

5 Points to contribute to changing norms concerning women, care and work

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Welcome everybody on this very important event of Gender Unlimited at International Women's day, a day to celebrate the importance of gender equality for women, and, I 'd, like to stress for men as well. I like to elaborate here especially on today's topic, which is close to my heart, combining care and work and sustainability in gender issues.

In our society, the government demands more and more participation of civil society as the role of the welfare state is diminishing. We are expected to take good care of ourselves, making our psychological and physical well-being a personal issue, we are expected to take care for others around us if they need care - our fathers/mothers, neighbours, friends.

Recent research among our own staff at Tilburg University shows that no less than 1 out of 5 of our staff members gives informal care to others. And the crucial point here is of course that a larger share of this type of caretaking is performed by women. It is a heavy burden, which, often hinder women in developing their career. Yet men too face inequality here: Research shows that men, even more than women face work-home conflict and the majority of men indicate they feel hindered in taking care of their loved ones because of expectations at work. Today, at this conference we are discussing how to change norms to become a more sustainable society in the light of combining career and care.

Let me give an example from my own background. I was raised in a traditional family in the south of Holland, my mother working as housewife, my father of course was gaining money. After the retirement of my father and after the children left home, my mother started some philanthropic projects for which she was travelling with her friends to Eastern Europe, to bring medicine and other necessities and she left for longer periods of time. My father stayed at home. Suddenly the roles were reversed. In fact this all happened spontaneously. I think all of us benefitted from this role reversal: My father, my mother, and us kids, we suddenly realized that there are no prescribed roles for fathers and mothers, but that there is a world of career and care to learn, for both sexes.

As for society it is not enough to wait for generations to change and to lean back or until changes will affect everybody as well as our norms and values. We should act ourselves.

It is my conviction that our university can do a lot more for women and men. We all will benefit from a climate where combining career and care is something we cherish and value. We will benefit as university if we stimulate men and women to invest in care and in career so each can develop to their own potential. This might mean we need to invite and stimulate men more to "dare to care" and women to feel entitled to "go for a career". This means that we may have to look at our organizational values and goals differently, and we must learn how to approach individuals openly, inviting them to develop themselves as 'complete' persons.

Tilburg University's founding father, Martinus Cobbenhagen, had a strong belief that our students and academics have an impact on society, to live 'good' and by living good to act as role models. He introduced the concept of a 'good life'. In his view it is not enough to contribute

to society in a materialistic way, or to only value achievements, but to also to take responsibility to improve our lives and assure that people can prosper under the right circumstances. This means that we have to reflect on the role of our employees and students and make sure they have the opportunity to perform their responsibilities for others around us.

Let us make the change and let us make it in a positive way. I would like to quote Nelson Mandela here: "As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison."

Let us think and discuss with an open mind. Let us ask ourselves questions in order to break existing hindering norms and let us aim for sustainability in career and care. In my Dies speech last year I announced 2016 to become the year of dialogue and high on my agenda is the topic of today. I invite you here and today to start such a dialogue.

In general we should introduce a 'slow society' in contrast to a society that looks more like a rat race. In order to take care of others one has to be able to take care of oneself. 'A healthy mind in a healthy body' as precondition for care giving *and* career making.

Let me just give me five levers for change, where we as Tilburg University can envision change:

1. We have a beautiful sports centre to train our bodies, but let us also think about training facilities or practices so we can have a healthy mind
2. Let's facilitate care, let us establish a caretaker fund
3. Would it not be wonderful if we as Tilburg University introduce a month of paternity leave as the first university in The Netherlands? We were the first university to implement the research sabbatical after pregnancy leave for mothers, now let us also show the way for fathers
4. Let's learn from the research that told us that our university's staff members are not aware and feel hindered in taking op leave for our ill relatives
5. Let us first and foremost- introduce a form for mental space and care

Thank you.