HIGH-LEVEL PROFESSIONAL WOMEN IN THE LEGAL DOMAIN AND THEIR UNIQUE UTILIZATION OF THEIR PROFESSIONAL IT-BASED WORK CALENDARS: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This paper provides an empirical examination into a particular way in which a number of high-level professional women in the legal domain utilize their IT-based (onscreen) work calendars. The study, spanning just over a 10 year period, covers North American and British law firms and in-house legal departments of private sector companies.

To start, the IT-based (onscreen) work calendar is the 'lead' medium and discourse focus point where much of the professional legal women's daily, weekly and monthly work 'life' is fixed and maintained in written form. Added to this information, can be a significant amount of information regarding activities of primary group (family) members.

This author analysis the choice of discourse and images inherent to the IT-based (onscreen) work calendar of a significant number of high-level professional women in the legal domain over the decade-long study. It draws on a number of principle analogies and concepts brought to light in Geser's study (2004) on the *Sociology of the Mobile Phone* (and the numerous findings of authors which Geser draws on within the same work).

The IT-based work calendar enables 'fits' or 'matches' of work flow, interface and organization within the work time and physical space as well as visualization of such information according to selected time frames. Nevertheless, in applying an interpretivist approach, the study aims to reveal subjective meaning and motivation as to why the high-level professional women's perception and operation of their respective IT-based work calendars within the legal domain differ in some fundamental ways to how this IT calendar tool is utilized. In this context, the paper will also apply Goffman's "presentation of self" in relation to how these professional women perceive their status set within the professional environment.

The focus of the paper will not be on the utilization of IT-based work calendars for professional purposes (such as setting up meetings, discussions, reminders) with secondary group members or for personal reasons in order to effectuate mutual activities or engage in bilateral communication with primary group members. Rather, the paper

will reveal the way in which a number of professional women, active in the legal domain, are involved in a unique utilization of their IT-based work calendars: they create and maintain nominal entries in their IT-based work calendar concerning their respective primary group (family) members activities and events, which are directed exclusively to themselves during their working time.

Through nominal entries in the IT-based work calendar, these professional women have devised an effective method on an emotive level, to allow their professional status to run parallel and as a complement to their maternal status. Consequently, they are able to harmonize their status set and roles (as both lawyer and mother). Moreover, this unique supplementary way of utilizing the IT-based work calendar, i.e. for *nominal* entries exclusively linked to primary group (family) members and their activities, enables these professional women to overcome, on a psychological level, tensions between statuses as well as role conflicts in relation to their professional and personal lives.

Keywords: gender communication differences; status expectations; social roles; role conflict; computer mediated communication; virtual communication; legal profession gender bias and gender schemas.

1. Technical aspects of the IT-based work calendar

Professional IT-based work calendars allow for the transfer of work responsibilities and activities into a tangible mode, i.e. on the computer screen. Individual work time and interchange or collaboration with others, activities and events can be framed within a set time and space. Indispensable and ubiquitous, the IT-based work calendar is operational both within and outside of the physical confines of the work environment. The professional IT-based work calendar uses can range from setting simple reminders, to organizing meetings and affirming meeting attendance, verifying (or even checking) on others to ascertain their availability, cancelling events, noting ideas to reflect on, or indicating tasks to undertake later.

Indeed, as with the professional mobile phone, the primary purpose of the IT-based work calendar is an instrumental one.[1] While both are indispensable in the professional environment to promote communication, socialization, interaction and synchronization of work procedures and activities, the IT-based work calendar has added advantages. Firstly, like the mobile phone, the IT-based work calendar is a "private space".[2] Yet, unlike the characteristics of the mobile phone which can be intrusive,[3] the IT-based work calendar has a wholly inconspicuous

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[1] Geser (2004), Towards a Sociological Theory of the Mobile Phone, p. 6.
[2] *Ibid.,* p. 6.
[3] *Ibid.,* p. 6, 18, 36-38.

presence, where even its calendar reminder '*bing*' does not disturb any flow of work, conversation or thought-process.

In addition, the IT-based work calendar can offer 'proof' of work activities, events, whereabouts of others, work schedules, and actions involved in coordinating discussing and collaborating on specific projects, themes or issues. In contrast, phone interactions for the most part do not leave a fixed trace (unless filming or recording), hence bilateral communication effectuated over the phone remains ephemeral.[4] With the IT-based work calendar, however, activities and interface can be created, fixed and maintained to generate actions such as individual or team collaboration, meetings and client calls, which in turn consolidate individual and group positions. Here, through the IT-based work calendar, individuals and groups can initiate, accept or cancel activities, and can transfer either directly or indirectly messages to others linked to the same scheduling or network organization. While the phone reveals social interactions within a present 'live' situation, the IT-based work calendar shows both the past 'lived' and the future 'live' interactions, be they once occurring or repeated events.

In addition, the IT-based work calendar is an integral part of the interrelations and power structure of many work organizations. Professionals are, to a greater or lesser extent, expected to maintain a certain IT-based work calendar presence in relation to secondary group members within the same organization. As a result, the IT-based work calendar can reflect the way in which the organization operates on a hierarchal basis. Those on upper management, VP and CEO levels might wish to maintain a symbolic distance to lower management figures in the company. Hence, their respective IT-based work calendar availability cannot be accessed through the calendar's scheduling assistant mode when company employees on a lower hierarchal status desire to set up meetings with company representatives on a higher one. This results, for example, in the need for lower level representatives to contact directly the executive assistants of the company's higher management for any scheduling requests. A similar process is inherent to the mobile phone, as Geser (2004) notes, whereby receivers are able to "maintain certain control over their accessibility" by filtering names in mobile phone contact lists or by intentionally not answering calls.[5]

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[4] *Ibid.,* p. 3. (Geser cites Aronsen (1977), p. 32)
[5] *Ibid.,* p. 15.

2. Setting the 'professional status' and the 'maternal status' in the IT-based work calendar

The organization of the IT-based work calendar can be interpreted as enabling a "presentation of self" (Goffman, 1959) to others; yet it can also realize a "presentation of self" to oneself. Thus, while the telephone is used in terms of "bilateral discourse"[6], the IT-based work calendar fulfils a dual function: it can connect with other parties directly, for example by setting up, accepting or declining meetings or by allowing a shared calendar view; it can also function as a link to the *self*, such as a reminder to the individual user regarding ideas or activities, manually entered in the IT-based work calendar at a certain point in time, to appear at a future point in time for action. The latter feature is of significance as discussed later on, when examining professional women's use of the IT-based work calendar.

As Geser points out in the *Sociology of the Mobile Phone* (2004), mobile phones are crucial in enabling social integration regardless of geographical mobility, distance and time difference[7]; emails and IT-based work calendars also operate on this basis. While all this technology has the ability to connect the individual with others, only the IT-based work calendar has a particular use over these other forms of technology (such as phones, emails, texts). Here, the IT-based work calendar can be used as an indispensable organizational tool to visualize activities and events over days, months and years regarding the professional self's involvement. Moreover, the IT-based work calendar can trace over time the professional self's interactions with secondary group members (meetings, discussions, conference calls). In sum, the IT-based work calendar is programmed to allow for visualization and assessment of work progress and interaction over the short-term and the long-term. In the course of work time, the individual can set secondary group interaction on a regular and an irregular basis throughout the IT-based work calendar. In this, the individual has considerable flexibility in the IT-based work calendar settings to undertake actions, which can influence the schedules of others, such as by initiating, accepting or declining events, or by postponing events to a later date.

While the IT-based work calendar functions to fix in time particular events for future realization, such as a meeting or a conference call which involves a form of bilateral communication, it can set an idea to be converted into individual action at a certain time and

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[6] *Ibid.,* p. 5.
[7] *Ibid.,* p. 7.

date, such as a task to initiate or finish. Above all, the IT-based work calendar is programmed specifically to transfer written discourse into a form of 'live' action at future point in time, whether on an individual or collaborative basis.

Taking the above features into account, a number of professional women utilize their IT-based work calendar for an additional purpose. Here, the professional woman must consciously override (in other words, ignore or deliberately overlook) the in-built automatic mechanism of the IT-based work calendar, which is set to indicate planning conflicts when users inadvertently juxtapose double entries (running parallel to each other). Indeed, the IT-based work calendar of these professional women reveal multiple calendar entries pertaining to the whereabouts and/or activities of primary group (family) members which these professional women have *consciously* juxtaposed (placed side by side and hence in time 'conflict') with other calendar entries relating to their professional activities.

Of added interest, is that the information in these specific IT-based work calendar entries, regarding primary group (family) members (many of which are set at the same time as professional work calendar entries) are purely *nominal*. In other words, the keywords do not act as reminders to ensure that the professional woman (who has entered the information in her IT-based work calendar) break her work flow to undertake specific actions in relation to her primary group members. Furthermore, these nominal calendar entries do not demand any reciprocal action from the primary group members indicated in the keywords. In short, the presence of this nominal information in the IT-based work calendar is counter to the calendar's logical utilization which exists as a 'live' connection, notably to initiate, or engage in, a certain action or process, either on an individual basis or with others, at a set point in time.

The keywords which these professional women use for their IT-based work calendar nominal entries make direct reference to the professional women's maternal status and roles. Hence, a lead lawyer's recurring block entry for her daughter's after school music and dance classes, along with her daughter's every Friday late afternoon hairdressing appointment – notably all at times when this particular professional woman is due in meetings or otherwise very occupied, and confined in space and time to her professional responsibilities. The situation ruled out any possibility for contact with her daughter – and in fact contact or any follow-up on this entry regarding her daughter's activities was neither desired nor undertaken by the professional woman.

Why do these professional women indicate in their IT-based work calendar the activities or whereabouts of their primary group (family) members which do not demand any interruption on their work rhythm, responsibilities or duties? In fact, why do these professional women note nominal IT-based work calendar entries, which, in the end, are often neither read nor even noticed by them when these nominal reminders (exclusively relating to their respective primary group members) show up on their computer screen while they are most likely busy with calls, in meetings or reviewing documents? Of interest in this context, is the significance behind this particular management of the IT-based work calendar, undertaken by a number of professional women in the legal domain, as an effective mode by which they can connect on an internal basis to their maternal status.

3. Use of the IT-based workplace calendar to discourse with the 'maternal status'

Geser (citing Puro 2002) notes that "mobile phones amplify pre-existing differences in social participation and integration". [8] An individual's lack of modern technology would be interpreted as the individual's (either desired or not) social marginalization, stuck in an anachronistic situation, out of time and out of place. The mobile phone therefore ensures that the individual can constantly remain within a "closed social field of familiar others: thus reinforcing a unified, coherent individual identity". [9]

While Geser explains the "sociology of the mobile phone" in terms of Goffman's "presentation of self" (Goffman, 1959) and "behaviour in public places (1963), whereby individuals use the mobile phone to convey specific impressions of themselves to others, [10] this illustration can be drawn upon to understand the way in which numerous professional women customize their IT-based work calendars. Here a particular "presentation of self" (s. supra) emerges through the written discourse in their IT-based work calendars, wherein keywords relating to multiple statuses and roles - both professional and personal - run parallel to each other. In this way, through the medium of the IT-based work calendar, the professional woman connects on an emotive level to her maternal status, whose existence is brought into relevance within her work time and space, and her daily work interactions.

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[8] *Ibid,* p. 8. (Geser cites Puro (2002), p. 28)
[9] *Ibid,* p. 9.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 95. (Geser cites Goffman (1963), 83; 85-86)

Geser affirms that the mobile phone conveys the ability for individuals to "reduce role strains and role fragmentations, typically generated by social environments and societal conditions".[11] Citing Palen/Salzman/Youngs (2001), Geser points out that the mobile phone represents a technical "umbilical cord", enabling mothers who are geographically separated from their children to contact them.[12] Geser furthermore draws on Rakow and Navarro (1993), to highlight the power of the mobile phone which allows individuals "to exist in their domestic and work worlds simultaneously … women are now working 'parallel shifts' rather than what has been described as the 'double shift'".[13]

Similarly, a number of these professional women in the legal domain utilize their work calendars as a type of indirect 'umbilical cord' to their children. Whereas the mobile phone has the potential, as a hand-held tool, to aid the individual to implement in real time "parallel shifts" (s. supra), the IT-based work calendar equally has the ability, as an on-screen software tool, to be utilized by these professional women in facilitating internal dialogue with the maternal status. Here, as empirical analysis in this study has shown, through their respective IT-based work calendar entries, these professional women combine emotive and cognitive processes to realize "parallel shifts" (s. supra), in which they link their professional status to their maternal one.

The use of double (or parallel) entries in the IT-based work calendar, wherein children's activities are set next to professional duties and responsibilities, allows for a harmonious and non-intrusive integration of the maternal status within the work environment. Although the IT-based work calendar will automatically show a 'conflicting' entry when two or more appointments are scheduled at the same time, the warning 'flag' of the IT-based work calendar does not 'invade' work space, work concentration or secondary group member interaction (contrary to the mobile phone ring which, Geser points out, can have a particularly intrusive effect on people's interactions and conversations).[14] These IT-based work calendar parallel entries (wherein the professional related entry is active and the primary group related entry is nominal) have a dual function for the professional woman: they maintain her work rhythm, interaction, activities and focus; they also represent a self-reaffirmation of her ability to maintain multiple statuses and roles during her daily work experience.

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[11] *Ibid.*, p. 12.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 12.(Geser cites Palen/Salzman/Youngs (2001))
[13] *Ibid.,* p. 14. (Geser cites Rakow and Navarro (1993), p. 153)
[14] *Ibid.*p. 36.

As the nominal entries of these professional women are exclusively focused on primary group members, often juxtaposed to professional entries (for example, an active entry indicating a client meeting set in time parallel to the nominal entry of a child's dancing lesson), they can be interpreted as effectively enabling professional women to discard potential daily discordant feelings. Here, the maternal status and role of mother re-emerge from the marginalized shadows and become symbolically integrated into her daily professional responsibilities and routine. This is not a 'balancing' act of opposites in which two spheres are 'juggled' against each other in the course of a work day or week. Rather, this process enables the realization of harmoniously integrating the primary group sphere into the secondary group professional environment, through the medium of information technology, namely the IT-based work calendar. This conscious dual-purpose management of the IT-based calendar can help the professional woman overcome feelings of dissipation and fragmentation towards primary group members, while remaining wholly focused on her professional responsibilities and secondary group interactions within her physical work space.

4. Applying 'impression management' in 'heroic' versus 'unheroic' work input

In many professions, long hours have become a type of pseudo-proxy for business operational success; in other words, there is often a misconception that overtime input is evidence of productive work methods. While this is not gender-related, but rather a general work issue, a gender-related association can nevertheless be found between these nominal entries featured in the professional women's IT-based work calendars (exclusively relating to their respective primary group members) on the one hand and the professional requirement to put in such so-called 'heroic' work hours on the other.

Applying Piwinger's et al concept of impression management, whereby a person intentionally creates and maintains a set of specific characteristics or impressions aimed at how the said individual wishes to be perceived and understood by the external environment,[15] this study notes that some professional women in the legal domain operate the IT-based work calendar for this purpose. Here, however, impression management" is created and maintained in written discourse (keywords) directed to the internalized maternal status rather than externally, at

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[15] Manfred Piwinger, Helmut Ebert (2001), "Impression Management: Wie aus Niemand Jemand wird". In: Bentele, Guenther *et al* (Ed.), *Kommunikationsmanagement: Strategien, Wissen, Lösungen*. Luchterhand, Neuwied.

individuals or for bilateral communication. Daily or weekly activities of the professional woman's children (set in her IT-based work calendar as running parallel to her professional activities) represent emotive links to her primary group members. Through this specific use of the IT-based work calendar, the professional woman can connect to the maternal status during her work time and within her physical working space. Accordingly, the professional woman is able to promote a unique impression management to her 'self' whereby her principle status sets - as professional and as maternal (including her role as mother) - all coexist to form her holistic and self-governing identity.

The IT-based work calendar is thus an instrument which can be activated by the professional woman to discourse on an emotive level with her maternal status. Even if the ability to communicate with primary group members is not possible or not desired, and the manual entry of primary member activities in the IT-based work calendar is purely nominal in form, the professional woman can satisfy her continual desire to provide care and nurture to her primary group (family) members as well as ensure for herself a sense of serenity in her capacity to combine multiple status sets and roles. Hence, the presence of nominal entries in the IT-based work calendar of a professional woman concerning primary group members (for example, a child's award event, a child's dancing competition or a child's dentist appointment) which can run at the same time as engagement in professional activities (for example, a commitment to a client call, meeting or conference, or an application to certain professional tasks) enables her to overcome feelings of physical, emotional and cognitive dislocation. While the professional woman's 'heroic' time input can convey 'heroic' impression management towards her secondary group, there is nonetheless a latent effect, namely prolonged physical separation from primary group members. Here, the presence of nominal entries in her IT-based work calendar concerning her primary group (family) members provides the professional woman with the required emotive link which mitigates the way in which she might feel that her 'heroic' overtime work could be contradictory and 'unheroic' towards her primary group members.

5. Ensuring emotive sense of control and fulfilment of primary group needs

Professional women can have a number of entries in the IT-based work calendars which relate to primary group (family) member events or issues that entail real interruption in their professional lives, such as early departure from work to pick up a child from school, or late

arrival to work due to taking a child to a doctor's appointment or absence from work due to a child's illness. Male professionals also utilize their IT-based workplace calendar in the same way, namely as a reminder to break work rhythm for external obligations towards primary group (family) members, such as taking a child to a sport's game or picking a child up from school. Yet, in no instance has this particular research revealed one case of a male professional in the legal domain utilize the IT-based work calendar for nominal 'reminders' regarding primary group member events, activities, whereabouts, responsibilities or tasks, which demand no action or intervention on the part of the male professional, and which exist merely as a non-intrusive IT work-based calendar feature, popping up at specific set times during a given work day or week.

In addition, this study gathered evidence that professional women often do not pay much attention to the nominal information in the IT-based work calendars which deal exclusively with primary group (family) members. In fact, the keywords are rarely noticed by these professional women when they appear on the computer screen as 'reminders' at the scheduled times (for example, *Clara's dance lesson, Dylan's sport's workout*). They can be highly involved in their professional duties, such as conference calls, meetings or otherwise absorbed, during which their immediate focus and field of concentration is removed from their IT-based calendar attention when their primary group members and related activities appear in written form.

Taking the above points into account, professional women can sense separation from their maternal status in two fundamental ways. Firstly, daily professional responsibilities and duties separate them (in physical distance and in ability to communicate) from their respective primary group members. Secondly, at the specific times, when certain activities of their respective primary group (family) members take place, professional women are in a way marginalized by those 'other women', with different statuses and roles, who, as nannies, caretakers, or as members of their extended families etc., ensure that the daily needs and activities of the professional women's children are taken care of. An interesting feature in the course of this decade long study, is that none of these professional women's IT-based work calendars acknowledges these 'other women' (who tend to the child's needs in different ways) in terms of keyword(s) or description(s) (such as the *nanny* who drives the child to the events, the *sister* who picks the child up from school, the *live-in housekeeper* who prepares the children's dinner, the after-school *dance teacher*, or the *hairdresser* etc.). Rather, the nominal

entries in the IT work-based calendar only indicate the child's name and activity or event taking place. Hence, these nominal calendar entries give the impression that the professional woman directly fulfils the tasks herself and is 'present' in the realization of these particular activities and events in relation to her primary group (family) members. In fact, there is no difference in the written discourse regarding primary group (family) members between those 'nominal entries' which require no action for the professional women (and which are at times effectuated by other women) on the one hand, and on the other hand, those 'active entries', which require action from the professional woman, for her to break her work rhythm and attend to a child's needs. Both entries are indicated in the same way (for example, *Clara dentist* or *Dylan sport's practice*).

While these professional women have achieved a leading position in their occupation, which allows for significant power and control over work processes and secondary group members, they remain nevertheless so to speak captive within their work space and time. The professional woman has lost a certain amount of control of her maternal status and of her role as mother during her working time which have been yielded to 'other women' with different status sets and roles, who in turn have specific direct or indirect responsibilities regarding the professional woman's children. Moreover, the professional woman cannot determine the realization of on-going activities of her primary group's (children's) activities during her work time. She is not able to exert the influence which she might desire at a given moment in time in relation to the external activities and whereabouts of her primary group (family) members; therefore, on a lingering conscious level or in the background of her mind, she might ask herself during her daily work activities, whether her child's hair cut was right, whether her child was taken on time to sport's training, or whether her child took a proper outfit for an after-school dance class.

By virtue of ensuring that family activities appear as nominal features in the IT-based work calendar during the day to day professional activities, these professional women (while physically apart from family members and focused on professional responsibilities) are able to maintain unbroken emotive interactive connections to primary group members and their respective activities. The professional woman's conscious omission in the IT-based work calendar of the personal names and roles of the 'other women' (nanny, caretaker, aunt, sister etc.) - who are nevertheless physically present and responsible for ensuring the smooth running of certain activities of the professional woman's children - reinforces the professional woman's

efforts and ability in establishing and maintaining her clear, unbroken and direct emotive control on actual undertakings and outcomes of her primary group (family) member activities or events.

6. Realizing the ability to *get around* within the confined professional space

High-level professional women can be under considerable scrutiny within their working time to avoid spending too much (or any) time on primary group (family) members and issues. In the legal profession, "time is money" - time is of the essence in both the ability to maximize capital intake and in the capacity to ensure legal deadlines are met (if not, penalties are incurred such as fewer clients, less remuneration or considerable work overload). Unlike some professions, where a higher professional status allows for significantly more leeway to plan and manage one's work time and activities, it can often be the reverse in the legal profession. The higher the professional legal status, the higher the responsibility to ensure capital for example, and in turn, the less flexibility to undertake activities which are not directly related to the professional responsibilities.

In similar manner, the higher the woman's professional legal status, the less likely she can devote time to family issues. Contacting primary group members during work time could easily give the impression to colleagues that there are issues with her ability to uphold an exceptional level of professional competency. The success of many legal companies or departments is very much based on relations with clients (this in turn determines to a large extent opportunities for promotion), and high-level professional women in the legal domain can be more sensitive than their male counterparts not to interrupt work time with primary group (family) member issues which cannot be billed, cannot generate networking potential, or which otherwise, from secondary group members' perception, cannot provide tangible benefits for a legal firm, legal department or company.

Palen/Salzman/Youngs (2001) (as cited by Geser) have noted the importance of the mobile phone usage in "'grooming calls' which have primarily (or even exclusively) a non-instrumental, socio-economical function: e.g. showing concern, solidarity and commitment, and articulating nearness, compassion, sympathy and love". As with their male counterparts, high-level professional women in the legal field often have IT-based work based calendars on constant overflow and are hard pressed to find even a few moments time to connect with

family members. These professional women without doubt strive to be fully engaged and integrated, and endeavour to convey to secondary group members, through their interface, work methods and competencies, that they are comfortable with the physical and socio-emotional distance towards primary group (family) members. Nonetheless, the nominal entries in the IT-based work calendars of a number of these professional women, regarding primary group (family) whereabouts and activities, reveal their desire to overcome the constraints of time, freedom and space which they can experience on a daily basis. These nominal entries function like the "grooming calls" of the mobile phone (s. supra), and convey what Licoppe/Heurtin (2002) (cited by Geser, 2004) show with short mobile phone calls to close individuals - "nearness, compassion, sympathy and love" (s. supra).

On a similar note, Geser refers to Bautsch et al (2001) that "if you are without mobile phone (…) means no one depends on you for urgent direction; no one wants to get in touch with you at all times (…) in short, not get-ting [sic] around all that much." Professional women in the legal domain are, for a good part of their work time, without much opportunity to use the ubiquitous technological gadgets and tools for bilateral communication to primary group (family) members. Even if readily available and visible on the office desk or computer desktop (mobile phone, social networking, texting, face time etc.), the restriction is due not only to a considerable lack of time but also to potential negative perceptions from secondary group members. As a professional woman's engagement and commitment can be questioned, if for example seen connecting with primary group members within work time and space, the professional woman's aim is to minimize – if not wholly remove – differences to male counterparts in the heavily competitive and mentally demanding legal profession.

Differences can be interpreted by secondary group members as 'stigmas', according to Yoshino's study (2006), and subsequently Yoshino and Smith's study (2014) "Uncovering Talent" (2013). Here, Yoshino and Smith affirm that the "concept of covering" in the workplace is an effective technique to eliminate any noticeable difference, effectuated in usually one of four ways: "appearance-based"; "affiliation-based"; "advocacy-based" or "association-based". Specifically, Yoshino and Smith define the concept "affiliation-based" as an individual's conscious avoidance of specific behaviours and actions (which are linked to an aspect of the individual's identity) in order to deflect potentially damaging stereotyping by secondary group members. Yoshino and Smith's example highlights that "a woman might avoid talking about being a mother because she does not want her colleagues to think she is

less committed to her work." Hence, the professional woman's exclusive use of nominal entries in her IT-based work calendar concerning activities of primary group members can be a form of compensatory behaviour in lieu of entering into direct contact with primary group members while in her work environment. At the same time, the professional woman can reinforce effective impression management, regarding her ability to focus and commit herself to the work load and responsibilities, on the level of her secondary group members, and perhaps more so, vis-à-vis her male counterparts.

As can be deduced, the place of high-level professional women in the legal domain can be an extremely lonely one. She cannot easily get in touch with her primary group (family) members and her demanding professional responsibilities encroach on her personal scope and time. Through the daily, weekly and monthly flow of nominal entries in the IT-based work calendar, these professional women can 'beam' themselves into a myriad of emotive links to their respective primary group (family) members at fixed calendar times and dates. Again, in many cases, the professional woman does not necessarily consciously notice the nominal entries as they pop up as calendar reminders at a particular scheduled time, being preoccupied on a client call, or participating in a meeting, or meticulously reviewing a document. Nevertheless, in manually 'placing' keywords concerning primary group (family) members in the form of nominal entries into her IT-based work calendar, the professional woman creates and retains 'snapshots' of her activities through this written discourse at hand. As a result, she is now "getting round" to use Bautsch's et al term (s. supra).

The professional woman's emotive experience to primary group members' activities can exist in a two-sequenced time frame: first, the present moment, both through the manual action of entering the nominal keywords into the IT-based work calendar and of setting the time at which the activity or event is due to occur; second, the result later on, conveyed by the IT-based work 'reminder' on-screen pop up. In both former and latter scenarios, the four office walls can give way to the emotive and internally visualized image of the child tapping in the dance class, or sitting in the hairdresser's salon, or training at the sport's arena. This time-fixed imaging of the whereabouts and activities of primary group (family) members, conveyed by written entries in the IT-based work calendar, imbues the professional woman with an inner sense of empowerment: she is able to get around, to be with her family and become a part of their activities, while nevertheless remaining within the confines of her physical work space, work time, work interaction and activities

7. Promoting parallel statuses and roles

Whereas the mobile phone has been shown to reinstate "fluid, casual modes of informal communication",[16] so the IT-based work calendar can be programmed to 'bing' in activities of close individuals, thereby re-establishing flexibility of communication, movement and connection among status sets and roles. Drawing on his own work and that of others, Geser details the diverse ways in which "cell phones help individuals to reduce role strains and role fragmentation, typically generated by highly complex social environments and societal conditions".[17]

The professional woman's operation of her IT-based work calendar functions in the same manner. Indeed, she can control her IT-based work calendar in such a way to reduce – if not eliminate - conflict among statuses and roles by manually setting on parallel time lines both active professional-based entries (which require physical presence, bilateral communication or task completion) and personal entries linked to her primary group (family) members. Some of these primary group related (personal) entries can function as active entries, requiring for example a physical or cognitive break in her work rhythm (such as leaving work early to take a child to the dentist, or needing to call a child). Other primary group related (personal) entries can be purely nominal in form with no requirement to break her work flow, simply indicating in keywords, for example a child's activity. In using the IT-based work calendar for active entries (on professional and personal levels) as well as for exclusively primary group related nominal entries, the professional woman transforms her office area into a multi-functioning sphere wherein professional and personal activities and events run side by side. Her impression management to her *self* is complete: hence, she creates and maintains her holistic identity - as a lawyer and as a mother – to co-exist within her work environment.

Drawing on Gillard's research, Geser remarks that:

each role demands one's physical presence at a specific place (workplace, private apartment, church, school etc.), reconciling different roles usually means: sequencing role involvements diachronically and taking the burden of frequent time-consuming locomotion. By providing the opportunity for flexible role switching without changing location, cell phones facilitate the harmonization of different role duties, because diachronic role change can be

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[16] Geser (2004), p. 11. (Geser cites Fox (2001))

[17] *Ibid.,* p. 14.

substituted by (almost) synchronous roles involvement and because frictional costs associated with time-consuming locomotional activities can be avoided (Gillard 1996). Thus, women can engage in 'remote mothering' at work or 'remote home' at work."[18]

Professionals in the legal domain must devote a considerable time on a daily basis on individual, colleague and client-focused work. The use of any interruptive tool for "bilateral communication" to facilitate a type of "synchronous roles involvement" (s. supra) with primary group members within the work environment can be extremely disruptive. Plant (2000) notes the same effect of the mobile phone which can "siphon concentration".[19]

The professional woman utilizes nominal entries in her individual IT-based work calendar as an emotive connection to primary group (family) members by consciously placing primary group activities parallel to her professional actions and tasks. In choosing this unobtrusive method to connect with primary group members, she can deflect secondary group members' potential negative analysis of her engagement with her primary group members, such as work place deviancy, incompetence or an inability to focus on the demands placed in the professional sphere. Moreover, a disruption of work rhythm (by engaging in direct bilateral communication with a primary group member) could compromise both the way in which she is *conducting* her own impression management and the way in which her secondary group (work) members are individually, and as a group, *interpreting* her impression management.

For the most part detached on a daily working basis, both physically and in terms of bilateral communication, from primary group (family) members, the professional woman can operate the IT work-based calendar to serve as a cathartic tool. Here, nominal entry reminders in the IT work-based calendar affirm the professional woman's involvement in events and activities of the primary group (family) members. The pre-programmed warning device in the IT-based work calendar to denote conflicting events is reduced to an irrelevant (obsolete) function. The child's weekly sport's game, the child's Friday afternoon hairdressing appointment, or the child's Thursday afternoon dance classes are set parallel to a Board meeting to attend, a task to complete, or a client call to make. Here, an emotive connection representing the maternal status and intrinsically linked to her primary group (family) members joins her physical professional status and roles within her office environment. In this way, the

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[18] *Ibid.,* p. 14. (Geser refers to Gillard (1996).
[19] Plant (2000), The effects of mobile telephones on social and individual life, p.30.

professional woman realizes a type of virtual "synchronous roles involvement" (s. supra), similar to Gillard's description in relation to mobile phone use.

While the mobile phone promotes "primary bonds to be continued during periods of spatial separation"[20] and is effective in "empowering moving individuals to connect to any distant partners at any point in time, regardless of location and speed"[21], the nominal entries in the IT-based work calendar of professional women serve also to maintain bonds, although without necessitating time spent on contact with their respective primary group (family) members. Hence, the professional woman is able to fulfil a particular impression management in which she creates and maintains a holistic image of her *self*, that is conveyed exclusively to herself, and wherein she can experience on an emotive level multiple statuses and roles within her professional environment.

In many professions, women are perceived as, on the one hand too soft and, on the other hand too assertive to be considered for a lead role or leadership position, and hence "gender bias can give rise to double binds and double standards".[22] Yet, taking gender politics of earnings into account, the legal profession has made great strides in overcoming inequalities. Women in the legal domain can be higher placed and can easily earn just as much, if not more, than many of their male counterparts. In essence, the legal domain displays significant flexibility towards enabling professional women to evolve, as the organizational structures of law offices and in-house company legal departments are significantly less gendered than in many other specialized domains, such as in the fields of the sciences, engineering or technology.

A professional woman in the legal domain can excel in her area of speciality without depending on a team organization or team achievements; she can acquire a significant number of her own clients, bill according to her own estimations, and function to a highly independent degree from both her male and female counterparts who specialize in either similar or different areas of law. Prescriptive stereotype is nevertheless present, whereby women legal professionals need to maintain certain behaviours and norms to avoid derogatory or harmful

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[20] Geser (2004), p. 18. (Geser cites Gergen (2002), p. 237)
[21] *Ibid.,* p. 21.
[22] Robin J. Ely, Herminia Ibarra, Deborah Kolb (2011), Faculty & Research Working Paper. Taking Gender into Account: Theory and Design for Women's Leadership Development Programs, p. 31. (Ely et. al., cites the following authors: Frankel (2004); Bowles, Babcock & Lai (2007); Heilman & Parks-Stamm (2007))

remarks from secondary group members. In this sense, she might feel the need to do the same (if not more) 'heroic' hours as her male counterparts and, at the same time, she could also be more sensitive to showing herself to be engaged in any significant or overt primary group (family) member contact during her professional time.

Through nominal entries into her IT-based work calendar, the professional woman sets up and maintains a bond with her primary group, just as one function of the mobile phones is, as Plant (2000) affirms, to "keep established relationships alive".[23] Hence, the professional woman's entries in her IT-based work calendar relating to primary group members (such as, a child's singing lesson, a child's sport's game or a child friend's birthday party) maintain her 'live' and emotive link to "established relationships". Furthermore, unlike the mobile phone which "disrupts the natural boundaries between public and private"[24] (Plant, 2000), the IT-based work calendar nominal entries allow the professional woman to transcend the confines of physical work space, and to place both private and professional spheres parallel to each other, without the interruption or disruption of work focus and activities, which using a mobile phone would involve.

8. Creating multiple spaces as a form of 'retaliation' and 'protection'

Office photos of family members remain 'fixed' in time, and while they are able to convey a subconscious intention of the individual to affirm a stable and happy married / family and social life, office photos remain a static object confined to a specific moment in the past. This study's empirical findings show that higher placed professional women in the legal field tend to make considerably more efforts to enhance their offices with photos of their spouses/partners and/or children as opposed to their counterparts on a lower professional level whose personal office photos are usually fewer in number, and at times non-existent. Of note is the fact that women in the legal domain can and do stand at the helm of the firm (as law firm partners) or of the company (as senior in-house legal counsel or legal vice-president), and in the latter case, side by side with other VPs and the CEO involved in the dynamics and the steering of the organizational structure as a whole. In most cases, these professional women will be unique in their position not only in terms of their professional status, as legal

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[23] Plant (2000), p. 30.
[24] Geser (2004), p. 69.

representatives of the company but also in terms of their gender, in a mainly male-dominated structure.

Lasen's study (2002) as cited by Geser, describes the mobile phone as a "symbolic bodyguard" [25] which serves as a type of protection for a woman to fend off unsolicited or unwelcome attention directed at her[26]. In the same context, Geser draws on Goffman that "women especially often don't like to show themselves alone in public places, because this may indicate that they are without relationship: a condition which (1) provides a bad impression of their social status and (2) leaves them in an unprotected situation (…)."[27] The mobile phone, whether placed on the café table by a women sitting alone in a café, or clasped in her hand when alone outside, acts as "barrier signals"[28] to convey that she is nevertheless "not isolate and alone (…) [but remains] embedded in [her] (…) social setting".[29]

In similar manner, office photos of primary group members can add value to the overall standing of professional women, in particular to those professional women who find themselves numerically fewer when in the boardroom, a committee meeting, or on a conference call. Here, the presence of these office photos, like the mobile phone, can serve to enhance the professional woman's social profile, to quote Plant (2000) as "not isolate and alone" (s. supra). Rather, through discrete placement of the office photos on her office desk or otherwise near to her working area, the professional woman can convey a successful image of herself outside of her work environment. By this, she facilitates positive impression management in which secondary group members perceive her as successful within a specific social environment and able to maintain stable primary group relationships.

Office photos are nonetheless limited in what they can convey. As 'snapshots' of past moments, they cannot reveal the manner in which family members evolve through activities, events and situations on a daily basis, and they cannot convey the professional woman's present involvement with primary group (family) member activities. In short, office photos do not facilitate the creation of "two spaces"[30] in the present moment, which, as Geser points out,

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[25] *Ibid.,* p. 9. (Geser cites Lasen (2002), p. 27)
[26] *Ibid.,* p. 9. (Geser cites Haddon (2000); Cooper (2000))
[27] *Ibid.,* p. 9. (Geser alludes to E. Goffman (1963), p. 83ff)
[28] *Ibid.,* p. 9. (Geser cites Fox (2001))
[29] *Ibid.,* p. 9. (Geser cites Plant (2000))
[30] *Ibid.,* p.23. (Geser cites Palen/Salzman/Youngs (2001))

the mobile phone can do – by creating both "the physical space" and "the virtual space of the conversation".[31]

The IT-based work calendar has, however, the in-built versatility of creating multiple spaces; all of these multiple spaces are at set times and dates which can be activated by the individual: the *physical space*, set within specific tangible boundaries (such as scheduled meetings and conferences); the *activities area* (such as reminders to actions or tasks to be accomplished), and the intangible *emotive sphere* where nominal entries can feature (on primary group members' whereabouts, events and activities). Indeed, in the latter case, this information is neither intrusive nor does it interrupt any on-going work flow or concentration. As a result, the professional woman can easily *feel* herself to *be* in multiple statuses and roles within the confines of her work space and activities. In setting up *physical, activities* and *emotive* areas in the IT-based work calendar, the professional woman has immersed herself within 'parallel' worlds, in which she can experience the various spheres simultaneously.

9. Conclusion

Professional women utilize the IT-based work calendar both for its intended purposes, such as to harmonize organization, interaction and communication among secondary group members (work colleagues, superiors and clients), and to a lesser extent for activities which usually denote a break in work rhythm, notably in relation to primary group members (such as, a reminder to leave work early to take a child to the doctors).

Yet, this study reveals that high-level professional women in the legal domain also use the IT-based work calendar for a purpose which the IT-based work calendar was not intentionally designed, namely to create and maintain *nominal* entries. The presence of nominal entries does not demand any action on the part of the professional woman to engage in bilateral communication or activities regarding the individuals represented in these nominal entries, which act as an internal reinforcement of the professional woman's bonds to primary group (family) members.

Through the conscious action of manually entering nominal information into the IT-based work calendar, usually in short keywords relating to primary group (family) member

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[31] *Ibid.,* p.23. (Geser cites Palen/Salzman/Youngs (2001))

events or activities, these professional women can ensure an emotive 'transfer' of their primary group member sphere into the professional one. In this context, the use of the IT-based work calendar to set primary group related activities parallel to professional secondary group related activities can also be seen as a compensatory action to reinstate harmony within the work place, by relegating the maternal status to the same level as that of the professional.

The professional woman's manipulation of her IT-based work calendar, whereby she consciously overrides the IT-based work calendar automatic system that warns of double, or parallel running, entries (such as a client call set at the same time as her child's sport's lesson) can be interpreted as a form of her internalized 'retaliation'. Through this action, she regains a sense of 'control' and 'power' against an organizational operation and structure which can be seen to suppress her maternal status over her professional status. Nominal entries regarding primary group member activities restore the equilibrium of two statuses (hence, the Board meeting set at alongside the child's sport's game, the client conference call set alongside the child's hairdressing appointment). This in turn reflects the way in which the professional woman feels, perceives and experiences her holistic identity within her daily working environment.

The deliberate juxtaposing of two 'incongruent' and conflicting events, representing professional and personal spheres, indicates the way in which a number of professional women are utilizing and successfully controlling work place technology to assume their multiple statuses and roles which co-exist within the work environment. In short, professional women's nominal IT-based work calendar entries of activities and events of primary group (notably family) members can be perceived as a way to reduce a feeling of social distance and separateness. Moreover, the professional woman's experience role conflict and role strain in the work place can also be mitigated through this unique utilization of the IT-based work calendar.

In consciously not opting for any visually recognizable or intrusive tools (such as mobile phones or on-screen social networking options) which are readily available in the working area, the professional woman ensures optimum concentration, productivity and time management within her working environment. In short, her thought processes, activities and work flow remain constant, without interruption which could affect her impression management. By such adept management of the IT-based work calendar, the professional

woman is also able to shield herself from possible harmful stereotyping from secondary group members.

Indeed, this distinctive way in which the professional woman in the legal domain utilizes her IT-based work calendar, through nominal entries regarding her primary group (family) members, reflects a remarkable and innovative style of impression management: she can convey to her secondary group members a sense of complete physical, cognitive and emotional presence and engagement to her professional responsibilities, including her ability to be fully involved in secondary group interaction and to maintain 'heroic' time input, if required. At the same time, in creating and maintaining nominal entries regarding primary group (family) members, which are directed *to* and *for herself,* she sets into motion and upholds a form of self-empowerment, affirming her multiple status sets and roles. Here, she is effectively transforming her IT-based work calendar to reflect and enhance her daily rhythm. By setting her professional (secondary group) activities and events parallel to her personal (primary group) activities and events in her IT-based work calendar, the professional woman provides a narration of the daily interconnectivity of her status sets which she experiences. In essence, the professional woman succeeds in affirming *to* and *for herself* a holistic stable identity, within multiple spheres, where both primary and secondary group members co-exist parallel to each other.

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