



## Embodying Modern Times

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## **Embodying Modern Times**

### **Investigating tiredness**

**Karin Widerberg**

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**ABSTRACT.** We argue that the way time is organized affects bodily habits and emotions. Drawing on a variety of qualitative and quantitative studies from my large-scale research project with Ulla-Britt Lilleaas, 'The Sociality of Tiredness: The Handling of Tiredness in a Gender, Generation and Class Perspective' (presented in Lilleaas and Widerberg, 2001), we focus on class and gender aspects of bodily habits and customs generated in work life and family life (and in the combination of the two). In this article, I illustrate variations in the type of time and body habits that different work organizations and professions generate. I also stress similarities in the use of time and body across professions and gender to illuminate the driving forces of modernity. It is argued that a 'sped-up life' and a 'life of doing' at work and at home generate a restless body, and irritation (the emotion of late modernity?) as its emotional expression. Finally, the question is raised whether this development is not only a threat to the body, but also to the very heart of democracy.

**KEY WORDS** • class • embodied time • gender • modernity • work

### **Introduction**

An increase in illnesses related to tiredness and exhaustion is statistically documented in most western countries. In Scandinavian countries, these figures increase steadily and continuously, especially among women (Ramm, 1997; SOU, 2002; Lilleaas and Ellingsen, 2003). In Sweden (with a population of

about 9 million) the issue now is given 'first priority' politically as more and 'better' statistics show that long-term sick leaves and stress-related illnesses constitute a major part of the 30 per cent yearly increase (SOU, 2002) in the above figures. The debate in the media, however, is quite schizophrenic. In the daily papers the population is one day described as spoiled and whining with the health system as its promoter; the next day, cases of burnt-out workaholics fill the pages, illustrating life in modernity.

In this article I argue that if we approach this issue by focusing on the embodiment of time in everyday life, we can see the roles of structural forces, institutionalized arrangements, and ideology, and thereby get a better understanding of how, individually and collectively, to work towards change. My arguments are based on the large-scale research project I conducted with Ulla-Britt Lilleaas. We used tiredness as a road sign to get a grasp of the body, time and work in modernity. After substantial empirical investigations we conclude that time is what it is all about. That is, how 'time is done' affects bodily habits and emotions, and how we perceive them. Here I will focus on both the variations and the similarities across occupations to highlight implications for research as well as for politics.

### **The Research Design**

How tired is it 'normal' to be? Is everybody equally tired – men, women, different generations, classes and ethnic groups? And how do we handle tiredness? What do we do with it? We started out with these ordinary and daily questions raised, implicitly or explicitly, in everyday life. We focused on the tiredness of everyday life, that is, how 'tiredness is done' at work and at home. Informed by the approaches of Pierre Bourdieu (1990a, 1990b) – especially his concept of habitus – and Dorothy E. Smith (1987, 1990, 1999) and particularly her insistence on inquiries of 'how things are put together', we approached the theme from below and through investigations of praxis.

Both quantitative as well as qualitative studies were conducted. The quantitative studies were meant to serve as a background for the qualitative studies so as to inform and validate the qualitative approaches. We started out with the quantitative studies which included questions we formulated for the 1998 National Survey on Living Conditions (of a representative sample of the Norwegian population) conducted by the National Statistical Bureau every third year, and questionnaires distributed to employees in the workplaces chosen for qualitative studies. In both instances we asked how often respondents felt tired, if they considered it to be a problem, and how they handled it at work and at home. Since the questions were the same in the national survey and in the questionnaires, it allowed us to make sure that the respondents chosen for the

qualitative studies were representative on these issues. And since the interviewees were selected through the questionnaires it was possible to compare the answers they had given on both occasions. This way the quantitative studies could be problematized and validated as to what the respondents grasped and did not grasp and the different possible meanings given to the categories used in the national survey and in the questionnaires. As such the design made some kind of validation of both the quantitative and the qualitative studies possible. Comparing and relating these two kinds of data, however, convinced us early on of the need to emphasize the exploration of the issue qualitatively before embarking on further quantitative analyses so as to be able to understand the results more fully. We focused our research project on the qualitative studies and it is the findings from these that I aim to discuss in this article.

The qualitative studies include studies of four different kinds of workplaces in Oslo: a firm, two schools, a restaurant, a community service bureau – and employees from different occupations and professions working there: engineers, teachers, waiters, domestic nursing personnel, and managers.

We interviewed between 10 and 20 employees of each category and men and women in proportion to the gender ratio of their respective occupation and profession. We also tried to get the different generations and family situations represented. Last but not the least important criteria when selecting interviewees were if they – in the questionnaires – had stated tiredness to be a problem or not. On the whole the aim was to have different types of life situations represented when inquiring about the meanings and implications of tiredness. Finally, we also conducted a specific study of collective as well as individual ‘changers’ (workplaces and employees who try out other ways of organizing time to improve the life and work situations). In all, approximately 100 qualitative interviews were conducted, including about 20 interviews with bosses and managers at different levels. All the material from this study is presented and discussed in Lilleaas and Widerberg (2001) as well as in articles (see, for example, Widerberg, 2005) and several reports (in Norwegian) published at the University of Oslo.

### **The Approach in the Interviews**

Extensive pilot projects<sup>1</sup> had taught us that the theme had to be approached descriptively to avoid ‘taken-for-granted’ statements, and instead allow for substantiated variations to unfold. The overriding question ‘How is it (tiredness) done?’ was investigated by the use of questions about what generates and what consumes energy during the day. We tried to track our interviewees through their different situations at home and at work, both during the weekday and the weekend. We asked them to explain their daily tasks in detail from morning until night, as well as what they did when they were not working. We also asked

respondents to reflect upon the different types of tiredness they felt, where they perceived the tiredness to be located on their body, and how they handled these different types of tiredness. Although tiredness is a (favourite?) daily topic, especially, it seems, among women and the younger generations, interviewees reported that this was the first time that tiredness was the subject of serious reflection and investigation.

### **The Approach in This Article**

Taking professions, occupations and workplaces as a starting point, we wanted to illustrate how types, variations, and responses to tiredness related to different kinds of work. Because jobs are gender segregated, gender variations are also illustrated.

In this article I will present findings on four of the occupations and professions studied: engineers, teachers, waiters and domestic nursing personnel. The main focus will, however, be on the two non-manual labour professions in our studies because non-manual labour generates the tiredness typically conceived of as a new kind of tiredness – a tiredness that is experienced as located in the head. The professions mentioned above are both typical middle-class occupations, but this kind of tiredness and its causes are increasingly common across other occupations and classes. They illustrate some important characteristics of time, work, and body in modernity. Because the two professions chosen – engineers and teachers – are typical men's and women's work, they can also serve to illustrate the workings of gender in a class perspective. Taken together, class and gender can give us a clue as to why this new tiredness is not a topic for a new discourse. The more traditional tiredness, in our studies represented by waiters and domestic nursing personnel, is presented briefly to serve as a contrast and also to enable reflections on similarities of how 'time is done' across class distinctions.

Let us start with a description of the work of the engineers and the teachers who responded to our questions, focusing on the intensity and tempo, and the bodily effects and expressions thereof.

### **Working for the Joy of It**

Both the engineers and the teachers we interviewed expressed that they really like their jobs and that is why they stay on in spite of the increase in workload they all reported experiencing. Their work tasks, of course, are quite different.

### ... The male way

The engineers in our study solve different kinds of technical problems. The amount of time needed to do this work is unpredictable. Often it takes 'a long time', longer than it 'ought to'. Time passes quickly when one is involved in the work process. The employer and the customers, however, expect it all to be done fast or faster. That is the common expectation we all have of technical matters, brought about by technical developments that make everything go faster. A consequence of this expectation is that employers and customers do not give the engineers enough time; engineers are instead always 'short of time' and 'lagging behind'. It seems, however, that this hectic tempo is so intertwined with having a stimulating job that 'a hectic environment is often interpreted in positive, albeit ambivalent, wordings, as expressed here by a man and a woman:<sup>2</sup>

It is an exciting job, challenging and one can get feverish. It is like the job takes over and you fall out socially with only work on your mind. (Male, 42)

Some days you get very highly strung, that is not an easy day for you, lots of nagging, everybody wants something from you. At the same time, though, you never have a boring day! I think that is very positive. It is a hectic environment. (Female, 30)

Respondents do feel tired, they confess, but it is mostly after work, at home and on weekends. For some it is only a problem related to specific, demanding work periods, while for others it is a daily or a weekend problem. As one man expresses it:

During tough periods I couldn't be reached. Even if I spent the weekend at home I was in my own thoughts while my wife was doing her stuff. The marriage was in danger and divorce was on the cards. So it was. (Male, 45)

This is not a theme only for older or middle-aged engineers, but also for the young ones:

I feel it in the whole of my body. It is more psychological – in the head, I am without strength and very tired. It takes the whole Saturday and I am not quite there. During Sunday you start to feel OK and get ready for Monday. That is the way it is. I do not have any physical pain but I feel irritated. And even if I do not consider it a problem, my family might think it is. It is not like I am always worn out but it is quite often. (Male, 31)

Another well-documented characteristic of technical work is that it is unlimited in time and space. There is always something new to investigate or try out, and the work can be done at home just as well as at the work place. Work time and work place can accordingly be extended and the borderline between work and hobby, work time and leisure time, and workplace and home can be obscured. The engineers here express the same ambivalence as that expressed earlier when describing the intensity of their job:

I like the job, it is self-developing and the technical development has its way. Everybody has mobile phones, home computers, and Internet, and that goes for me as well. This increased activity is what we live for, it is our daily bread and it has its costs. When I come home my work day is not over. I do notice that it wears you down, especially when you have not had a holiday for some time. (Male, 53)

What about their bodies then? The bodies of the engineers – as they described them – are tired, worn out, under stress, and invisible to others as well as to themselves. The tasks and relations that generate energy are also the ones that consume all the energy. Regular and frequent breaks are not scheduled, and the body is ‘run at full speed’ throughout the day. It is a male, middle-class body, a body that is expected to endure and not complain, in a middle-class way. Work comes first but being available at work must be compensated for at home. The Scandinavian ideology of equality has made equality an issue of debate, negotiations and expectations, particularly among the middle classes. The result is a body ‘always at service’. A calm surface – most claim to handle an impossible workload by ‘taking one thing at a time’ – hides a rebellious body, sending signals of more or less serious conditions such as heart problems, high blood pressure, migraine and sleeping disturbance. The possibility to work even when ill, either at the workplace or at home, normalizes the worn out, tired, and sick body, and it makes it ‘healthy (enough)’ and available. As one man expresses it,

Of course it is freedom because if I do not feel well I can always do the work at home instead. I can for example participate in telephone meetings although it might sometimes happen when I actually ought to be in bed. If I have the flu or a cold I might also do some work on the PC. But I am not sure it is so bad for the health. I make myself a cup of tea, relax and do exactly as much work as I think I have the strength for. It is quite voluntary, I feel, and flexible. But even though nobody tells you to work a specific amount of overtime, there is always a kind of eagerness or a demand to work more. It is something that sort of sneaks in. (Male, 52)

### ... The female way

The teachers in our study work with children and young people. Just like the engineers, the teachers find their job both stimulating and hectic, and some express a similar ambivalence towards the joy of it, as expressed by this woman:

I am very idealistic and have a lot of guts. And I do get good feedback from my pupils. I am the kind of person who gives a lot. I cannot really manage to hold back. That is something I am working with. There is a life outside school as well! But I give 100 per cent till I fall over. Until I feel like fainting – then I have to sit down! Maybe that is typical of women? I do not know but it is typical of me, anyway. I find it very intense when I am at school. All the time people want to talk to you – children or grown-ups and teachers – about my class or pupils. Parents call. People confront you all the time. I hardly have time to go to the toilet!

Grabbing food, eating fast, having just half an hour for lunch or only 15 minutes if you are the one responsible for the inspection. I am almost shaking when I am through, every day! Sometimes I get so worn out that I am about to faint. My breathing is sort of right up under my neck. (Female, 27)

The prevalent expectation that 'learning takes time' makes the expectation of speed less relevant for teachers than for engineers. Because it is also a profession with repetitive work tasks, teachers know how long different types of teaching and learning require. National standardization and school reforms have resulted in time planning and schedules. All work tasks are to be scheduled for a certain amount of time, during the day, week, year, and over the years. A certain amount of flexibility, however, is allowed, as long as the stated goals for learning are met. But the school days cannot be prolonged, and there are explicit norms for how much homework pupils and teachers are expected to do. Teaching time is measured and distinctly limited, with regular and frequent breaks scheduled. Unlike the engineers, the teachers have a chance to relax, rest, or handle their tiredness during the workday. And so quite a few of them do:

Lots of times I have used the short break (10 minutes) to sleep. I let the kids out, lock the door and lay down to sleep. When the school bell rings, I wake up and continue to work. I have done that during several periods. (Female, 50 years)

Time-use is the basic organizing principle for the teachers' work and they are socialized into an extreme time discipline, which often becomes embodied, as expressed by these two women:

There is a lot of 'five-minutes thinking'. Sometimes it feels as if you have oceans of time just because you have five minutes extra before you have something you have to attend to. Five-minute breaks. Maybe it makes you efficient! But at times it makes you geared up. (Female, 27)

I notice that I sometimes sit on the edge of the chair. I am aware of it. I walk fast, take the steps in three, I run. I notice it at home as well. I hurry and then I have forgotten something, so that I have to run down the stairs and then up again. I live in a house with a lot of stairs. 'Do not stress so much', my daughter tells me when I have not even noticed it. (Female, 57)

Because the time-schedules and plans given to the teachers are modelled on a 'normal' class (white and middle-class), teachers with a diverse class may be short of time and lag behind. In fact, our teachers claim that most classes differ from the normal model or from what they were educated to deal with:

You have kids with serious problems. Social, behavioural and emotional problems. Such things are heavy to work with. We do not have the right competence for it. Our competence is related to the pedagogical work and there is nothing in our education to help us deal with kids with these kinds of problems. We know how to deal with reading or writing disorders but not behavioural disorders! (Female, 41)



I think kids nowadays are more nervous, quite a few have psychological problems for various reasons. They are acting out, frightened, nervous, fighting to get the attention of the grown-ups. It is hard to say but, generally speaking, the kids are more unsettled, restless. (Female, 50)

The teachers describe their bodies as female, energetic, visible, and available. They report that its 'batteries have to be charged' for it to function as a tool in the classroom, through physical exercise for example. Total presence and attention take a lot of energy. But when everything works, energy is also generated. To survive in the profession, teachers must be able to budget the energy, to make it last, and not to use more energy than what can be refilled. This budgeting combined with frequent breaks when the body is 'turned on and off' results in a conscious body. The teachers listen to their bodies (and the bodies of their pupils) and let their signals affect the organization of their work, as far as this is possible. It is a body which must *not* be tired during class; tiredness is therefore stored in the body to be let out during daily breaks, weekends, long summer holidays, or sick leave. To handle the daily 'tiredness in the head' after a whole day at school, rest or sleep seldom work. Instead the teachers exercise or take long walks to make the body tired. It is only then, when the 'head is silenced' that they can relax, rest, or sleep. It is important, however, to stress that teaching when compared to most other professions traditionally has more scheduled breaks, as well as a system with substitute workers that provides sick leave without increasing the workload for oneself or one's colleagues. This may be why teachers' sick leave rates were higher than engineers', and why the teachers interviewed showed fewer symptoms of severe illnesses.

### **Working for the Dole**

Let me briefly present the two other occupations investigated – waiters and domestic nursing personnel – to contrast and further illuminate the above picture.

#### **... By serving others**

The waiters do service work: they attend to guests at a restaurant, and serve them food and drinks in an atmosphere of competence, availability, and friendliness. Time is set by the amount of tables a waiter is in charge of. Within this frame the use of time, however, is unpredictable. One never knows the number of guests or how long they will stay. Some guests are in for a quick bite, whereas others might want to spend the whole evening at the restaurant. A waiter might, therefore, simultaneously have both plenty of time and be short of time. The time belongs to the guests. Thus, the waiter has no control over his or her time. If time

passes quickly, it is not a sign that the waiter is involved in his or her work, as is the case with engineers, but rather it is a result of having too much to do. If it gets too hectic, though, the waiter might lose control and start 'swimming'. Too little to do, on the other hand, makes time go slowly and the waiter gets bored. Breaks are neither scheduled nor regular but totally dependent on the number of guests.

The body of a waiter is an energetic, young, visible, and available body. It is a manually working body that walks a long distance and carries heavy weights. This work and the mental work performed simultaneously, however, are expected to be done more or less invisibly. The result is a highly competent, but disciplined body. As embodied competence the manual work is expected to be done automatically, expressed by the waiters as 'shutting the body off' or letting it 'run on its own'. Thereby they can concentrate on the mental labour. The waiters perform two different kinds of work, involving different body parts. Arms and legs do one thing, while thoughts and speech do something else. The body is accordingly experienced and handled as if split in two. Waiters get tired both mentally and physically. Like the teachers, total presence is expected when attending to customers, maybe for shorter intervals, but over longer hours. Just like teachers, waiters cannot demonstrate their tiredness. Because they have less control of their time, they have less control of their bodies. Quite often they are 'wired up' and have no chance to 'wind down' until work is over and then it is often too late. They feel restless, have problems relaxing or sleeping and they feel irritated. When they finally hit the ground, they can sleep or watch TV endlessly. An uneven bodily tempo seems to result in uneven bodily symptoms, which over a period of time are likely to turn into chronic illnesses.

### **. . . By cleaning for others**

The domestic nursing personnel we interviewed perform domestic work and caring tasks in other people's homes. Their time is divided into three different kinds: time spent with the clients, time for transportation, and time for meetings. The time with the clients is both distinctly measured and divided, with each work task specified in minutes. The time discipline is strict and the personnel have no control on the schedules. Within a schedule, however, there is some room for flexibility as to tasks, tempo, and breaks. The nursing personnel often experience conflicting expectations on how they should use their time. Whereas the employer demands and appreciates fast work, the opposite is often true for the client. Using (a lot of) time is a sign of doing the work properly, whereas fast work is considered bad work. Expectations like these easily result in the personnel 'being short of time'.

The domestic nursing personnel describe the body as a hard-working, manual, working-class body, visible, but not directly available to others, unlike the

teacher and the waiter. It is a manually working body where the competence is embodied. One work task is performed at a time, unlike the waiter who performs manual and distinct mental work tasks simultaneously. The time planning and control make the tempo even and predictable, just like their bodies, which show signs of even and predictable chronic symptoms. Tiredness – conceived of as a natural result of the physical labour – is not to be demonstrated in front of the clients. In front of colleagues, however, it is not only permitted, but even interpreted as an honorary sign of hard work.

### **Embodied Modern Times**

Across profession, class, gender and generation, an increase in intensity at work, as well as in life more generally, can be observed in our studies as well as in other studies of the situation in developed countries (Levine, 1996; Robinson and Godbey, 1997; Lilleaas and Widerberg, 2001). People want to get something out of their time and their lives. It is all about getting a lot done, and to be done with it so that one can move on to something else. This intensity seems to be both structurally and ideologically determined.

Structurally, the constant reorganization of workplaces (now an unquestioned norm of a modern organization) implies that we are in a state of change all the time. The goal of efficiency means, without exception, an increase of intensity at work (Coser, 1974; Carnoy, 2002). In short, more has to be done in less time. This structural force, based on a globalized capitalist economy, strikes most professions. The similarities between the occupations in our study are therefore quite obvious (Lilleaas and Widerberg, 2001). Engineers, teachers, waiters, and domestic nursing personnel are all affected by reorganization and an increase of work intensity. It has become normal to 'have too much to do'. Respondents report that is just the way it is nowadays, everywhere.

Ideologically, this development is understood and expressed in terms of 'freedom, flexibility, and development', both by employers and employees (Carnoy, 2002). The engineer, teacher, waiter, and domestic nurse assistant all express that one of the things that they value most in their work is freedom (Lilleaas and Widerberg, 2001). By this they mean different things, but the discourse is the same. For all of them, the work amount has increased and they have to work faster and/or longer hours. The increase of tempo makes 'freedom and flexibility' even more important, maybe even structurally necessary. It is often not possible to work like this eight hours in a row, five days a week. Part-time (domestic nurse assistants), concentrated work periods (waiters), or a divided working day (teachers and engineers) are made a necessity if one is to cope at all.

The possibility of not working when ill is a structural condition not equally

available to all. In the name of freedom and flexibility it can be avoided. With a computer at home, a 'home office', one can work even if one is sick or the kids are ill. Under the headlines of freedom and flexibility it is expected that one is (more) available and works more. So when, for example, the management of the company where our engineers worked boasts of a low sick rate (3%) and short sick leaves it might hide a problem (Lilleaas and Widerberg, 2001). It might imply that it is not possible to be absent from work, and that employees work when both worn out and/or ill. This may be the reason the engineers questioned showed signs of more serious illnesses than the teachers. When it is normal to have too much to do, it is likely that it is also normal to be tired and worn out, and to have bodily symptoms. Aches in the back, neck, head, stomach, and joints, and sleeping problems seem to have become too common to be worth talking about. That is just the way it is, it seems, for all of us.

This taken-for-granted view and understanding of the capitalist economy and its demands, as if a natural law, are probably most typical of the middle classes. These classes are also the ones which might benefit the most from this development. The fact that we (academics like me are no exception) have stimulating jobs, which enable self-development, makes it harder for us to see straight. We let ourselves be exploited by our own free will, with enthusiasm and joy in the name of progress. In such a perspective, tiredness is a sign that one is not in line with this development, that one is a failure or a psycho. As one boss we interviewed expressed it, 'People are not tired nowadays, are they? Why should they be and how could they be . . . think of all the possibilities.' It seems as if today no major group or class within our type of society is positioned to be ideologically in opposition towards the dominant economic ideology.

There is accordingly no general interest in understanding the new tiredness, and therefore no discourse developed to enable it to be handled differently at the structural level. Instead people seem to try to handle tiredness the old-fashioned way – through physical activities for example. Old-fashioned gender structuring and understandings, as well as new and modern ones, seem to reinforce rather than threaten this discursive silence.

### **. . . The female way**

Our study indicates that women are a vulnerable group in modern work life, where the socialization and positioning of a woman is in fact 'disabling'. Women are still expected to be 'good girls' (Chodorow, 1978, 1999; Gilligan, 1982; Widerberg, 1994), to do everything properly, and to have the needs of others as their first priority. When work is intensified, these generally considered good qualities, however, create problems for women at work as well as at home.

Taking generation into consideration does not seem to change the overall picture. The result seems to be the same, even though the roads taken are differ-

ent. In our study middle-aged, middle-class women (represented by the teachers) working full time seem to hide the amount of housework they do in the name of equality. They can do it all, they say, because they are so exceptionally energetic, all of them. Complaining of tiredness would make the lack of equality at home visible, and as such a theme for discussion and change, which is something they are not ready for. The younger generation of women in our study, are 'naturally' all for equality in theory but are not able to relax or slow down. Quite the opposite. As an 'up and coming' generation with an enormous life appetite, they have already developed bodily habits and a body tempo that make them even more vulnerable when combining this with the 'good girl' syndrome. And good girls they are, they say, even if they don't like it and might try to fight it.

If the indications from our studies are true, a modern Scandinavian woman of any generation is not tired. Or if so, she should not show it or talk about it in public. Tiredness might make us question the chosen road of liberation and equality, and be interpreted as a sign of backlash, used as an argument for a return to a traditional division of labour. Tiredness, it seems, is now a forbidden theme in women's talk.

### **... The male way**

The men are also, it seems, vulnerable in modern work life due to gender socialization, but in a different way. For them work is still expected to be what life is all about (Connell, 1985; Morgan, 1992, 1996). They are expected to be available for the employer and at the job, just like women are expected to be available for the family and at home. In our studies the middle-aged men with a more traditional division of labour at home are available at the job not primarily because of individual benefits, but because they are men who stand up for their colleagues, the boss, and the workplace (Lilleaas and Widerberg, 2001). A real man is one who pulls himself together, does his best, and does not show signs of tiredness. One cannot therefore be tired either at work or at home. Presence, involvement, and work at home are nowadays – due the ideology of equality – expected of most men, at least in Scandinavia. When expressed at home, complaints of tiredness from working too much are likely to be met with demands to work less. And that is something one cannot or will not do. Men, therefore, have to pull themselves together at home, but they 'collapse', as they put it, in front of the TV, reading the papers, or at parties (Lilleaas and Widerberg, 2001).

In our material the younger generation of men seems to be divided into two categories. Those (mostly single) who still think that work is what life is all about, and like their older colleagues are available to the job 24 hours a day. It is, however, not a sense of solidarity with the colleagues, the boss, or the workplace that triggers them, but rather the individual benefits, the salary, and career.

They are still real men who can work hard without complaining or showing signs of weakness, such as tiredness. The other category of young men (mostly with families of their own) tries to be equally available to work and family. Their position resembles the position of women at work, and these men can accordingly be expected to negotiate family-friendly working conditions. But even though they are not ready to sacrifice family to their jobs, and accordingly are not as job available as their career peers, they are still real men when at work. At home, though, they can show their tiredness because their partner is equally tired from trying to combine work and family. Tiredness and time organization are much-discussed topics of conversation but also much fought about (Lilleaas and Widerberg, 2001). A tiredness competition – who is the most tired and has the most legitimate reasons – is often the result.

### **Future Generations, Future Bodies and Emotions**

Maybe the younger generations, across gender, are the ones who are most likely to be damaged in the long run by the development they have welcomed. Unlike the older generations, they have continually and gradually incorporated the spirit of modern times from childhood. It is in their bodies. What the teachers in our material have to say about their young pupils confirm this view. But it also indicates the strength of the ideological forces – the spirit of modern times – which fits like a hand in a glove with the ‘new economy’ and its ‘spirits’. One is busy all the time; one works, studies, exercises, or parties till one drops dead. Bodily aches are conceived as natural, as costs of the life chosen. Rests are for later, when one gets old, even though they are all tired and tiredness is an everyday complaint. But even though they do not want to be tired, the tiredness is there, they say, in the body like a restlessness and irritation that never seem to go away (Lilleaas and Widerberg, 2001).

With new ways of using time, not only should we expect new bodily habits and habitus, but maybe also new emotions. Emotions were not an issue we originally set out to investigate or focus upon but our respondents made it a topic in the interviews. And then irritation was the emotion most often mentioned and discussed when trying to describe the feelings generated by tiredness or a sped-up life. To answer the question whether irritation may be the modern emotion accompanying the modern body, further studies, however, need to be carried out. For us the issue took us not only by surprise but also too late in the research process for it to inform our design and approaches. And this was not the only issue raised during the research process or through the findings, unfortunately not foreseen and therefore not properly investigated. In fact we started to wonder if modern life was not only threatening to the body, but also to the very values founding our societies. By the end we regretted not having focused more

on values such as solidarity and caring in a time perspective, issues which most of our respondents talked about albeit in a more indirect way. If we do not have time for ourselves or each other, and our relationships become irritations instead of stimulations – a view quite a few of our respondents expressed with great concern – then even democracy might be threatened. But this is an issue for future research, if not by us then by some other researchers.

### Conclusion

Within medical research, research on stress for example, embodied time is thoroughly investigated. Through a variety of techniques, internal reactions can be measured and ‘observed’ which might not be visible from the outside or even felt or known by the person.

For example, when the body is in a state of stress blood pressure increases, the heart pounds faster, and the stress hormones in the blood increase (Frankenhaeuser, 1997). Stress hormones balance the physical and mental adaptations to a situation of alert. They prepare the body for efforts and extra demands. If a situation is perceived as threatening, the brain will send out signals to the kidneys, which will respond by producing the stress hormones adrenaline and noradrenalin. When this happens, the blood pressure increases. All of this makes us ready for action, and this in itself is not bad for the body, quite the opposite. It may do the body good, and very often it feels good. It is only when the body is made to react as if it is in a constant situation of threat – being alert all the time – that it becomes damaging. Then not only are bodily fluids, internal organs, and muscles affected, but also the emotions, causing depression, anguish, feelings of insecurity, irritation, and rage (Vøllestad and Blom, 1985; Lundberg et al., 1994; Frankenhaeuser, 1997).

What makes us stressed and how we perceive and handle it, however, is socially determined, and therefore varies among people even in similar situations. Our social habits incorporated as bodily habits – *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990) – are important. Moving fast and talking fast, doing many things quickly and at the same time, might be a habit that was once developed out of necessity, but when it is incorporated it becomes a part of one’s identity (Lilleaas, 2003), or the identity of the family, profession, workplace, or even society (Levine, 1996). If this also is a socially valued quality – to do a lot and do it fast – it is likely that other habits will be ‘infected’. A more or less constant bodily stress situation might then be the result even though it might not be perceived as such because that is just ‘the way I am’ (Lilleaas and Fehr von der, 2001). The fact that something which can be ‘objectively’ measured is not felt, perceived, or understood by the patient illustrates that specific social understandings can play the upper hand. Accordingly, ideologies and discourses have to be taken seriously because

they tell us how to relate to and listen to our bodies. I have given a few examples of how time is done and the kind of bodily habits it might generate. I have used this material to argue that such bodily habits form identities when supported by cultural understandings of gender and generation. It is an approach that enables us to understand the embodiment of time in everyday life, where the intermingling of structural forces, institutionalized arrangements and ideology are illuminated. Although the picture drawn here is a rough sketch, making other variations, similarities, and contradictions invisible, I still hope it will serve to stimulate further explorations. Embodying time and exploring the connections of time and body from a social science perspective seems a most urgent task for both researchers and policy makers.

## Notes

1. The pilot projects included a month's diary on tiredness, and interviews and observations of family members and friends. All the material is presented and discussed in the book and reports mentioned above.
2. Quotations are not direct translations of Norwegian but were translated to preserve meaning.

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