doesn't want her career advancement to be slowed down in any way. Charlotte explained:

> **Charlotte:** Um, [pause], but, but *I do* put a lot of pressure on myself, because *I want* these things, *I want* this career, I would like to be a partner.

Thus, Charlotte makes a declaration of autonomy, showing that she is in control of her own career, as she actively makes her own choices.

Similarly, Kate, who has been very successful in her organization, receiving early promotions as she actively pursues the ideal career path, is careful to explain that she does so ultimately on her terms. In other words, it is of her own accord that she actively pursues worker success and if she ultimately does not achieve partnership in her firm, that too will be of her own accord, not, in her mind, because someone or something stopped her from doing so. Moreover, Kate asserted that she determines what the most "critical" or important aspects of her non-work life are, and that these are non-negotiable – she will not prioritize work over these things. Kate very much fulfills the demands and expectations of the ideal worker norm. As has been discussed elsewhere in the results, Kate is, in her own words, a "go-getter" – committed, dedicated, willing to go above and beyond. And to be sure, Kate has reaped the rewards for her pursuit of worker success. Yet, even as Kate discussed the many ways in which work demands create tension between work and non-work spheres of life, she draws parameters around things she is not willing to give up:

> **Kate:** But I have never really felt that my work has interfered with something I really wanted to do. So I've waived a lot of things. Like if I had to go for dinner, with someone, you know, a friend in the firm one night. I waive that, I'm okay with that – maybe that's right or wrong…I don't know. But I'm okay with that, but where it comes to, you know, attending a family function that's, you know, really important to me, I've never felt like I really had to move that. Like that's always been honoured. Or I've made it a point to say, I am, I cannot miss that. I will work the night before and the night after, but I cannot miss this one thing tonight. You know? So it's never, the minute it really started to interfere, I think I would leave. But it hasn't so far. It's been challenging but I haven't felt like I've missed out on big things…that are really critical to me.

Kate also stated that she feels she and her partner, who works in a similar profession, do not have enough time together and that work is their primary focus during the week. Kate, however, stated that she there is a line she's not willing to cross (although it's not clear exactly what the line is):

> **Kate:** I would say we both understand that we're high achievers and we want to get to that next level. Um, but we do draw the line, like if it gets to the point where, you know, we were working 15 hours every single day, I mean, that's where, you know, one of us would stop. But it's not there yet. Hopefully it doesn't get there.

Thinking about her future and the possibility of having children, Kate said while she makes certain sacrifices now, her family in the future will be very important: While she is willing to make certain "sacrifices" now, she hopes those sacrifices will establish herself as an ideal worker. But once she has children, she will not be willing to sacrifice as much.

Thus, Kate has defined certain aspects of her non-work life that she sees as essential to prioritize. In fact, she has declared family as the "most important" thing to her, over work. In this way, Kate is asserting control over the way she conforms to the ideal worker norm. Kate also provides herself an "out" from work – that if work demands are ever to interfere with essential aspects of her non-work life, she will leave her job. Kate has drawn a boundary between work and her personal relationship – it is, however, a vague boundary. Nonetheless, Kate maintains that there is a threshold and if work demands ever exceed that threshold, either she or her partner would leave their current line of work.

Josh explained that he has never missed something truly important to him due to work demands, although he did state elsewhere that work is usually prioritized over his non-work life. Josh said:

> **Josh:** I've never missed something. Um, I don't think I'd be prepared to either. It's just not something I'm prepared to do. So I don't have anything like that that I've regretted. Have I necessarily been home at a decent time to spend time with my wife for the last, you know, busy periods of the year, well, no, probably not. Has she been happy with that? Absolutely not. Not all the time, no…But you need to have

things that your spouse is, and your family is, accepting of. And if they're finding that the balance isn't enough, enough in their favour, then the firm's not happy if you're gonna do any less on their side, well, there's only so many hours in the day – so that's where the challenge is.

Similar to Kate, Josh asserted that there are certain things he's just not willing to prioritize work over and that his wife needs to be okay with the choices he makes between work and non-work. Thus, he too maintains a sense of asserting control over the way he conforms to the ideal worker norm.

As a part of maintaining an attitude of ambivalence towards the ideal worker norm, respondents make declarations of autonomy. Respondents explain that their careers and the demands and expectations which they fulfill are their own *choice*. Moreover, these declarations are a way of asserting that, despite the demands professionals are expected to fulfill, they fulfill them on their own terms. For respondents, this often means giving oneself permission to leave the job if ever necessary – an "out," as I have referred to it. In other words, professionals do not see themselves as permanently or indefinitely tied to their jobs and allow themselves the freedom to leave. Declarations of autonomy also take the form of being internally detached from work. This does not mean that one openly displays such an attitude to co-workers, but rather than one is internally aware that work is not everything in life, nor is it one's sole source of identity, as Oliver explained when he talked about work as being a manifestation of his purpose and calling and just one of many different priorities in his life. Respondents also focus on the benefits they derive from work, as opposed to only focusing on what they give to work. Respondents see their current work as affording opportunities to them in the future. Finally, respondents make declarations of autonomy by asserting control over the way they conform to the ideal worker norm, drawing limits around the aspects of their non-work lives that they are willing to give up and those that they are not.

IV.B.iii.v Summary

While professionals conform to the ideal worker norm in practice, they very clearly maintain an attitude of ambivalence toward it. This attitude of ambivalence is evident in the misgivings respondents express over the choices they have made and the difficulty of negotiating the competing demands of work and non-work spheres of life. Respondents make critical assessments of aspects of the ideal worker norm, also revealing their ambivalent attitude towards it. Not all respondents are sure that they aspire to the ideal career path (even if they do so in practice by fulfilling work demands and expectations). This uncertainty about whether respondents wish to move along the ideal career path, achieving success as their organizations' define it, also demonstrates respondents' attitude of ambivalence. And finally, respondents make declarations of autonomy, asserting their independence from the ideal worker norm, explaining that they make their own choices when it comes to work demands and expectations. These declarations of autonomy are particularly important for maintaining an attitude of ambivalence as the ideal worker norm relies on professionals' thoughts, feelings and internal desire for success to elicit professionals' work efforts.

IV.B.iv Why Do Professionals Accept the Ideal Worker Norm?

Given the intensity of the ideal worker norm for professionals, one might wonder why they largely conform to the ideal worker norm, particularly as they themselves express many contradictory thoughts and feelings regarding the ideal worker norm. To be certain respondents do not embrace or endorse the ideal worker norm. Understanding why professionals conform to the ideal worker norm is not an explicit research question in this study. However, the data collected point to some potential answers. Much of this paper focuses on the "bad work intensity" generated by the ideal worker norm. The "bad work

intensity," a term borrowed from Perlow and Porter (2009), represents professionals' long work hours, face-time pressure, expectations for constant availability and responsiveness to work, and the unpredictability professionals' are expected to endure. When asked about work dislikes, respondents revealed that the "bad work intensity" is by far their greatest dislike. However, respondents also have many likes regarding their work. We can view these work likes as representing the "good work intensity" – the good aspects of being a professional. As Austin explained, he would not be willing to work in a "punch the clock" type of job. Thinking about his future, anticipating life changes such as marriage and children, he stated that he might require more flexibility, as he wants to be able to see his children before they go to bed in the evening, thus his long work hours right now might be cause for concern. However, Austin doesn't anticipate working fewer hours, rather, he expects that he might come home earlier and then log onto his computer later at night. The lower intensity of a different kind of job doesn't appeal to him. He said quite emphatically:

> **Austin:** No, that's not me. I would hate to do that.

Respondents' most commonly cited work like was the variety and frequent change in their work. As Lucy explained of her work, it has to be "dynamic." Kate also viewed her work as dynamic, constantly changing and always offering new opportunities. She said her work "keeps me on my feet" and this is something she enjoys. Like Kate who does not want to be bored at work, Oliver also expressed that his work is "never boring," something that he likes about his work and that fits his broad interests:

> **Oliver:** And this business…is one that has the benefit of putting us into the everything, from the law, to politics, to engineering, to science, um, to capital markets. And so, for someone like me who has a broad range of interests it's never boring, there's always something new going on.

Bethany also described the "good intensity" in her work, which she finds exciting. Constant change and learning new things are important to Bethany:

> **Bethany:** And, um, you know, I kind of enjoyed the excitement, and the intensity of the work that we [do]. It [is] kind of…uh, the constant learning and challenge. Um, because every project and deal you work on is different. Um, whether it's a different team, a different industry, um, just a different proposal…It's very, it's much more project based then it is, you know, come in and do the same thing over and over again…Like I feel like the basic skill set is the same, but the way you use them is different every time. There's a new challenge, you're learning about something, and things are constantly moving, which I like.

Closely associated with the dynamic nature of respondents' work is that the work is also challenging and intellectually stimulating, as is noticeable in Bethany's above statement. Respondents greatly enjoy being challenged and stimulated intellectually, constantly learning. Jessica talked about valuing the intellectual stimulation of her work, saying:

> **Jessica:** In terms of my actual work, it's very intellectually challenging. Um, I'd say that's probably why I went into it with the pay cheque being a nice bonus…Um, the work is very intellectually stimulating. I work with engineers, I work with experts, I work with very, very smart attorneys. I'm constantly learning.

In addtion to the dynamic nature of their work and the constant intellectual challenges and learning opportunities, respondents also stated that they enjoy working with other smart and talented colleagues. Respondents value being productive and having a sense of accomplishment from their work. They view their work as affording them interesting opportunities, something that very much like about their work. Thus, for respondents, the variety, intellectual stimulation and challenges of their jobs are greatly rewarding. This is the "good work intensity" that comes with being a professional in a high-status occupation. Notably, while respondents sometimes discussed financial compensation during the interview, financial compensation was not discussed when respondents reflected on what they like about work and what they found to be rewarding. In no way should we take this to mean that respondents don't like their compensation, rather, I suspect they very much do. As Jessica said, "the pay cheque is a nice bonus." Yet despite respondents' high earnings,

they focused far more on the "good work intensity" of their work when discussing their likes about work.

For professionals, the "good work intensity" which they seek and derive much enjoyment from is closely coupled with the "bad work intensity." We can imagine how variety and constant change is coupled with unpredictability and expectations for availability and responsiveness. In varying degrees, work is a source of meaning and fulfillment for respondents, not just a means to an end but an end in itself. Many respondents saw work as a way to express their interests, to exercise their talents, to help co-workers or contribute to broader society, and to develop oneself personally. Thus, taking into account respondents' work likes and the meaningfulness it occupies in their lives, we gain insight into why respondents are willing to grapple with the ideal worker norm. In no way should this short discussion of professionals' work likes be considered to be a sufficient explanation as to why professionals accept the ideal worker norm. Rather, it provides some insight, and clearly suggests that understanding *why* professionals seek the careers in which they work is worthy of an in-depth examination.

IV.C Research Question 3: Gender Differences in the Response to the Ideal Worker Norm

Having clearly delineated respondents' perception of the ideal worker norm as they experience it in their workplace and the response that professionals take regarding the ideal worker norm, I now discuss the ways that professionals' response varies by gender. Are men's and women's response to the ideal worker norm different? In short, the answer is both yes and no. I largely find no patterns of variation in men's and women's practical response to the ideal worker norm. However, the attitude of ambivalence that professionals' exhibit in response to the ideal worker norm reveals some interesting gender patterns.

IV.C.i Conforming to the Ideal Worker Norm While Maintaining an Attitude of
      Ambivalence: Gendered Differences

Of the study's 20 respondents, the 2 workers who resist the ideal worker norm are

both women. To this end, one might speculate that the practical response professionals'

have to the ideal worker norm is gendered. However, all other 18 respondents, men and

women alike, conform to the ideal worker norm. Thus, 9 of 11 women and 9 of 9 men

conform to the ideal worker norm. In this way, far more apparent is the *similarity* in men's

and women's practical response to the ideal worker norm as opposed to any differences. In

fact, some of the study's most ambitious, successful "go-getters," who fulfill the demands

and expectations of the ideal worker norm are women. For example, Kate, Charlotte and

Lucy all fulfill the intense demands and expectations of their jobs. They emphatically speak

of their aspirations to achieve success, as the ideal worker norm defines it. Acutely aware of

the trades-off and choices they will face as they pursue worker success, they are nonetheless

highly determined to succeed. Both men and women, then, conform to the ideal worker

norm, often prioritizing work obligations over their non-work sphere of life.

However, men and women professionals display some very different *thoughts* and

feelings regarding the ideal worker norm. Women's attitude of ambivalence appears more

exaggerated than that of their male counterparts. To be sure, *both* men and women express

an attitude of ambivalence toward the ideal worker norm – this is very evident and I do not

wish to de-emphasize this finding. However, I characterize women as generally *more*

conflicted about conforming to the ideal worker norm than men. In addition to the sense

of greater inner conflict that women convey, women experience an emotional response to

the ideal worker norm.[16] For women, conforming to the ideal worker norm has greater

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[16] I wish to carefully emphasize that I do not intend to promote a stereotype of "overly emotional" women and "stoic" men in the workplace. Indeed, expectations for women's emotions can be viewed as a double bind: on

emotional consequences, unlike men who tend to possess a "cool" or "clinical" attitude of ambivalence toward the ideal worker. Furthermore, women's attitude of ambivalence to the ideal worker norm involves questioning who or what is ultimately responsible for the work/life conflict that the ideal worker norm generates in a way that men's attitude of ambivalence does not involve. Finally, women also provide a justification for choosing to the conform to the ideal worker norm, framing this choice as a way to maintain a sense of an independent, adult self, emphasizing the importance, as women, of having a career. What the findings show, then, is that women's attitude of ambivalence is complicated by the social and emotional connections they retain both in their work *and* non-work sphere of life – evidence of a pervasive ideology of gendered separate spheres, as I will further discuss

IV.C.ii Greater Internal Conflict and Emotional Consequences

Unlike men, women discussed the emotional consequences they experience, often expressing feelings guilt, worry and anxiety in response to the ideal worker norm, the struggle of conforming to it and the tension it creates between work and non-work. Interestingly, women's feelings of guilt and worry are not expressed solely toward their non-work sphere of life but also towards their work. Natalie discussed "letting down" family and friends due to work demands:

> **Natalie:** It [competing demands between work and non-work] is a source of stress…it's very hard for me to make plans during this time of year. And I feel like sometimes I let my friends down because I'm either not there when they want me to be, or I try to be there and then I can't. And I hate doing that.

Natalie continued on to discuss the anxiety letting down her friends causes:

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the one hand, women are stereotyped as being overly emotional and yet are subject to cultural expectations for the emotional labor and caregiving they should perform at work and at home (for example, see Hochschild 1983 and Pierce 1995 for a discussion of women's emotional labor). Rather, I view both men and women as situated within a particular social context, which shapes both their experience of work and their response to it. In the case of this study, I assert that the ideology of gendered separate spheres, whether consciously or subconsciously, creates greater conflict for women's experience of work, thereby resulting in emotional consequences for women. I do not necessarily view women as being inherently more emotional than men or view men as being inherently unemotional.

> **Natalie:** Anxious. It makes me feel anxious. There are evenings, like last night, I have, uh, there's a baby shower tomorrow for one of my friends and I was meeting one of my other girlfriends to go and buy a present and have a drink or dinner or something. And we were gonna meet at 7, and I'm sitting at work and I'm like, 'How am I gonna leave, how am I gonna leave right now?' But, 'I can't bail, I need to go.'

Like Natalie, Caroline struggles with feeling as though she is letting others down when she allows work obligations to overtake non-work demands, something she explicitly said she feels guilty about:

> **Caroline:** I don't want to come home every night and see my husband for an hour. And I think he has an expectation too – I mean like we understand that we go through busy periods – but if I'm staying at work to do things that I could easily do tomorrow…I don't know, I think he gets disappointed with me. Like it's sort of like, 'Ok, come on, you…come home…' You know, like, or you have plans to do this, and then last minute you have to say, 'Sorry, I can't do it'… And it's just, you feel guilty. You know, you want to – at the end of the day it is just a job, and yet I kind of have to remind myself of that… But when I call my husband and tell him I'm not going to be home, I feel guilty, like I feel like I've let him down.

As Charlotte discussed some of the demands and responsibilities she has outside of work, she mentioned that she needs to provide healthy meals for her family and she feels guilty if she doesn't do so. Charlotte explained that she feels guilty when her family orders take-out too much, as she feels like it is her job to make sure her family is eating well. As we continued the interview, Charlotte reflected, in a tentative tone, on the guilt she is trying to let go of:

> **Charlotte:** I don't…I didn't use the word guilty too much, because I've let go…I've let go of a lot of guilt [tentative tone]…

Thus, while Charlotte is attempting to let go of feeling guilty, her statement nonetheless acknowledges the guilt that she has felt regarding her ability to fulfill demands and responsbilities at home.

Not only do women experience emotional consequences regarding their *non-work* sphere of life, they also experience feelings of guilt, worry and anxiety regarding *work* and

their ability to fulfill *work* demands. Just as women do not want to let down family and friends, they do not want to let down work colleagues. Patricia, who is on a flexbile work arrangment, told me that she makes herself available to work on the days when she is not supposed to be working (and for which she is not compensated). When I asked if anyone had told her to be available on these days, she said no, but that she just "feels" that she should be available. I asked her to tell me more about this, and she explained:

> **Patricia:** I guess it's a sense of responsibility, because if I'm given, um, responsibility for managing a team, so even though I'm not there that day, they're gonna be out there, the client's still working, so…I, I guess in my own sense, I, I feel guilty, either if I'm not there to answer a question that may, you know, keep them from moving forward…you don't want to give them [the clients] the sense that they're getting less, so…

Thus, Patricia experiences guilt when she is not, in her mind and according to the ideal worker norm, available to her clients or her team. Caroline discussed her on-going struggle with feeling like she's going to let colleagues down at work, which often leads her to agree to too many work requests. Her tendency to do this leads to stress, which spills over into her non-work life, and creates tension as she attempts to meet both the demands of work and of non-work life. Caroline said she often feels worried and anxious that she has missed something important at work, particularly if she doesn't check her emails in the evenings:

> **Caroline:** Honestly, every, every morning I go in there and it's like, what would have happened between when I shut down to when I open it up. And you never know…So Friday, for example, I went in a little bit earlier, because I knew I had a busy day and I had some things I wanted to get out of the way before my phone started to ring off the hook. And I got there, and I said to myself, 'Well thank god I got here because I have a meeting at 8 o'clock, that I didn't know about that got scheduled last night at 9:30.' Yeah, so if I hadn't been there before I would have missed the meeting. It wouldn't have been the end of the world…but for me personally, I would have felt horrible. Just cause that's who I am…

Caroline's family encourages her to worry less about work, something she agrees is problematic, but as she explained, she feels she can't let colleagues down. Caroline said that she often gets "really stressed out" about work, and has to consciously calm herself down,

reminding herself that things at work will turn out "fine." In fact, Caroline says her husband and extended family have an on-going joke over her tendency to worry about work. She says they say, "You're not the CEO, the bank will go on without you." While Caroline recognizes that this is, in fact, quite true, she explained that "you have this feeling" where "you can't let everyone down!"

Like other women respondents, Marissa discussed the emotional consequences of her work demands and expectations. Marissa feels that her work is very intense and she feels like she is under "extreme pressure" and "very high expectations." Marissa talked about how those high expectations make her feel like she is "constantly pulled in a lot of directions," expected to perform at a level that may not even be possible. This creates a lot of stress for Marissa and she finds the pressure "scary" and "frustrating." She also explained that she believes partners she works for lack an empathy or understanding of the kind of pressure they place on staff below them, such as Marissa. Marissa recognizes that her job affords her great opportunities and has a high level of exposure to influential people in her organization, something that will help her advance. However, she also acknowledges that demands of her job are "extreme" and "unreasonable." Marissa talked about how these demands made it difficult for her to fulfill the demands, responsibilities and wants of her non-work life. She is, in fact, quite unhappy with the lack of balance she experiences in her life. Yet even so, Marissa explained that she frequently experiences feelings of guilt for not fulfilling all of the demands and expectations placed upon her at work. She feels as though she is "not doing enough" for the people she works with:

> **Marissa:** So I think that I, um, I'm like sort of constantly thinking that I'm doing a bad job, and so I'm constantly thinking that I'm not meeting expectations or that I'm not meeting, you know, I'm not doing enough…

Marissa continued on to talk about how she feels "guilty" for "letting down" her work

colleagues:

> **Marissa:** [I feel guilty] All the time. All the time. I think that's like, probably, the biggest issue for me, is the guilt. Yeah. Yeah. Like take this weekend for example. I was at the office until 10 on Friday night, and I took, you know, I had a call on Saturday morning before leaving for a friend's place, I was a at a friend's for the afternoon of Saturday, the evening and then Sunday morning. And then as soon as I got back to Toronto I worked form, I guess it would be, 4pm until 9pm. And then back in today. So it's like, and, and, around that I felt guilty for things that were left undone. You know?

Marissa explained that she checks her Blackberry frequently, otherwise she worries she will miss an important email and will not follow through on a colleague's request, feeling as though she may fall short of colleagues' expectations. Marissa said that she doesn't like to have "red light flashing" (a Blackberry's way of notifying one that they have unchecked emails) and so she constantly scans her emails. However, Marissa also noted that doing so exposes her to the risk of opening a "stressful email" when she's not act work, which in turn leads to "feeling guilty" until she actually goes into the office to "work on whatever they're asking" her to do. Thus, Marissa concluded that checking emails constantly is a way to keep on top of the volume of email one receives – if she didn't check them over the weekend, she would be overwhelmed Monday morning with emails. Moreover, she also concluded that checking emails is a way to mitigate the underlying anxiety she experiences when she is left wondering whether unchecked emails contain work requests that, if left unattended, will mean that Marissa won't meet the expectations of her co-workers.

Women respondents', then, experience emotional consequences in response to the ideal worker norm. These emotional consequences often involve feelings of guilt, worry and anxiety. Perhaps most interestingly, women experience these feelings in their non-work sphere of life (e.g., feeling guilty for not fulfilling its demands) *and* they experience these feelings in their work sphere of life (e.g., guilty for not fulfilling its demands). Women's discussion of the emotional consequences they experience in response to the ideal worker

norm reveals the great degree of internal conflict that women experience in response to the ideal worker norm. Additionally, women's discussion of the emotional consequences of the intense demands and expectations associated with ideal worker norm (or the conflict these demands create with one's non-work life) are often tied to the notion that someone else is going to be "let down." In reading the words of these women respondents, we have the sense that they very much experience contradictory thoughts and feelings towards the demands of work and non-work and the ways in which they try to navigate these two spheres of life and juggle their competing demands.

Men, on the other hand, simply did not express the same degree of internal conflict. No doubt, men also possess an attitude of ambivalence toward the ideal worker norm, making critical assessments, expressing uncertainty about the ideal career path, and making declarations of autonomy. Men also express some misgivings, however women's words imbue a sense of feeling "torn" between these two competing spheres of life, something that was not present in men's discussion of the ideal worker norm and the potential work/life conflict its demands generate. Moreover, men do not say they experience feelings of guilt, worry and anxiety regarding their ability to meet either non-work or work demands. In fact, only Lucas mentioned once "feeling bad" about not being able to see friends often. However, he did not, as many women did, express the sense that he was letting anyone down. Lucas also mentioned that he checks his Blackberry frequently for emails to make sure he doesn't miss anything and get "in trouble" at work. Again, unlike women respondents, Lucas did not express any sense that he might be letting colleagues down or feel guilty about not fulfilling the expectations of others at work.

Dylan, who, like other respondents, including both men and women, limits demands placed upon him, described how he quit a sports league due to work demands:

>**Dylan:** Yeah, so, I would love to join, uh, sports leagues and things like that. Like when I first joined the company, I was in a volleyball league downtown, so you know, it wasn't that demanding on time, it was once a week, but it started at 6:30, and, um, you know it was a struggle just to make it there for 6:30. And then, at one point, it was just like, 'Okay, I can't take this anymore,' because every Thursday was like, all day, you're looking at your watch, and you're saying 'okay how much work do I have done? How much time is left? And what has to be done before I go?' And you're like really pushing it to the limit, showing up, you know, you're always like 10 minutes that for the game and that kind of stuff. And then after the season you just say 'Screw it, it's not worth it.'

Likewise, Kate has refrained from joining activities like a sports league due to work demands. However, when Kate discussed why she limits such non-work demands, she emphasized that it is to avoid *letting others down*. She said:

>**Kate:** So there's lots of classes I'd like join, or, you know, baseball for example, or Frisbee, but I'd feel like I'd be letting people down, if I can't come to the game every Wednesday right, which is…really, it's hard to say.

Elsewhere, she again stated that she avoids making certain commitments so as to not let others down, even though she would otherwise like to participate in certain activities:

>**Kate:** It's [work unpredictability] prevented me from, yeah, from you know, signing up form certain things, or making certain commitments, because I just don't know and I don't want to let people down. When you're always cancelling, you start to feel bad, and then people start to wonder right?

Thus, Kate does not want to let others down, and when she does, it's something she feels "bad" about. Dylan, on the other hand, quit his sports league not because he was letting others down, but to alleviate stress on himself. As this example shows, women, in contrast to men, often explained their choices or their feelings about their choices in terms of *not letting others down.*

Whereas women discuss the emotional consequences of the ideal worker norm and the internal conflict one feels when fulfilling its demands and expectations at the expense of non-work demands, men were much more "clinical" in their tone of voice when discussing the competing demands of work and home. In fact, while men accept the ideal worker

norm and frequently prioritize work over non-work, several men explained that sometimes they simply draw a limit on work demands, and they did not discuss feeling guilty for doing so. For example, Josh who says that work frequently gets prioritized over non-work demands also stated:

> **Josh:** Um…I've never held back in enforcing what I need to…to do, or what I will be doing. Um, I'm taking this Thursday off for Easter, and I'm taking next Monday and Tuesday off. Is everyone else around me doing that? No, some are completely swamped. My parents have just arrived from the UK, so I'm not, not gonna do that when they're around. Some people get to see their parents every week, every 2 weeks, I get to see mine twice a year, so…

Likewise, Mike, stated that, when necessary, he maintains the "mentality" that work can "wait until tomorrow":

> **Mike:** If I've, say I've planned to go to a concert or something like that, and something comes up for work, I still maintain the mentality that there's nothing that can't wait until tomorrow.

Unlike men, such as Josh and Mike, who expressed internally detaching oneself from work at times, some women expressed their difficulty in compartmentalizing work and non-work spheres of life. These women believe that they allow feelings caused by demands from one sphere of life to be expressed in the other sphere of life. For example, Jessica discussed the consequences of fulfilling work demands and expectations on her romantic relationships. In part, Jessica attributed such consequences to her tendency to externalize feelings of stress caused by work demands in her relationships. She said:

> **Jessica:** I think that I'm very susceptible becoming very mechanical. Because, there is a lot on my plate…And so, I think that that does take a toll on a relationship, because I think, you know, I have heard from family and friends it does seem sometimes that everything is on my timetable, and people understand that, but nobody wants to feel that way. And then just in the relationship, the romantic relationship, I tend to externalize stress…it's harder for me to compartmentalize I guess, and really be present. Like I have to make an active choice, like okay,…I'm not going to talk about work, I'm just going to be present and listen to this other person. I think that that is an area of growth that I think is natural in me when I'm not in this sort of high pressure environment. Like prior to working I didn't have to actively say, 'Okay, I'm not going to talk about other things, I'm gonna just focus on

this other person.' I mean it's natural, it's in my nature to focus on other people, so there's a sense of who I am is being really, like who I am naturally is really stifled in this environment, because you have to make adjustments to do the work and be available.

Jessica continued on to explain that she feels as though her demanding work leads to a selfish existence, again emphasizing that she "verbally expresses" work-related stress to others, causing others to feel that her work or her packed schedule are more important to Jessica. Thus, Jessica has to consciously seek ways to help keep this selfishness in check, such as actively connecting with friends, asking about their lives and listening intently. She regards her difficulty with compartmentalizing work and non-work, and, as she says, "expressing" or "externalizing" stress in her personal relationships, as problematic. Much in the same way that concern for "letting others" down is a way to show one's care and consideration for others, Jessica is concerned about how others in her life feel, whether she is being "present" and caring for them as she thinks she should. Caring for others is something that Jessica sees as a "natural" quality she usually possesses, but that the intense demands and expectations stifle this aspect of Jessica's character.

Marissa discussed many times her inability, in her estimation, to compartmentalize work demands from other aspects of her life. Following up on her discussion of feeling guilty for visiting a friend over the weekend, as opposed to putting in extra time at the office, she said:

> **Marissa:** So it's like, I don't, I don't compartmentalize well. And actually I think that is a huge issue. And I think that is probably, you know, reflecting back on what makes someone partner potential, I think that's part of it, is being able to compartmentalize. Because I think when you can't let go of a past meeting or a past stress, in order to transition into whatever's current, and be in the now and be in the present. Then you, you carry those stresses and the stress is fully evident, right?

Outside of work, Marissa said that she spends a lot of time being stressed and feeling "sad"

about work. For Marissa, this "goes back to compartmentalizing" – from her perspective, if she could better compartmentalize work and the related emotions she has in response to the intensity of work, it would create fewer problems in her non-work life. Marissa's belief that she is not good at "compartmentalizing" creates concern future and the possibility of having children:

> **Marissa:** And that's certainly a…it's certainly something, like, when I think about, I think about myself raising a child, because I am who I am and I do wear everything on my sleeve, I wouldn't want them to grow up around me being so stressed, right?

Not only did Marissa talk about work stressors causing negative feelings in her non-work life, Marissa also discussed the ways in which she shows her emotions at work, something that Marissa also attributes to an inability to compartmentalize. As she stated above, she views a successful worker as good at compartmentalizing work stressors. In fact, Marissa believes that one's ability to compartmetnalize, and in particular to supress negative emotions and present onself as "put together" is important for one's progression. Marissa explained that one shouldn't appear "stressed," "overworked," and "exhausted." Rather, she believes it is important to appear as though one is "great with everything all time," exuding one's ability to juggle competing demands and all the while remain "happy" and "confident." Thus, because Marissa tends to show her emotions, particularly when she's "stressed," "angry," or "sad" – all emotions that intense work demands elicit – she has concerns that it will hinder her progression. Thus, not only do women experience emotional consequences in response to the ideal worker norm, but these emotions have consequences themselves, both in work and non-work spheres of life. And as women respondents explained, the consequences are, in some ways, a result of *their own inability* to compartmentalize and control emotions.

IV.C.ii.i Summary

For men, the ideal worker norm is a source of stress and can make balancing competing demands of work and non-work very difficult. However, they do not have the same sense being internally "torn" over the difficulty of meeting the different demands and expectations of work and non-work spheres of life, expressing fewer misgivings over the tension between work and non-work spheres of life. Women are more concerned that they will let others down, and think about their choices in terms of others. To the extent that women have difficulty fulfilling competing demands, and as such fall short of the expectations of others or let others down, they experience feelings of guilt, worry and anxiety. Women also discussed difficulty "compartmentalizing," which carries consequences itself both in and out of the workplace. Indeed, women, unlike men, experience emotional consequences in response to the ideal worker norm, and as such the attitude of ambivalence that women experience is all the more conflicted.

IV.C.iii Transferring Responsibility to Oneself

Women professionals' attitude of ambivalence is further complicated by concerns over who or what is responsible for the stresses and strains they experience. In doing so, women transfer that responsibility on to their own selves, explaining that oneself is responsible for drawing boundaries between work and non-work spheres of life and that one's own inability to set such boundaries contributes to the amount of conflict one experiences between work and non-work spheres of life. Women further explained that the pressure women experience is, in part, internally induced and often *self-imposed*.

IV.C.iii.i Drawing Boundaries

Caroline talked about the pressures she finds herself under due to work demands and high expectations for responsiveness to work requests. However, Caroline believes that the

stress and anxiety such pressures induces are partly her own fault. Caroline explained that

she needs to learn to do a better job of setting boundaries:

> **Caroline:** I mean sometimes it's hard to prioritize which one [of many work demands] is the most important because they all seem important. And…I don't know, I think part of it is my personality, I'm also a pleaser, so I want to be 'Everything's got to be perfect.' And I find, sometimes I stress myself right out. Yeah, I agree to do everything, and I, and I have to, personally, I think I need to do a better job of, 'You know what? I'll have to get back to you tomorrow on this,' and 'You know what? I won't be able to do that this time or the next time,' kind of thing…yeah.

Likewise Natalie feels that the stress she experiences from many different work demands is

partly due to her own inability to set boundaries and learn to say "no." She feels that co-

workers are not necessarily aware of all the different demands and expectations that one is

under, therefore, even though Natalie recognized that workload is definitely part of the

problem, "you still have to take responsibility" for "balance" in your life.

As she continued on to talk about the intense work demands she and her co-workers

experience, she again iterated the notion that one must take responsibility for setting their

own boundaries:

> **Natalie:** And I think individuals and I have to sorta take responsibility for that. It's about setting boundaries, and, um, and you know, saying, 'Okay, well, during, during, you know, here's what I can accomplish.' Um, but if people have always given you work and you've always just gotten it done, then, um, and there's a certain level of fear in saying no, I think, when you work somewhere with a high-performing culture that we do, that my firm is. There is that, I don't know if it's a stigma, but feeling that if you say no, it's that you can't, kind of, handle it. And so there's a fear of saying, 'Actually, I don't think I can do…' And, and, uh, I think once you build that trust, if you did say that, I think, you know, and I have said that, I think it's okay but you do definitely need to build that trust first.

Natalie pointed out the fact that while one is responsible for setting their own boundaries

when managing the demands of work, there may be consequences for saying "no" to work

demands. Natalie explained that one might be viewed as "not committed" or that one "can't

cut it," but she emphasized that nonetheless, one's own self is responsible for setting

boundaries. Moreover, Natalie also believes that you need to "build that trust" before setting boundaries and saying "no." In other words, Natalie believes that she is responsible for setting boundaries to manage work demands, but before she is able to do that, she must build a reputation for herself as someone who is dependable and will get the job done. This kind of credibility as an ideal worker, from her perspective, allows one to set boundaries.

Like Natalie, Kate also believes that one's own self is responsible for setting boundaries and managing work demands. And also like Natalie, Kate understands that her ability to set boundaries is predicated on having first established herself as "that critical person" – someone who, ultimately, the firm can count on to do what it takes to get the job done, and to do it well. Kate explained that the people she works for are not really respectful of or concerned about her life outside of work, thus, she needs to set her own boundaries:

> **Kate:** Um, they don't really know our life outside of work and what we do… It's just the expectation is to get the work done, and you have to be the one to say 'I gotta today at 5,' or whatever. So it's hard, it's hard to…But I think it goes back to also being a little bit assertive, and saying, you know…some of the people we work for will take advantage of you to the extent they can, right? And they'll push you…So you have to manage that yourself and manage those other people.

Kate continued on to explain how her reputation and credibility as an ideal worker gave her more room to set boundaries. As she explained, she came into her group with a "very good reputation" as someone who, in her own words, "was gonna be there…whenever you needed her." Kate stated that "you have to establish yourself as that critical person" and then set boundaries. Thus, because Kate has established herself as an ideal worker, she feels she has more ability to set boundaries. Of course, the irony is that to be able to set boundaries and limits on work demands, one must be an ideal worker, willing to fulfill its demands and expectations.

Both Marissa and Jessica believe as well that one is responsible for setting their own boundaries. Jessica described how she has grown in confidence over the years, now more willing to set boundaries on work demands for herself. Like other women, she asserts that one needs to do this for one's own self. As she said, "you have to learn to take care of yourself, as no one else is going to take care of you." Marissa assessed her ability to set boundaries as poor, something she doesn't like about herself. Like other women, setting boundaries is something Marissa sees as an individual's own responsibility. As she talked about the expectations for constant availability to work, she said:

> **Marissa:** Yeah, I mean, I would say that there are expectations that you will be available, um…I think there is a real personal responsibility to set boundaries and to learn to say no. Um, having said that, interestingly, I've tried to do that a few times and not have it go so well. So I think that further reinforces the expectation that you will just be on call.

Marissa picks up on the fact that even though it is her "personal responsibility" to set boundaries, they are not necessarily honored when she does so. On the one hand, Marissa agrees that one is responsible for setting boundaries. On the other hand, she expressed some confusion over it, as she feels that in some way, it's not possible for her to set boundaries, as she does not have enough influence or power to protect her time and have those boundaries be respected. She said that it is "looked upon favorably when people are able to strike a balance, but it's very hard to do that."

In fact, Marissa wonders whether her lack of setting boundaries makes her look as though she "lacks a backbone." Marissa also wishes that she could be like other people who she perceives as caring less about work and meeting others' expectations than she does. Interestingly, the people who Marissa perceives as not worrying about meeting others' expectations are also individuals who she believes to be high-performers. These individuals possess some intangible quality that she too wishes she could attain – a certain "charisma":

Marissa: I always want to be like – I don't know if you've seen the movie Office Space – so I always want to be that guy who just let's go and doesn't care. And I think there are ultimately people who are like who are still regarded as really good employees – not that extreme [as Office Space] – but who are still regarded as really good employees. And they have that something, right? That people aspire to. The charisma, or whatever it is. But I can't get myself there. So even though I want to be the kind of person who will say, like, 'This doesn't make sense, I'm not doing this', I can't get myself there.

Despite believing that certain individuals possess a quality in which they are regarded as good employees but don't care about fulfilling expectations as much as she does, Marissa still discussed at length the importance of fulfilling demands and expectations to be viewed as a high-performer. She also recognizes that if one does not fulfill such demands and expectations, they are viewed as less committed, dedicated and serious about their career. Thus, Marissa seems to believe that there is some vague middle ground, in which one simultaneously set boundaries and says "no," yet fulfills demands and expectations, at once caring less about work yet also communicating their commitment and dedication to worker success. For Marissa, this middle ground is something that she is responsible for finding within herself, but has yet to uncover.

Unlike women respondents, men did not really discuss the responsibility one has to set boundaries for their own selves. This does not mean that men don't set boundaries, or that they have boundaries set for them, or that they don't think that boundaries are necessary. Rather, they just did not talk about the *personal responsibility* one has to set boundaries. They also did not talk about difficulties in setting boundaries or self-perceptions of an inability to set boundaries. Furthermore, men did not discuss the need to establish oneself as an ideal worker to be able to set some boundaries without experiencing consequences for attempting to do so. Mike's comment about "drawing a limit" – a boundary – on work illustrates how, like other men, he doesn't discuss at length his responsibility to draw a limit, or difficulty

drawing that limit, or needing to be perceived a particular way before he is able to draw a limit. Rather, Mike just says he does it:

> **Mike:** …there's definitely people who won't say no, and it may reflect favourably on them, just in terms that they're able to get things done and they're able to go the extra mile. Um, I think it's also people that, you know, like, you know, work chews 'em and spits 'em out. And I've seen kind of both sides of that. Um, so that's one area that I, always being able to draw a limit, to say I'm not willing to do that, I don't care what the rewards are at the end of the day, it's not worth it…At the end of the day, your job is not your life, and I think a lot of people mix that up a lot of times.

Mike's statement on drawing boundaries at work does not convey the same sense of inner conflict or complications that women respondents' conveyed. Rather, Mike's statement is a simple declaration of autonomy.

IV.C.iii.ii Pressure and Expectations Are Self-Imposed

Women respondents often spoke of the pressures they experience at work and the high expectations to which they are subjected. However, when talking about these pressures and high expectations, women do not solely attribute work pressures and expectations to the ideal worker norm and workplace cultural definitions of success. Rather, they feel that these pressures and expectations are attributable, at least in part, to something women impose on their own selves. Very closely related to the sense that one is responsible for setting boundaries and learning to say no, women see the pressures and expectations they experience as partly their own doing – something that is internally induced and applied.

Charlotte talked about pressures on her both at work and at home. She explained that much of the pressure she feels from the tension between work demands and home demands are due to the high standards she holds herself to:

> **Charlotte:** I *do* put a lot of pressure on myself, because I *want* these things, I *want* this career, I would like to be a partner. At the same time, I don't want to give up some of these other aspects of my life…I feel like I do a relatively good job [balancing work and home], however, I feel there's still not enough hours in the day, and I feel like how am I going to juggle it all to get…*I'm* holding myself to a higher standard, I think, yeah.

As Charlotte thought about the work she does at home, running the household and taking care of her daughter, she reflected on societal pressure to be a certain kind of mother, and that this means she often performs more household and childcare duties than does her husband:

> **Charlotte:** Um, I feel societal pressure – things I mentioned to you about like birthday gifts and all that – *like those are the mother's job* [said very emphatically and slowly]. Like they just are. Um, like, shopping for clothes for Ava, like that's…I do that. I enjoy it, but like if I didn't do it I don't think my husband would be online, like, at Baby Gap, getting, like 'Oh there's a sale, let's pick some jeans,' like, so, you know? And then like there is societal pressure, like, okay, what's an example…like if there's like, like if you're supposed to bring treats for something…like, *that's my job*. So there is societal pressure on that, like, I think if I didn't do that stuff it would be like 'Oh that mom is like complete deadbeat'. So,…I like to do, like I'm happy to do most of it, but when you're trying to juggle a full-time career there are days when it's just like, 'Oh god, we've got to get cupcakes, nut-free cupcakes in tomorrow,' like, you know, that's not even on my husband's radar, you know? So, and it could be…like he does a lot, he's very helpful, so I'm not saying that…it's just not…you know…it's just not on his radar because it's not been, like 'that's not his role,' you know?

Charlotte concluded that much of the work she does at home is due to the pressure she puts on herself to be a great mother, not because her husband necessarily adheres to a traditional model of family caregiving in which she is "supposed" to take care of certain duties. Charlotte stated that about "90%" of the pressures and expectations on her are entirely self-imposed.

As Bethany thought about the competing demands between her work and non-work lives and the tension such competing demands create, she questioned whether the expectations on her were due to real, external demands being placed on her or due to her *own* high-expectations for *herself*.

> **Bethany**: I mean, I mean, I think I try to balance as best I can, um, and…hmmm…I think I've tried to balance things the best I can…the question is…um…you know, do I set, you know, do I set extremely high expectations on myself? I.e., you know, if I'm frustrated or if I'm unable to balance something, is it, is it because of pressure I put on myself, or is it like, you know, real external factors? That's debatable.

Women respondents discussed the pressures that they feel while at work to meet the many

expectations and fulfill the many demands that work places on them. Yet they also

explained that such pressure is due, in part, to their own self-imposed expectations for their

work performance. For example, Caroline views herself as a pleaser at work, who needs to

learn to say no, and as such agrees to take on too much while simultaneously expecting

herself to perform work tasks perfectly. Natalie said that having high expectations of herself

means that she will largely do whatever it takes to get the job done:

> **Natalie:** When you're [meaning herself] somebody who has high expectations of
> yourself, your not likely to, you know, you want to deliver a 100%, right? I mean
> that's the, the natural, kinda, that's just what you expect of yourself. So when, you
> know, when it's gonna take you 60 hours to do that there's no question as to
> whether you'll do it or not. You know what I mean?

In fact, Natalie said she has "trouble differentiating" between pressure placed on her by

work and expectations she places on herself – she's not quite sure when her firm is

subjecting her to intense demands or when she is imposing her own high expectations on

her work performance. Likewise, Marissa said that she is "really, really, really hard" on

herself and has high expectations of her own performance at work.

Unlike women respondents, men largely did not express the notion that the

pressures and expectations they experience are the result of self-imposed expectations. Only

Thomas mentioned that he feels there is a lot of "self-pressure" in his job. Thomas

attributes this "self-pressure" to an "inherent desire to achieve" and be successful. He did

not relate this to a desire to meet the expectations of others at work nor did he express any

uncertainty over the source of the high expectations that he experiences. Thomas is very

aware that *work* imposes demands and expectations on him, attributing his compliance with

these demands and expectations as a "desire to achieve." Moreover, Thomas, like other

men, did not discuss any sense of imposing high expectations on himself in his *non-work* sphere of life.

IV.C.iii.iii Summary

As women respondents reflected on the pressure, stress, and tension they experience due to work demands and the competing demands of their non-work life, they discussed the personal responsibility that one has to set boundaries on work so as to better manage demands and expectations. Women explained that, often times, they have trouble setting such boundaries, and that to do so one needs to first be perceived as an ideal worker. Women also expressed their uncertainty over the source of the high expectations they experience: Are expectations truly imposed from external sources, whether it be work or family members? Or, are women personally holding themselves to a high standard, imposing high expectations on themselves? In doing so, women unconsciously transfer some of the responsibility for the pressure and stress that the ideal worker norm generates on to their own selves. Why they do so is not entirely clear, but what is clear is that women grapple with who or what is to blame for the pressure they experience. In this way, women's attitude of ambivalence women in response to the ideal worker norm is exacerbated relative to their male peers as they experience contradictory, conflicted and uncertain thoughts and feelings over who or what is the source of work and non-work pressures and who is responsible for alleviating such pressure.

<u>IV.C.iv Justifying the Choice to Conform to the Ideal Worker Norm</u>

Women, unlike men, talked about the importance of having a career to maintain a sense of an independent, adult self and often talked about this in contrast to the possibility of being full-time mothers. Women in the study who currently have children explained that they can not envision themselves *not* working. Other women in the study who did not have

children at the time of the interviews all expressed the desire to have children in the future –

and all expressed concerns about how they would manage such a change. Even so, as they

discussed the potential of having children, they asserted their desire and intention to

continue working despite the challenges of being a professional and a mother. In talking

about the importance of having a career and maintaining one's independent, adult self,

women provide a justification for the choice to conform to the ideal worker norm – a reason

for why one would pursue a demanding career even if even if one has children and could

feasibly focus on full-time childrearing.

      As Patricia talked about why she had chosen to stay working after the birth of her

first child, she reflected on the importance of work in her life, not being able to imagine

herself "just as mother":

      Patricia: Like I couldn't picture myself just as a mother.

Patricia is on a flexible work arrangement, reducing her work schedule to 3 or 4 days a week,

depending on the time of the year. She does this so that she can have some time with her

daughter, but she would not consider leaving work altogether to be a stay-at-home mother.

Patricia explained that when she was on maternity leave, she felt as though something was

"missing." Patricia said that she couldn't wait until her husband got home at the end of the

day, not just because she needed a break, but because she needed some adult interaction.

Furthermore, during her year-long maternity leave, Patricia felt bored at times. Valuing the

intellectual stimulation of work and the interaction with colleagues, Patricia said she would

"go crazy" staying at home with her daughter full-time:

      Patricia: I don't think I could stay home and watch Alyssa 5 days a week, and just be
      like, all, you know, 2 year old type stuff. Yeah, I think I'd go crazy.

Likewise, Charlotte said that she would not be a good stay-at-home mother. During her

year-long maternity leave, she started to feel "antsy," and contemplated returning to work

before her maternity leave was over. Charlotte also said that her husband would not want her to stay-at-home either, as she is not particularly "skilled as a homemaker." Her husband is, in fact, not supportive of her being a stay-at-home mother, because he thinks that would "not suit" Charlotte and she would be "grumpy all the time." Charlotte said that domestic work is not her interest, and that she'd rather spend her time doing the things paid work entails. Charlotte also explained that working is important for women – it's important to be independent, to be able to financially support oneself, as one never knows what can happen:

> **Charlotte:** I think it's important to be financially independent. It's not that my money's mine, my husband's is his, but if something should happen I want to be able to support myself and my kids and my husband. I don't, I've never felt secure with just one person having the job in the household…

Referring to Leslie Bennett's book *The Feminine Mistake*, about the importance of women remaining in the paid labor force, Charlotte explained that she thinks it's a grave error for women stop working:

> **Charlotte:** But, I do think…the Feminine Mistake, the author of the book…that kind of, like, that really resonate[s] with me, like I hadn't thought about it, and then since then, there's things that have happened, that I've seen, where, I really subscribe to the fact that it's a big mistake for women to step out of the workforce and stay at home. I think it's actually…it's kind of politically incorrect to say so I don't go around saying it but I actually believe that...

Kate, who didn't have any children at the time of the interview, talked about her future and her plans to have children. She is emphatic that she will continue working, as Kate sees her work as an integral part of who she is, providing her with meaning and sense of accomplishment that she could not get by staying at home full-time. Kate also emphasized the importance of being independent, and being able to support oneself in the event that a marriage relationship doesn't last. Just the *knowledge* that she could support herself if necessary is important to Kate:

> **Kate:** Cause I want to work, cause there's a sense of accomplishment, and you know, self-fulfillment that comes with that, and not depending necessarily on one person.

It may change, um, but, and maybe I don't need something as demanding. But I like what I do, and there's the potential to go farther, and I'm always told that, right? So, I want to be able to see if I can do it. I don't want to cut myself out of that… yeah, because it gives me that fulfillment, it's something that I feel like I'm contributing. You know, it's good to be a mother, and all that sort of stuff, and mentor, you know, sister, or whatever, but I also want to have that other side where I'm supporting myself in a way, and I always want to be…if anything ever happens, say I got, you know, dumped on the side of the street or my boyfriend left me, I'd always want to know that I could support myself.

Kate continued on to emphasize the importance of not only being financially independent but of being valued at work and appreciated outside of the home. Kate values the sense of personal accomplishment and confidence that work gives her. Furthermore, Kate's work gives her the sense that she is a strong, capable person – able to handle the things that come her way. Thus, working is important because it gives her financial security and independence, but, as Kate said, "it's way more than just financial":

Kate: And not just monetarily, not just financially, right, but knowing that you're valued at work. Even just by your skill set means a lot to me. And that gives me fulfillment. And I think it gives me confidence too… Because you know that people are appreciating what you do and you're good at what you do. Not just…not just on the on that one side of things, the family side, but also on the professional side. And you could support yourself no matter what. And, not that I ever think that will happen, but I want to be able to…And at work you face so many challenges that help you in your personal life too, and you know, even if you're faced with something personally really challenging, you can think back to work, and say you know what, I never thought I could get through that, but I did. So that gives you a sense of being able to handle things, I find, for me. Um…you know. Yeah. So it's way more than just financial. It's the other stuff too.

Marissa expressed deep misgivings throughout her interview about the stress and pressure that she experiences at work and the sacrifices she has made for work. Marissa greatly dislikes the lack of balance she experiences in her life and as she considers becoming a partner in her firm, she has serious reservations about the costs that may be incurred in her non-work life. Yet even so, when she talked about her desire to have children in the future she explained that she intends to keep working. Marissa said she would "go crazy" if she wasn't working. Moreover, Marissa believes it is important to have a career, not only for

oneself but also for other members of the family. She believes that working will allow her to contribute to her family not just in terms of income (although this is an important contribution) but also as a role model to her children. Thus, Marissa said that she wants to continue with her career both for her family and for herself.

Lucy also said that she simply could not envision herself as a stay-at-home mother – her career is far too important to her. In fact, Lucy explained that she could not imagine giving up all of the hard work she has put into her career to stop working once she has children. Similarly, Jessica also talked about not giving up all the hard work she's put into her career once she has children, which she, like other women respondents, hopes to have one day. Jessica was hesitant to use the term "give it up," because she believes that childrearing is important and valuable work itself. Nonetheless, Jessica feels she has made a significant investment in her career thus far, and she does not want to see it "wasted" (again, a term she was hesitant to use so as to not disparage childrearing). Like other women respondents, Jessica said that she "can't imagine not working." And, like other women respondents, Jessica has hard time reconciling how she will continue to work with the intensity that she works with now and also raise children. Yet, working is important to Jessica, and while she entertains the idea that she may not work in the same way that she works right now, she has a hard time imagining what that alternative might look like. Jessica explained that she feels like being a lawyer is part of her "calling" – a use of her gifts and talents, something that she feels she should be a good steward of:

> **Jessica:** I guess I'll go back to what even propelled me into law and all of that in the first place, is I do feel a calling in my life to be a lawyer. Now do I have to, or do I feel a calling to be a lawyer at Parson and Hodges? Not necessarily, I don't think God cares about where I do it, but I do feel like I've been in, given a certain amount of privilege and talents and gifts, by His grace that I don't…I mean, who knows, maybe I'll feel different after I have children. But I do feel like at this point, He's made a lot, He's given me a lot of opportunities that I would want to use in some capacity. It's part of my, like, calling.

Jessica also explained that having a career is important to maintain an "adult self."

Reflecting on her friends with children, she feels that those who work in some capacity are

"healthy." Working in some way allows a woman to maintain a "healthier balance on life" –

in some sense, better as individuals and perhaps as mothers too:

> **Jessica:** That's just always been very important to me, from a very, very young age. I've been told I have a very good work ethic, and like, I'm just a very hard worker. And I just, I feel like I would feel – not that raising children isn't hard work in a different way – but I feel like I would fill the time that I could be doing something with like idle things. Or…like I think it's healthy, I've seen, a lot of my friends have kids now. And I've seen the kids, er, uh, the, uh, and a lot of them are stay at home moms and some of them work. And then ones that seem to have a healthier balance on life are the ones that either work or they are stay-at-home but they volunteer regularly. So just to kind of maintain some sort of adult self. So I definitely [want to work] – that's shifted in the last couple of years, I always thought I would stay home.

Women respondents, then, emphasize the importance of working. When doing so,

women focus on the ways in which work ultimately contributes to a better quality of life and

makes them better as individuals. Remaining independent is an important reason to have a

career, as women respondents' explained. To the extent that one cannot predict life's

outcomes, being independent and self-sufficient (in particular, financially) is a reason to

pursue a career. Women also feel that working provides more than just financial

independence, security and self-sufficiency – it also contributes to their overall well-being

and satisfaction as individuals. Working develops women's confidence as individuals and

gives them a sense of accomplishment, meaning and belonging to something beyond family

life. Moreover, in many ways, not working would be a denial of one's whole self, as some

women feel that they have various talents and abilities that are important to exercise.

I interpret women's emphasis on the importance of working as ultimately providing

a justification for why they work, and presumably, why they work in intense work settings,

conforming to the ideal worker norm. Most women spoke of the importance of working in

light of their current *or* anticipated family situations. As women explained, having a career is a way to maintain an independent, adult self. In doing so, women implicitly acknowledge the existence of an alternative to working and, in their opinion, maintaining an independent, adult self. This alternative is one in which women do not work in the paid labor force, but rather devote themselves to full-time caregiving. Women respondents' perceive that this alternative carries the risk of being dependent on a partner and thus at the mercy of someone else in addition to the risk of being absorbed into the lives of others (such as children), thereby losing one's sense of self.

Thus, women respondents ultimately acknowledge the existence and persistence of an ideology of gendered separate spheres. Men did not speak about the importance of working nor did they discuss the ways in which working contributed to their quality of life, well-being or sense of self. Men certainly did not talk about the importance of being independent and self-sufficient, nor did they discuss the benefits that their work has for others.[17]   In this way, men also implicitly acknowledge an ideology of gendered separate spheres. There is no need to for men to justify working and conforming to the ideal worker – rather, because work is culturally regarded as a masculine endeavour and because men's appropriate sphere of life is the workplace, they live in a world in which it is assumed they will work and not a world in which other alternatives readily exist. When discussing potential changes in the future to their family situation, men did not express deep concerns, reservations or confusion about how one will manage family responsibilities with work responsibilities, whereas all women expressed serious concerns about how they will do so. As Oliver said, while he anticipates changes in his life once he is married and has children, it's "not something keeping me up at night." Men did, however, discuss the importance of

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[17] One male respondent did assert that "paying the rent" (in other words, financially providing for his family), is an important contribution to the family's well-being.

financially providing for a family. As such, they again acknowledge the ideology of separate spheres, in which men's role is that of a breadwinner.[18]

IV.C.v Summary

For women, the attitude of ambivalence they have in response to the ideal worker norm is complicated by a persistent ideology of separate spheres. While women have made huge strides in gaining a foothold in the workplace, work is still gendered – it is still a masculine sphere of life and the ideal worker norm is a masculine work norm as well. As such, when women conform to the ideal worker norm, a great degree of inner conflict and contradictory thoughts and feelings ensue as they attempt to negotiate having one foot in each sphere of life. Experiencing feelings of guilt, anxiety and worry, women struggle with the dual roles they need to fill – being an ideal worker and a caregiver as well. Moreover, they are concerned with meeting the expectations of other, both in their personal lives and in their workplaces. Thus, women respondents discuss the importance of working and the ways in which their careers enrich their lives. They also discuss the necessity of working, to hedge against life's uncertainties. In this way, women's attitude of ambivalence is complicated as they give justifications for conforming to the ideal worker norm. These reasons for working are often tied to women's discussion of their role, either current or anticipated, as a caregiver

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[18] Men did express a desire to have a caregiving role in their families. As Elliott, for example, explained, he does not want to be an absentee father. Similarly, Josh does not necessarily like the way other men in his office had solely devoted themselves to their careers at the expense of time with their spouse and children. Nonetheless, this was not a significant source of discussion for men in study and no men considered any alternatives such as flexible work arrangements or not working. They also did not express the same degree of concern over these issues as women respondents. Harrington et al.'s (2010) recent study on professional fathers reveals that, as other research suggests, fatherhood is undergoing changes as fathers take on more caregiving duties in their families. As notions of fatherhood and the meaning of being a good father shift, men will find themselves in the midst of conflict, as they simultaneously try to fulfill the demands of the ideal worker norm – something that *men* should do. However, Harrington et al.'s study also revealed a persistent ideology of separate spheres. Their findings showed that men, for example, did not consider alternatives to work such as being a "stay-at-home" father. Men also did not perceive any negative consequences at work for becoming a father as women often do. Rather, men believed that they were perceived as more mature and committed upon becoming a father, unlike women who believe their commitment to work is undermined when becoming a mother.

– discussions themselves which are filled with contradictory, conflicted and uncertain thoughts and feelings.

V.   Discussion

V.A *Professionals' Perceptions of the Ideal Worker Norm*

As the results have carefully detailed, professionals have an acute awareness of a pervasive ideal worker norm in their workplace. As professionals' perceive it to be, this ideal worker norm entails a definition of worker success alongside intense demands and expectations. The ideal worker norm that respondents described is not contained in the formal rules and policies of their organizations or in their formal job descriptions – it is, to be certain, a cultural definition of success, imparting what is "important, valued and rewarded" (Perlow 1998:328) in the workplace. Underscoring the implicit and cultural nature what it means to be a successful worker (or rather, to be the ideal worker), respondents explained that no one told them how success was defined or what demands and expectations they should fulfill. Nor did anyone explicitly explain that fulfilling demands and expectations would communicate their commitment to workplace success. Rather, respondents explained that one's knowledge of the ideal worker norm, its definition of success and its demands and expectations, are "absorbed" by being in the workplace – it's something one "just" learns and figures out over time (hopefully quickly!).

Professionals described what it means to be successful – above all, the successful professional is committed and dedicated to their job, willing to do whatever it takes to get the job done. Moreover, the successful professional is willing to go above and beyond one's responsibilities, actively seeking out new assignments, new challenges and new work for the organization. The successful worker also demonstrates their pursuit of an ideal career path, a path defined by the organization.

In addition to defining what it means to be successful, the ideal worker norm submits professionals to a variety of demands and expectations, namely long work hours, "face-time" pressure, immediate responsiveness, constant availability, and expectations for accommodating unpredictability at work. Fulfilling these demands and expectations communicates one's commitment and dedication to work, and as such, one's pursuit of worker success. These findings are consistent with other studies of the ideal worker norm in professional settings (Blair-Loy 2001, Cooper 2000, Kelly et al. 2010, Kunda 1992, Perlow 1998, Williams 2000). Further, these findings clearly demonstrate that the ideal worker norm requires professionals to prioritize and give primacy to paid work obligations over unpaid work obligations (Kelly et al. 2010, Williams 2000).

Such requirements undoubtedly create a signification amount of conflict between one's work and non-work sphere of life (Blair-Loy 2001, Coltrane 2004, Cooper 2000, Kelly et al. 2010, Menino et al. 2005, Stone and Lovejoy 2004, Williams 2000). Respondents discussed the many challenges they face due to competing demands. Moreover, opting to use workplace policies specifically designed to alleviate some of the pressure and tension that erupts between one's work and non-work spheres of life, results, according to the perceptions and beliefs of respondents, in potential negative career consequences.[19] Respondents believe that it is precisely one's commitment and dedication to work which is brought into question when using such policies. Not only do such policies make it practically difficult to fulfill the "24/7" demands and expectations of work, but opting to use such a policy in and of itself communicates that one is less serious about their career than

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[19] We might think that professionals who opt to use such policies are committed to their work (given the alternative of opting out of their job altogether) and hope to find rewarding lives that include both a fulfilling career and personal life. Notably, studies, such as Stone's (2007), demonstrate that even women who have opted out of the workforce altogether remain highly committed to their careers and were so prior to leaving their careers. Such women describe the "choice" to opt out of the workforce as no choice at all – something they felt they "had" to do for lack of better alternatives.

those who remain working in a traditional capacity. This finding is also consistent with previous research on professionals' work/life conflict (Blair-Loy and Wharton 2002, Stone 2007, Stone and Lovejoy 2004). Informal, albeit very real, consequences for using such formal policies reinforce the ideal worker norm, its definition of success, and the demands and expectations which one must fulfill to communicate their pursuit of worker success.

Using such policies also carries formal consequences. In particular, respondents suggested that one's career advancement can stall when one does not completely fulfill the demands and expectations of work while actively demonstrating one's pursuit of worker success. Such formal consequences illustrate the intimate tie between workplace cultural norms and bureaucratic modes of control (Edwards 1979, Perlow 1998). Formal rewards, in the form of promotions, interesting assignments, and bonuses, are often coupled with the workplace's cultural definition success. Indeed, for professionals, cultural strategies of control (e.g., the ideal worker norm) and modes of bureaucratic control (e.g., promotions) combine to persuasively elicit their intense work efforts (Cooper 2000, Kunda 1992, Perlow 1998).

V.B *Professionals' Response: Conforming to the Ideal Worker Norm*

Respondents' discussion of their lives outside of work reveals the extent of the challenges which arise as work demands and expectations infringe upon their non-work lives, thereby making it difficult to meet the demands, responsibilities and wants of their non-work lives. Not only do respondents face challenges as they navigate work and non-work spheres of life, they experience disappointments as they often prioritize work over non-work demands, doing less of what they should or want to do in their non-work lives. To be certain, as presented in the results, respondents conform to the ideal worker norm,

practically speaking. This choice to conform is evidenced by respondents' choice of career, despite their awareness of high demands and expectations even prior to beginning work.

The long hours respondents work, averaging around 60 hours per week, demonstrate respondents' active acceptance of the ideal worker norm as well. In general, respondents explain that work takes priority in their lives, and their day-to-day choices reveal that they often prioritize work demands over non-work demands. Moreover, to manage the pressures professionals experience due to high work intensity, professionals limit demands. As Padavic and Reskin (2002) assert, limiting demands is an *individual* solution to work/family conflict and primarily takes the form of limiting *non-work* demands. As the findings of this study show, professionals largely limit the demands not of work but of non-work, thereby demonstrating one more way in which they conform to the ideal worker norm.

V.C *Professionals' Response: Maintaining an Attitude of Ambivalence towards the Ideal Worker Norm*

Despite the fact that respondents conform to the ideal worker norm, we should not in any way assume that respondents do not value their lives outside of work – in fact, they very much do. Instead, respondents find that as they prioritize work over non-work, even the non-work demands which they *do* meet are pushed and squeezed to the outer margins of their lives. Thus, respondents' practical choices are not easily made and they do not necessarily embrace or endorse the ideal worker norm or the choices they've made. Respondents maintain an attitude of ambivalence towards the ideal worker norm, revealing professionals' conflicting, contradictory and uncertain thoughts and feelings regarding the reality of being working professional. Unlike some studies (Copper 2000, Perlow 1998) which focus primarily on workers' practical response to the ideal worker norm and do not find any marked inconsistency between workers' choices and underlying thoughts and feelings, I find that what professionals *do* and *think* is often inconsistent, contradictory and

conflicting. This finding is consistent with other studies of professionals' subjective experience of careers characterized by intense demands and expectations (Blair-Loy 2001, Kunda 1992, Pierce 1995, Stone 2007).

Edwards' (1979) argument that bureaucratic control seeks to "bind" the "hearts and minds" (Kunda 1992:218) of workers to the organization, eliciting their efforts by requiring workers to internalize both the demands and potential rewards of their work is well-supported by the findings of this study. However, I do not believe it is accurate to see professionals as disempowered and entirely acted upon. Professionals do not blindly embrace the ideal worker norm, as is evidenced by respondents' attitude of ambivalence.

Kunda (1992) asserts that professionals actively construct a sense of self in light of the ideal worker norm. He argues that this sense of self ultimately involves having multiple selves, developed out of "balancing acceptance and rejection of…organizational ideology and the...role it prescribes," (162). According to Kunda, professionals engage in "role distancing" and "role embracement" – a way to actively manage one's thoughts and feelings. Role embracement involves displaying loyalty to the company, taking ownership of one's career, showing commitment and dedication to one's work – ultimately, fulfilling demands and expectations of the ideal worker norm while pursuing worker success, much as respondents in this study do.

However, role embracement, says Kunda, is a "limited reality," as role distancing is a simultaneous "declaration of autonomy, an emphasis on free choice and open exchange" (188). Kunda explains that professionals declare their freedom from control by observing, analyzing and critiquing organizational culture. In this way, one demonstrates that they are "autonomous enough to know what is going on and dignified enough to express that knowledge," (178). My findings clearly demonstrate that professionals, as they conform to

the ideal worker norm, also distance themselves from it through their attitude of ambivalence. Professionals' expressions of misgivings about often prioritizing work over non-work obligations, feeling uncertain about the merit of their choices, shows the "limited reality" of embracing the ideal worker norm, as does their uncertainty about whether they truly aspire to the ideal career path. Respondents' critical assessments of aspects of the ideal worker norm (e.g. expectations for long work hours or unpredictability) and their criticism of the general work culture is a way to demonstrate their ability to "be in the know" and thus declare their freedom from the ideal worker norm. Moreover, respondents' declarations of autonomy, whether manifested through declaring "essentials" in one's personal lives that they will not give up or asserting one's *own choice* to conform to the ideal worker norm as they seek to garner explicit rewards, is a way to distance oneself from the control the ideal worker norm exerts. Indeed, these declarations of autonomy are a way to assert one's *own* control over the *way* or the extent to which they conform to the ideal worker norm. This is a significant way to distance oneself from the ideal worker norm, as it is a matter of laying claim over one's own inner self: their thoughts, feelings, internal motivations and desires – the very site that cultural strategies of control attempt to manipulate to elicit the work efforts of professionals.

Thus, findings from this study clearly demonstrate that professionals distance themselves from the ideal worker norm, maintaining an attitude of ambivalence towards it. Yet, workers also revealed their internal commitment to work, especially as it relates to perceived rewards, such as promotions and handsome financial compensation as well as *symbolic rewards*, as Kunda (1992) calls them. These include the intellectual stimulation of their work, variety, and constant change which combats boredom. Respondents discussed the importance of being engaged with smart and talented colleagues and enjoy the sense of

accomplishment that accompanies the kind of work professionals perform. For respondents, work is far more than means to an end, but rather is an end in itself. Thus, to be sure, one can argue that the ideal worker norm, as a cultural strategy of control, subtly yet powerfully elicits the work efforts of professionals. However, I assert that one cannot argue that professionals are completely acted upon, but instead *consent* to their work, *incurring costs while also accruing benefits and rewards* (Burawoy 1979).

V.D *Gendered Responses to the Ideal Worker Norm*

Professionals provided a rich and deeply nuanced description of their perceptions of the ideal worker norm and their response to it. This subjective experience of the ideal worker norm is also a gendered experience. The ideal worker norm is widely acknowledged to be a masculine norm (Blair-Loy 2001, Kelly et al. 2010, Padavic and Reskin 2002, Williams 2000, 2010). Moreover, the workplace itself is gendered, designed by men and to their benefit (Blair-Loy 2001, Padavic and Reskin 2002, Williams 2000, 2010). In this way, at the outset of the study, I expected professionals' response to the ideal worker norm to vary between men and women. What I found is that men and women respondents reveal a great deal of similarity in their perceptions of and response to the ideal worker norm. In particular, men and women both make the choice to conform to the ideal worker norm. Women respondents are ambitious, dedicated to their careers, and determined to succeed. Additionally, both men and women respondents maintain an attitude of ambivalence to the ideal worker norm. For both men and women, this attitude of ambivalence is multi-faceted. However, alongside the shared experience of the ideal worker norm a great deal of variation in men's and women's attitude of ambivalence is also apparent.

Overall, women experience, in my estimation, a greater amount of inner conflict towards the ideal worker norm. Women experience emotional consequences in response to

the ideal worker norm, in a way that men do not. In particular, women experience feelings

of guilt, worry, anxiety and a general sense of "stress." These feelings are not only in

response to the demands and expectations of home (e.g., spending time with a spouse) *but*

also in response to the demands and expectations of work. Women's discussion revealed a sense of

being "torn" between these two spheres of life – work and non-work. They also talked

about a concern over letting others down, whether in their personal lives or workplaces.

Men, unlike women, did not talk about the emotional consequences of the ideal

worker norm. This is not to say that the demands and expectations of their careers are

inconsequential to men. However, they simply did not speak at length about the emotional

consequences of the ideal worker norm, whether in their work lives or non-work lives.

Moreover, men did not talk about fears of letting others down – whether those others are

family, friends or colleagues.

How are we to interpret women's emotional response to the ideal worker norm? I

posit that the ideology of gendered spheres powerfully shapes both women's and men's lives

and provides insight into gendered differences in professionals' attitude of ambivalence.

Padavic and Reskin (2002) assert that while women represent nearly half of the paid labor

force, the ideology of separate spheres, in which women's "proper" place is in the home and

men's "proper" place is in the paid world of work, remains a pervasive and powerful cultural

force shaping the way professionals think about and understand work.

Blair-Loy (2001) breaks this ideology down into two cultural schemas: the "work

devotion" schema and the "family devotion" schema. The work devotion schema, which

summons men to consuming, demanding careers, is a "middle-class, masculine, twentieth

century model of devotion to a managerial career that helps shape managers' commitment

and employers' expectations" (Blair-Loy 2001:690). Conversely, the family devotion schema

calls women to bear full responsibility for care of the household and family, and is predicated on the assumption that women's husbands will provide them with necessary financial support and social status.

In Blair-Loy's (2001) study of women in high-finance, she finds that while some respondents were not able to pursue both a demanding career and family life (and thus remained childless and sometimes unmarried as well), other respondents attempted to re-shape the family devotion schema, adopting a distanced parenting style and outsourcing domestic duties. While these women thus pursued both a demanding career and family life, Blair-Loy found that women's re-shaping of the family devotion schema remains limited – they not only experience misgivings and inner conflict over the choices they've made they also *remained ultimately responsible for household and caregiving duties*. Likewise, Stone's (2007) study of women professionals who have opted out of their demanding careers demonstrates that women would have preferred to pursue their careers, but felt "forced" out of their jobs (e.g., due to the negative career consequences they experienced after becoming mothers). In this way, these women were unable to successfully negotiate the work devotion schema and the family devotion schema, showing how the ideology of separate spheres has significantly shaped these highly-educated, professional women's career decisions.

Likewise, my findings show that women respondents' response to the ideal worker norm is shaped by the ideology of gendered separate spheres, and its corresponding work devotion and family devotion schemas. I assert that women professionals' misgivings, inner conflict and emotions in response to conforming to the ideal worker norm are rooted in the notion that they are expected to be ideal workers in their careers but they are also expected to remain fully responsible for home and family life. Women worry about letting others down, not fulfilling the expectations of friends and family in their personal lives. Glavin et al.

(2011) find that while both men and women experience stress and dissatisfaction with "boundary-spanning" work, it is women alone who experience feelings of guilt in response to competing work and home demands. As Glavin et al. explain, guilt is an emotion that is rooted in the sense that someone has "done something bad," that they have acted in a non-normative manner. Glavin et al. attribute women's feelings of guilt to "role conflict" between the family devotion schema and the work devotion schema. Thus, because of the expectations that the ideology of separate spheres places on women for bearing full responsibility of home, the demands of work and the choice to fulfill these demands may cause women to negatively assess their performance in their non-work sphere of life and results in feelings of guilt when women don't fulfill the expectations of their "proper" place.

Notably, only 2 women in the study had children at the time of their interviews and consequently have childrearing responsibilities. Yet, women without children still experience deep misgivings, inner conflict and emotional consequences in response to the ideal worker norm. For these women, current childcare responsibilities are not an issue – but their *anticipated* childcare responsibilities are. Moreover, women who do not currently have children still spoke of other caregiving responsibilities that they currently handle. For example, women explained they are responsible for such duties as buying gifts for extended family members – both their own extended family and their partners' families. di Leonardo (1987) explains that "kin-work" is *women's* work. "Kin-work" represents the labor involved in maintaining extended family and friend relationships, such as making phone calls, sending cards, arranging holidays, celebrating birthdays, and so on. Therefore, women do not need to be mothers to experience caregiving responsibilities and expectations in their personal lives.

Not only does the ideology of separate spheres dictate the "proper" work of men and women (men's being paid and women's being unpaid), but the ideology of separate spheres perpetuates and reinforces cultural conceptions of "femininity" and "masculinity" (Padavic and Reskin 2002, Williams 2000, 2010). Women are expected and supposed to be "nurturing, expressive, and responsive to the needs of others, naturally suited to homemaking and emotion work required by secretaries, flight attendants, and nurses," (Williams 2010: 78). On the other hand, men are expected and supposed to be "independent, ambitious, and competitive, naturally suited to market work and the breadwinner role," (Williams 2010:78). Masculine norms of what a successful worker acts like put women in a "double bind," (Williams 2000, 2010). What is perceived as assertiveness and competitiveness (highly valued in the workplace) in a man can be seen as overt aggressiveness and shameless self-promotion in a woman (Williams 2010). Pierce's (1995) study of women in the law profession carefully details how women lawyers experience such a double bind. She demonstrates how professional women are expected to be ideal workers (fulfilling masculine norms) but are also expected to remain nurturing, caring and responsive to others – to be true to their gender identity.

I assert that women's feelings of guilt, worry and anxiety in response to meeting the expectations and demands of others *at work*, not just in their non-work sphere of life, are also rooted in the ideology of separate spheres and the cultural conceptions of femininity and masculinity that it perpetuates. I make no attempt to settle the debate on whether women are *actually* other-oriented, or whether all women share an ethic of care and are relationship-focused (Williams 2000). I do, however, posit that *expectations* for women to be other-centric, rooted in the fact that notions of femininity are equated with domesticity, shape not only women's understanding of their performance in their non-work lives *but also*

of their performance at work. As such, I suspect that women's feelings of guilt, worry and anxiety over not meeting the expectations and demands of work colleagues are shaped by broader cultural expectations for women to meet the needs of others. In this way, the ideology of separate spheres, and the cultural notions of femininity and masculinity that it perpetuates, shapes and constrains how women should function while they are *at* work and home and shape and constrain the decisions they make *about* work and home.

In sum, the ideology of separate spheres greatly complicates women's understanding of their work and the choices they've made. As such, I assert that it exacerbates their attitude of ambivalence toward the ideal worker norm, over and above their male counterparts. Indeed, we see this in women respondents' tendency to transfer responsibility for managing the demands of work and the subsequent work/life conflict onto themselves. As women struggle to make sense of contradictory expectations (being an ideal worker yet fully responsible for caregiving duties), they may seek explanations within themselves to settle the apparent contradictions of these competing roles.

Despite the persistence of the ideal worker norm, many women, such as the respondents in this study, still find the trade-offs worthy to make. As Padavic and Reskin (2002) explain, the ideology of separate spheres denies women the rewards of paid work and relegates women to performing the "socially invisible and devalued tasks of housekeeping and childrearing" (28). Thus, even if juggling both a career and family is a challenge, women want to work. My findings show that women respondents emphasize that it is important to work. Justifying the choice to conform to the ideal worker norm makes particular sense in light of the ideology of separate spheres. Women respondents explain that it is important to maintain an independent, adult self and they enjoy the rewards of work. They also emphasize the importance of being financially self-sufficient, able to support oneself, in light

of life's uncertainties, such as the demise of a marriage or job loss. Thus, women maintain

that one's very well-being necessitates and justifies having a career. Men, on the other hand,

did not speak about the importance of having a career, specifically. They did, however,

speak of the importance of financially providing for a family. However, men live in a world

where it is assumed they will work and the alternatives are few and far between.

Emphasizing the importance of maintaining an independent, adult self is not necessary nor is

asserting the importance of working to be self-sufficient.

These findings are consistent with Gerson's (2011) recent study on young men's and

women's attitudes towards work and family. Gerson finds that both men and women agree

on the difficulty of meeting the demands of work and families and that both seek an ideal of

being in an egalitarian partnership. However, facing the realities of life and the potential that

their ideal may not be achievable, they revert back to the ideology of separate spheres when

making sense of this reality. Gerson notes that:

> "Young men shares women's doubts about their chances of striking a good balance
> between earning and caring, but they experience this conflict in a different way. If
> women worry about the economic, social, and psychological risks of depending too
> much on someone else, men are more apprehensive about their financial ability to
> support others," (2011:159).

She finds that while women's ideal is to be in an egalitarian partnership, if this is not possible,

they espouse a desire for self-reliance – to be able to independently support oneself and any

dependents one may have. Men, like women, seek an ideal of an egalitarian partnership, but

to the extent such an ideal proves elusive, men maintain a position of "neotraditionalism," in

which women bear the primary responsibility of caretaking and men's primary worry is being

able to financially support a household.

Like Gerson's respondents who wish for an egalitarian ideal, male respondents in

this study also expressed their wishes to take on caregiving duties. Harrington et al.'s (2011)

recent study on fatherhood among professionals also shows that men wish to have more caretaking responsibilities. Even so, Harrington et al. found that men do not have similar perceptions of career consequences for becoming a father (as mothers often do) nor do they readily consider alternatives to full-time, traditional work. Thus, Harrington et al.'s research still demonstrates that despite some change, the work/family interface remains a gendered experience for both men and women. Indeed, respondents' discussion of the ideal worker norm, their response to it and the gender differences which emerge reveal the ways in which work has clearly changed in recent decades. Women professionals, just like men, are ambitious and determined. They describe a similar ideal worker norm and exhibit a similar response – choosing to conform to the ideal worker norm. Likewise, both men and women possess an attitude of ambivalence in response to the ideal worker norm. However, as gender differences in professionals' attitude of ambivalence show, the persistence of an ideology of separate spheres continues to shape men's and women's experiences as professionals.

VI.   Conclusion

Detailing professionals' subjective work experience of the ideal worker norm has been described elsewhere as an "elusive" process (Kunda 1992). Having people describe culture (e.g., the ideal worker norm) and their interaction with it (e.g., the response to the ideal worker norm) is not necessarily a straightforward endeavor. Moreover, professionals response to the ideal worker norm, both what they do and what they think, is filled with internal conflict, contradictions and uncertainties. However, equipped with professionals' rich descriptions of their work experience, I have been able to show that, from respondents' perspective, an ideal worker norm pervades the work experiences of professionals in high-status occupations, *irrespective* of their specific field and organization. I have likewise shown

that professionals largely conform to the ideal worker norm and, more specifically, its demands and expectations. However, professionals' choice to accept the demands and expectations of their careers is not an unequivocal endorsement or embracement of the ideal worker norm. Rather, professionals' conform to the ideal worker norm while simultaneously adhering to an attitude of ambivalence. While pursuing worker success professionals' maintain distance from the ideal worker norm in their thoughts and feelings. Professional attempt to exert their own control over *the way* they conform to it, yet also enjoy the rewards of their work. As Kunda (1992) explains, "Inherent in a system of normative control is a contradiction between the requirements" of what one actively does in response to demands and how one maintains an internal sense of self (214).

Professionals' description of the ideal worker norm and their response to it reveal the effectiveness of cultural strategies of control in eliciting the work efforts of professionals. Just as Edwards' (1979) has argued elsewhere, part of this effectiveness is rooted in the manner in which the ideal worker norm fosters professionals' work efforts via their own internal motivation and desire to succeed. Furthermore, the combination of a cultural definition of worker success and bureaucratic modes of control proves to be powerful. Indeed, professionals described the lure and seductiveness of their work, demonstrating both the internalization of its demands and its rewards. As one respondent said:

> …sometimes you wake up, and you're like, 'What I'm I doing? Like seriously, what am I doing?' Like I've just, you know, worked a 1000 hours of overtime, and then you think, am I getting paid for this? Well no, so what's the point? But then you realize, that, oh well, you get your bonus and you're gonna get promoted. So then it becomes worth it…it's almost like, you know, they throw you something and then you latch on to it. And then, you know, you start to wonder, but 'Oh, no…they give you something'…

Professionals cannot be seen as entirely disempowered or acted upon. Rather, professionals' explanations of their response to the ideal worker norm reveal the ways in which they *consent* to their work. As Burawoy (1979) has previously argued, such consent is a

powerful way to mask organizations' coercive nature. Nonetheless, to deny the subjective work experience of professionals – to see them as entirely acted upon – is to provide an incomplete picture of the organization of work. Smith (1994) has noted this as well, arguing that overlooking the subjective experience of workers themselves – as told from their own perspective – is not just an "empirical omission" but a "conceptual blindness to the possibility that workers could reshape, appropriate, and temper modes of managerial control" (406).

This study has not only set out to examine professionals' response to the ideal worker norm but also to show that this response is a gendered one. I have found that there is remarkable similarity in men's and women's experience of the ideal worker norm, both in their practical response (choosing to conform to the ideal worker norm) and in the various facets of their attitude of ambivalence towards the ideal worker norm. However, despite similarities in their attitude of ambivalence there are also important gendered differences which speak to the persistence of the ideology of gendered separate spheres which continues to shape the subjective experiences of both women and men. The ideology of separate spheres makes for very difficult choices for women. Yet even so, many women professionals still desire to pursue demanding careers. Not only does the ideology of separate spheres place women in a difficult position, but for men, who's roles at homes are changing (although, perhaps not in a dramatic fashion), managing both demanding careers and their own expectations for the type of person they wish to be in their non-work lives becomes increasingly difficult. Furthermore, as women pursue careers, men's ability to adhere to a traditional work devotion schema becomes increasingly difficult as it is built on the assumption that male workers have female partners devoted managing their non-work lives.

VI.A *Study Limitations and Future Research*

Due to the small sample size, the findings of this study are not generalizable to a larger population of urban professionals working in high-status occupations. Moreover, this study examined professionals of a certain age group and living in two specific geographic locations, thereby limiting any inferences that can be made of professionals of different ages or living in other geographic locations (particularly outside of metropolitan areas in either the US or Canada). Finally, because this study sought to understand the ideal worker norm *from respondents' perspective*, the data is "self-reported." Thus, I cannot independently verify the accuracy of their accounts of the ideal worker norm in their workplaces. An investigation using participant-observation of the ideal worker norm in the actual workplaces of respondents would provide a complimentary account of the ideal worker, independent of respondents' perceptions.

An important strength of this study is that it assesses the ideal worker norm, from respondents' perspective, *across a number of organizations*. I cannot, however, assess how any of these organizations actively cultivate their organizational culture, an important area of research in the study of strategies of worker control. Another important strength of this study is that it examines professionals' response to the ideal worker norm in an age group for whom these issues are most salient. Nonetheless, examining the response of professionals who have just entered the professional workforce (e.g., recent college graduates) or of older professionals (e.g., those in their 40s) would allow us to assess how professionals' subjective experience of the ideal worker norm is shaped by age and life stage. Moreover, it would also us to assess whether gender differences in the response to the ideal worker norm remain consistent or manifest themselves in others ways based on age. Interviewing professionals in other geographic locations, such as smaller cities or in other

countries would provide insight into the extent that geography shapes professionals' perceptions of, and response to, the ideal worker norm. Finally, this study specifically examined professionals working primarily in professional services settings. Research into the ways an ideal worker norm functions as a strategy of control, and whether the experience of it is gendered, in other professions where highly-educated individuals work, such as medicine, would also be a worthy pursuit.

VI.B *Final Thoughts*

As many changes in men's and women's experience of work have occurred in recent decades, and as the professionals' work continues to be characterized by high intensity, continuing to trace the subjective work experience of professionals is an important line of inquiry. What kinds of changes will continue to take place in the workplace and in professionals' non-work lives? The findings of this study have revealed the ways in which the ideology of separate spheres has continued to shape and constrain women's response to the ideal worker norm. However, as expectations for men's role at home continue to shift, examining men's response to the ideal worker norm, in light of such changing expectations, will be an important area of research. It remains to be seen whether the ideology of gendered separate spheres will continue to persist and pervade the professionals' experience of work and home. Is it possible that the ideology of separate spheres will shift, and if so, in what ways? Will the work devotion and family devotion cultural schemas be modified or tempered? And if the ideology of separate spheres changes in any way, who will benefit – men, women or both?

Moreover, what are the reasons that motivate professionals to pursue demanding careers? What does their work mean to them? While glimpses into the meaning of professionals' work are interwoven throughout the findings, I have not attempted to give

voice to the meaning of work to professionals. Doing so would undoubtedly provide a more holistic representation of professionals' subjective experience of work.

Research into professionals' experience of the ideal worker norm and the responses they have towards it is, at its core, an examination of workers' subjective experience of a strategy of control. Therefore, we might also ask what the implications of such research are for workplaces. Can the goals of organizations be met while simultaneously changing the way we work, such that professionals can experience more rewarding careers and fulfilling personal lives? Can the interests of organizations and their workers be aligned? Or are they fundamentally at odds with one another and ultimately irreconcilable? To be sure, a central feature of the experience of professional work, for men and women alike, is not just an encounter with the ideal worker norm, but the struggle with it as well. And this struggle, while common to both men and women professionals, is experienced in gendered ways. As Kunda (1992) writes, professionals experience the problem of control within their private lives, and moreover, within their inner selves, as they become part of the "contested terrain" (221) on which the conflict between capital and labor plays out.

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VIII. Tables and Appendices

Table 2: Respondent Characteristics

Respondent Pseudonym	Gender	Occupation	City Location	Credentials	Marital/Partner Status	Children?	Hours Worked/Week (Range When Applicable)
Julia	F	Lawyer	Toronto	BA, JD	Married	Expecting	45 hrs.
Dylan	M	Accountant	Toronto	BA, MBA, CMA	Married	Expecting	50 – 70 hrs.
Audrey	F	Lawyer	Toronto	BA, JD	Partner	No	43 hrs.
Lucas	M	Investment Banker	Toronto	BA, MBA	Single	No	75 – 80 hrs.
Caroline	F	HR Professional	Toronto	BA, CHRP (expected)	Married	No	50 – 65 hrs.
Justin	M	Consultant	Toronto	BA	Married	No	45 – 60 hrs.
Thomas	M	Investment Banker	New York	BBA, MBA	Married	No	100 hrs. (more possible)
Jessica	F	Lawyer	New York	B.Eng., JD	Engaged	No	60 hrs. (70 – 80 hrs. some weeks)
Austin	M	Finance Professional	New York	BComm, MBA	Single	No	60 – 65 hrs.
Bethany	F	Finance Professional	New York	BBA	Single	No	60 – 90 hrs.
Charlotte	F	Accountant	Toronto	BComm, CA	Married	Yes	48 – 60 hrs. (75 hrs. possible)
Oliver	M	Engineer	New York	BBA, M.Eng.	Single	No	50 – 60 hrs. (100+ hrs., infrequently)

Table 2 Continued: Respondent Characteristics

Respondent Pseudonym	Gender	Occupation	City Location	Credentials	Marital/Partner Status	Children?	Hours Worked/Week (Range When Applicable)
Josh	M	Accountant	Toronto	BA, MS (Physics), CA	Married	Expecting	50 – 80 hrs.
Marissa	F	Consultant (former Accountant)	Toronto	BComm, CA	Partner	No	50 – 55 hrs. (up to 80 hrs. at times)
Patricia	F	Accountant	Toronto	BComm, CA	Married	Yes	45 – 60 hrs. (up to 75 hrs. infrequently)
Kate	F	Consultant (former Accountant)	Toronto	BComm, CA	Partner	No	50 – 60 hrs. (100 hrs. possible)
Mike	M	Accountant	Toronto	BComm, CA	Married	No	50 – 60 hrs. (75 hrs. possible)
Natalie	F	HR Professional	Toronto	BA, HR Mgmt Certificate, CHRP (expected)	Partner	No	50 – 60 hrs. (above 60 hrs. possible)
Lucy	F	Consultant	Toronto	BS, MS (Nursing), PMP	Single	No	55 – 75 hrs. (additional time spent travelling)
Elliot	M	Finance Professional	New York	BComm	Married	Expecting	60 – 70 hrs. (more possible)

Appendix A: Interview Guide

<div align="center">Interview Guide</div>

PI: Julie L. Armstrong – Graduate Student, Department of Sociology, Emory University

Thank you for meeting with me today. This interview, as you may well know, is about your experiences as a working professional. I would like to learn more about your career history and your current work, in addition to discussing how your work and your life outside of work possibly conflict given all of the competing demands and pressures you may find placed upon you. I am interested in the ways you try to negotiate these competing demands. Do you have any questions for me before we begin? As we already discussed, you can ask me any questions you life during the interview and you may choose to decline answering any of my questions.

Part A: Introduction – Job History, Current Position, Family Situation

To start, I'd just like to discuss a bit about your background – your current work, your

education, your family status, etc.

1. Can you walk me through your career history/path? For example, maybe you could begin with your first job after college and walk me through your path to this job.

2. What is the highest degree you hold?

3. What is your current job title and how long have you held your current position?

4. Can you describe your current position for me: your role and responsibilities (including a brief description about staff level, organization structure, number of employees the participant manages, and to whom the participant reports)?

5. How many hours, on average, do you work each week?

6. What about your current family situation? Are you married or do you have a serious partner?
   a. If NO, *SEE LAST SECTION*
   b. If YES,
      i. How long have you been married (or living together)?

ii. Do you have any children? (how many, ages, genders)

iii. Can you tell me about your spouse/partner's job/career?

Part B: Current Job Experience – The "Ideal Worker," Workplace Culture and Attempts to Manage Work-Life Conflict

7. So you told me a little about your current role. Can you tell me about the things that initially attracted you to this line of work and what you like about your work?

8. Is there anything that you particularly dislike about your work?

    a. For both likes and dislikes, can you give me any examples?

9. I'm curious about what a 'successful' career path looks like at your company? For example, in law firms, a successful career path might mean that you begin as an associate and 'move up the ladder' and within a certain number of years ultimately "make partner." Does your workplace have a similar kind of 'track' or 'model' of what it means to be successful, to "make it"?

10. How do you feel about this career path model?

11. What do you think it takes to "get ahead" in your organization? What kind of person – or worker – are they looking for in a high-perfomer? For example, what are the sorts of things you need to do to get the next promotion?

(This is likely to include explicit expectations like having a certain number of 'high-profile' client assignments/job assignments, working for certain kinds of individuals at the company, displaying certain technical skills, spending a specific number of years in a role. There will also be more subtle, less obvious things (but likely *just* as important) like having a certain leadership style, being perceived as 'committed' or the 'go-to guy' at work. This will vary with the type of job and organization the participant works for, but each participant will likely have a good idea of 'what it takes' at their company. I will not provide any initial prompts for the participant, so as to get their perspective – however, if they need some clarification I will give them some examples similar to those mentioned here).

    a. Are the qualities of a "high-performer" or someone that is really going to succeed and "get ahead" made obvious? How does one know what they are supposed to do to "get ahead"? Does anyone tell you explicitly *"This is what*

you need to do; this is what we are looking for" OR is it something you just know, you just "figure out"?

    b. For those who have "made it," how do you think they did it? How did they figure out what to do to get a promotion or reach or certain level?

12. Do you have a Blackberry for work purposes?

    a. If YES, can you tell me about your Black berry usage? How often do you check it outside of normal work hours? For what purposes OR why is that so?

    b. If NO, is there any particular reason you don't have one?

13. Many professionals today talk about the 'demands' placed upon them at work – for example, the expectation to be "on-call, 24/7" (e.g., some say they feel compelled to always be checking their blackberry and that when they receive an email, they should answer it right away, even if it is Saturday evening). Can you describe the expectations you feel at work in terms of when/where/to whom you must be available?

14. Are any of these expectations made really obvious to you (for example, are they explicit rules or does someone tell you what's expected)? Or is this something you "just know" – a general pressure of which you are simply aware?

    a. If it's something you "just know," how do you become aware of the expectations? For example, how would someone who is completely new to the company and/or the position learn about these kinds of things?

(One example could be that you learn about expectations of "face time" when you leave the office at 5:30 pm and someone looks at their watch and says, "Heading home?" You are not officially or explicitly reprimanded for violating an official rule, but you still have the sense you clearly violated 'something' – this case, what is basically a norm or an element of the workplace culture).

15. How do you feel about this? What do you, or the other people you work with, think about the workers who always fulfill these kind of expectations (e.g., of availability)?

16. What do you and/or other people at your office think about the workers who *don't* fulfill those kinds of expectations?

17. What kinds of responsibilities and demands (e.g., child care, elder care, time with spouse) do you have outside of work? (These might not even be "responsibilities" or "demands" but could simply be time for self, for hobbies, etc.).
    a. If participant has spouse/partner and/or children: how do you divide housekeeping, child care, etc. with your spouse/partner?
    b. Do you think you two have a pretty good system, or do you think one (or both) of you feel the other could be a better help at home?

18. Are the people you work for understanding and respectful of your need to balance these demands with work?

19. Does your company offer any workplace policies that help foster work-life balance for their employees? Do you take advantage of these policies? What kind of person at your office uses (or doesn't use) these policies?

20. So, overall, how do you manage to balance everything?

(While I will not initially provide any prompts, I expect participants to talk about ways they balance things both explicitly and more subtly – for example, some might actually take advantage of workplace policies designed to improve work-life flexibility others may find very covert ways to manage things and keep the conflict between work and life hidden from colleagues and supervisors).

21. Do you think you are doing a pretty good job of balancing all of these competing demands?
    a. Can you give me an example of a time when you felt you successfully balanced competing demands and a time when you feel you weren't able to balance competing demands?
    b. Do you have any examples of when you felt you had to choose between two important things (e.g., work and something outside of work)? How did you make your choice?

22. Do you think your ability to balance competing demands, or the way you go about it, can have an impact on your career path? In what ways?

23. Does all of this work-life conflict cause you to feel stressed?

24. How do you think balancing these demands (and your ability to do so) impacts yours family members or other relationships outside of work?

25. Do you think your workplace should change?
    a. If yes, is change possible?

Part C – Meaning of Work

26. So, we have talked a lot about the demands of work and how these can conflict with life outside of work, but I would like to revisit some of our initial conversation about your likes and dislikes in your current work. What motivates you to do this work?

27. Do you feel any sense of fulfillment by your work?
    a. If yes, can you explain this to me? What about your work is fulfilling? If you were to lose your job or leave this line of work, what might be missing in your life?
    b. If no, do you wish your work was fulfilling? Or maybe better put, should work be a source of fulfillment for individuals? Are there other things in your life that you get fulfillment from?

28. Does part of your identity come from your work? In other words, when you think about your sense of self – maybe, when you describe yourself to someone for the first time – does your work play a significant factor in shaping who you are and how you think about yourself? Do you think your work plays an important part of how others think about you?

For those without a partner/spouse:

29. Do you think you will get married one day?

      a. If yes, do you think this will change your approach to work? Will you have to change the way you do your work?

            i. If yes, what kinds of changes do you think you will have to make and does this concern you?

For those with a partner/spouse:

30. I asked earlier about your spouse's job/career:

      a. If your spouse does work, do your think your spouse thinks about their work in the same kinds of ways you do? E.g., is it as equally important to her?

            i. If no, is this influenced at all by the kind of work you do?

      b. If your spouse does not work, is this influenced at all by the kind of work you do? For example, some couples say it would be too hard to have children and for both spouses to have very demanding jobs, so one spouse may choose to "step off the fast track".

Part D - Conclusion:

31. Before we wrap up, is there anything else you wanted to share – either related to something we've already discussed or something new you wanted to raise?

32. Do you have any questions for me?

33. If I need to contact you again in the future, for example, to clarify something in our conversation, is that okay?

34. Do you have any suggestions of somebody else that you think I should interview, that in your estimation might be open to being interviewed?

Thank you so much for your time today. It has been really interesting talking to you.