



Gender Differentiation and New Trends Concerning the Division of Household Labour within Couples: The Case of Emergency Physicians

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Abstract

This paper provides an account of the division of household labour (i.e., housework and childcare) based on the results of a doctoral research project on time management among couples, in relation to a specific professional group: emergency physicians. It is tested the suitability of some general theoretical approaches for the explanation of housework time, namely rational choice theory and relative resources theory. The gender dimension is still an important variable to describe and understand attitudes and behaviours within the couple, even in upper socio-economical categories, largely recognised to be usually more democratic and egalitarian in what regards the tasks and self-perceptions of women and men inside and outside home. However, along with the persistence of 'traditional' gender roles in unpaid work, especially at some stages of the family life cycle, there are new trends of 'modernisation' concerning sex-role attitudes. This is translated into changes in the economic resources ratio between spouses, such as the appearance of a relative female breadwinner model in dual-earner couples. Therefore, it is important to deepen the social research on these issues by pursuing qualitative studies and articulating different analytical perspectives, in order to understand how they may interact in a more sophisticated explanation of the participation in domestic labour.

Keywords

Gender inequalities, time management, division of household labour, atypical employment schedules, emergency physicians

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Introduction

This article addresses the issue of time management within couples that have at least one partner working in healthcare emergency services. Focusing on housework's division, the article shows that there are some 'traditional' gender specificities, as long as new trends of 'modernisation' concern this topic. It explores the relationship between domestic labour time (housework and childcare) and micro-level determinants, such as the occupational status of couple's members, the hours worked in the labour market – and thus subsequent time available for household chores – educational level and labour income (relative and absolute earnings within waged work). These variables are tested within our sample. For that purpose, I base my analysis on the results of a completed doctoral research project.

Concerning our target population, it is relevant to study Emergency Medicine Doctors for their specificity in regards to paid work time, such as atypical employment schedules (rotating shifts including night and weekends), overtime pay for extra working hours at the Emergency Department/Room and multi-employment.

Concomitantly, being a segment of upper socio-economical classes, with higher academic degrees, indicates that two general aspects should prevail among Emergency Medicine Doctors: a bigger openness and acceptance of new marital relations besides marriage and a tendency for more egalitarian gender ideology among men and women. Moreover, it is often assumed that middle-class persons are traditionally the disseminating agents of changes in social attitudes and behaviours.

Like some authors such as Grossin (1974, 1996), Mercure (1995) and Ramos (1988), I argue that living conditions or life styles, namely the constraints of professional activity – not only chronometric (workload, work pace) but also psychological (dedication, commitment, demand, availability) – guide the actors' representations and practices concerning time. Therefore, my purpose was to study domestic time management in daily life within a specific professional group², from the perspective of the couple. I have then developed a research mainly focused on the relationship between domestic time, gender and marital relations, discussing the changes occurred in the private sphere and the role of men and women inside and outside home.

My research is also relevant because it indicates some broad trends in western societies, namely the persistence of asymmetrical gender patterns along with a movement towards more egalitarian couple relationships. In this new model, roles are defined not on the basis of «traditional» gender attributes, but on more democratic values. In fact, in high-skilled professions, both women and men recognise the need for self-fulfilment – such as in paid work – and personal autonomy. At the same time, the family is integrated in the market economy system, obeying to its rules and dynamics (rational choice).

² Sometimes overlapping and cancelling out each others. For example, time for childrearing at the expense of leisure or personal time.

The Gendered Division of Household Labour Time: Theoretical Approaches

The gendered division of labour in the home has persisted even though women's labour force participation has increased over time across the world. A growing body of comparative research has shown that the greater involvement of women in the labour market has not been translated into more equal sharing of unpaid work between the sexes, i.e., greater male participation in household tasks (Bianchi et al., 2000; Brines, 1994, 1988; South & Spitze, 1994). Although men have increased slightly their relative contributions to routine housework (Gershuny & Robinson), employed women continue to have the main responsibility and contribute more than their male partners in the domestic sphere, resulting in a double burden of paid and unpaid work.

I base my analysis on testing some general theoretical approaches for the explanation of the division of housework, namely rational choice theory and relative resources theory for their direct impact on sharing the household tasks.

Regarding the first approach, the general argument of the allocation of household labour within the couple as a rational process is that there are domestic arrangements between both partners driven by the maximisation of economic outcomes independently of gender role expectation. The neoclassical economic theory of human capital investment and its 'new household economics' variants are focused on the spouses' joint efforts to maximise the household's economic utility and efficiency (Becker, 1981; Becker, 1985). The human capital model suggests that women and men make a rational choice to allocate time and invest energy in household versus market work in order to achieve what is overall the best for the family unit. Therefore, the one with higher potential earnings in the paid labour market devotes more time and effort in that sector while the other with lower income prospects assumes a greater part of the housework.

Although this broad proposition has been contested, it is generally acknowledged that the hours spent in paid work determines the correlative availability of time for performing household tasks, and thus the division of housework between spouses. In fact, the time availability perspective draws on Becker's human capital theory – with its postulations on the efficiency of labour specialisation by gender - and it is focused on how each family member allocates his/her time between market work and domestic labour. Some studies have found a negative correlation between female labour force participation (employment status) and the amount of hours women dedicate to domestic chores (housework load), which results in a more egalitarian division of household responsibilities for fully employed women, even when their partners maintain the same share (Bianchi et al., 2000; Brines, 1994; Ross, 1987; South & Spitze, 1994). The decrease in housework time by married women employed full-time is not always due to a higher domestic participation of men, but by the fact that sometimes the household tasks are done by a third person, either hired domestic assistance or family members support.

There are also institutional influences on housework allocation related to the constraints imposed by labour market. Temporal diversity in spouses' employment schedules in married dual-earner couples is a significant determinant of the division of

household labour by gender, namely increasing the husbands' share (Presser, 1994). There has been an increase in evening and night-shift work, rotating schedules and weekend employment, resulting in a considerable lack of overlap in labour market hours of each spouse (Presser, 1984; Presser, 1989).

Regarding the determinants of husbands' participation in domestic labour, the demand/response capability hypothesis states that the more domestic task demands on a husband and the greater his capacity to fulfil those demands, especially in terms of available time, the greater his participation in household activities (Coverman, 1985). The indicators of time availability are spouses' employment status, number or presence of children and number of hours spent in paid work. In what concerns the effects of sociodemographic, life-course and household compositional factors, the number of children increases husbands' domestic labour time (*ibidem*). However, the presence of each infant or toddler is also associated with greater levels of providership, thus reducing the husband's hours and partly undoing the previous positive effect (Brines, 1994). As the number of children increases, husbands' share of housework decreases even when they do more hours because wives' hours increase even more (Presser, 1994). Transitions into cohabitation or marriage and parenthood increase the women's housework hours, while declining the amount of time that men spend on housework (Gupta, 1999; Rexroat & Sehan, 1987; South & Spitze, 1994).

Another way to conceptualise housework arrangements stresses the importance of relative resources for the marital negotiations in which is based the division of labour in the home. Women with less material resources within the couple, and thus more economic dependent of their spouses, perform more housework and may accept an unequal gendered division of domestic labour, because they don't have any means to support themselves in case of marital disruption. Therefore, the smaller the gap between husband's earnings and his wife's, the greater his relative contribution to household tasks, i.e. the more equal is the division of labour at home, that is to say, the husband's share is lower the more he earns, and higher the more his wife earns (Ross, et al., 1983; Ross, 1987).

Within this class of economic or quasi-economic exchange models, there are some well-established theories to explain unequal sharing of the household labour. Two of those theoretical models are the resource-bargaining perspective and the economic dependency model. The resource-bargaining perspective has its origin in Blood and Wolfe's resource theory of family power; the basic assumption being that 'the balance of power will be on the side of that partner who contributes the greater resources to the marriage', such as education, earnings and occupational position (Blood & Wolfe, 1960: p.12). The household division of labour is settled as the outcome of negotiations between spouses, taken as power relations, one of each using their valued resources to strike the best deal based on self-interest (Brines, 1993).

The economic dependency model – which can be viewed as an alternative (Brines, 1994) or a special case (Halleröd, 2005) of the resource bargaining model – focuses on marital exchange relations, where women and men are assumed to enter into a 'business contract' wherein the dependent spouse exchanges housework in return for economic

support (money) from the main breadwinner, i.e. the partner who earns the larger part of the household income (Brines, 1993; Brines, 1994). In this model, the rules governing the division of labour at home are linked to relations of economic providership and dependency (Brines, 1994).

If women don't depend anymore on their husbands for economic production, we would expect that, under the game theoretic models applied to family both in sociology (Breen & Cooke, 2005) and economy (Manser & Brown, 1980; McElroy & Horney, 1981), this greater financial autonomy would result in more female bargaining power in marital negotiation for an equal allocation of household labour. However, empirical research for the USA (Brines, 1994), Australia (Bittman et al., 2003) and Sweden (Halleröd, 2005) has shown that as wives become the primary breadwinners in the couple, they retain the majority of the most time-consuming household chores, reinforcing traditional gender identities. The explanation is that men, given the main capacity earning of their female partners, would fear for their gender power and would do less domestic tasks in order to follow institutionalised, normative, gender-appropriate role behaviours and expectations in terms of housework and thus compensate the social 'deviance' from the cultural norm of masculinity (male provider role). In gender-atypical partnerships, the option for traditional housework arrangements is a mean to reclaim gender accountability from oneself and from others (Brines, 1994).

If some studies sustain the relevance of resources on housework, both in absolute and relative terms (Ross, 1987), others just find minimum effects (Coverman, 1985). The effects of resources, such as education, on the division of household labour are difficult to predict because empirical results are mixed. It has been found in previous research that the higher the husband's education the greater his share of the housework, however the wife's education does not have a significant effect on her share (Ross et al., 1983; Ross, 1987). However, other studies also find that highly educated husbands do more housework, but wives with more education do less (South & Spitze, 1994). There is also a conceptual confusion since education can be considered a relative resource, a predictor of gender role attitudes or even a measure of human capital accumulation (Coltrane, 2000).

All these analytical perspectives are "gender neutral" and emphasise choice, although education – measured in years of formal learning – also indicates cultural values such as sex-role attitudes. In what concerns gender ideologies (more 'traditional' or more egalitarian), which is another line of interpretation of housework division, data was not directly available in my study since I didn't include any specific questions on this variable. Nevertheless, several interviews have also indicated the respondents' position concerning the division of paid and unpaid work. Moreover, I may assume that a more egalitarian role ideology would prevail in my sample, given its socioeconomic characterisation, although some studies report little class difference in sex role attitudes and/or behaviour (Coverman, 1983; Hartmann, 1981).

Some literature indicates that gender role attitudes and behaviours are a consistent predictor of the division of domestic labour. However, gender must be conceptualised as relational or interactional rather than as individual property or role (Thompson & Walker,

1989). Gender role socialisation in childhood is a considerable variable affecting housework allocation since parents' early behaviours shape their children's adult lives (Cunningham, 2001). Therefore, previous research has shown that women holding the most traditional gender ideology perform more household chores, regardless their husbands' gender ideology (Greenstein, 1996). Other studies show that spouses with more egalitarian gender ideology will perceive unfairness in the traditional division of labour (DeMaris & Longmore, 1996; Kane & Sanchez, 1994) or find that less traditional gender role attitudes are associated with a more egalitarian division of domestic labour, although this is true mostly for men since no significant effect of women's gender role attitudes was found (Bird et al. 1984; Ross, 1987). However, findings can be contradictory since research has also shown that only the wife's gender ideology increases husband's hours of housework (Presser, 1994) or that, surprisingly, more egalitarian views have a negative effect on husbands' contribution to household labour, slightly decreasing the time they spent on domestic tasks (Coverman, 1985).

Time availability, relative resources and gender ideology are important determinants of the allocation of household chores within the couple. Nevertheless, some studies have suggested that these shaping processes are not symmetrical for men and women and also differ according to welfare state regimes (classically categorised into liberal, conservative-corporate and social-democratic) due to the impact of macro-level effects (structural constraints and contextual factors) that also explain the division of household labour, regardless individual characteristics (Geist, 2005).

It was not my purpose to evaluate the influence of women's labour force participation and relative economic resources of both spouses on family outcomes, such as marital disruption (divorce or separation). However, some studies have analysed the repercussions of the division of household labour on individual outcomes, such as marital satisfaction (Sutor, 1991; Yogev & Brett, 1985); psychological distress (Bird, 1999; Ross et al., 1983); wages and work effort (Bielby & Bielby, 1988; Coverman, 1983; Hersch & Stratton, 2002); and also the repercussions of housework time for future family transitions, such as fertility and marital stability (Cooke, 2004). Studies have found a negative effect of hours spent in domestic labour (housework and childcare tasks) on both sexes' income, thus explaining male/female earnings gap, for example, women's lower wages relative to men (Coverman, 1983). The sexual inequality in the division of household work perpetuates labour market gender inequalities.

These theories of household labour sharing are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive (Coltrane, 2000) In fact, they sometimes overlap and compete, showing that there is also a significant interplay among them³.

³ For a critical review of the research literature on the division of household labour see Coltrane, 2000 and Shelton & John, 1996.

Operational Concepts, Research Hypotheses and Methodology Design

This paper approaches the way in which people working on healthcare emergency services are involved in housework and how they like to spend their free time, focused on the relation between men and women in the couple. However, the scope of my doctoral research project was more extended since I sought to investigate how professional time is managed and interferes with the domestic world of intimacy. For this purpose I have chosen to analyse the conciliation between four different uses of time (personal, couple, family and paid work), comparing three types of conjugal relationship (marriage, unmarried cohabitation and Living Apart Together⁴ or L.A.T.).

In terms of theoretical and conceptual framework, I propose an analysis model based on four fundamental concepts of social use of time, associated with four values or meanings about their daily use, which I list and briefly define:

1- The 'time for one's own' as a private and self-determined time, i.e., freely managed by the individual. It is the time for personal satisfaction or "confirmation of the self" (see Singly, 2000).

2- The 'conjugal time' as the time devoted exclusively to nurture the relationship by means of the moments shared by the couple or the mechanisms that make explicit the conjugal life (through dialogue or joint practices). It is the time to confirm the identity of the couple.

3- The 'domestic time' referring to how, on time structure, the singularity is articulated with family dynamics in terms of conflict and forms of reaching agreements. This is the time to strengthen interpersonal relationships with 'significant others'.

4- The 'professional time' corresponding to the time of paid work, in what concerns professional aspirations for the future as well as strategies and projects for personal fulfilment. It refers to the time of obligations related to paid employment⁵.

For each concept to be analysed, I selected two dimensions and its set of indicators. I structured the interview script based on those dimensions.

⁴ Conjuality is taken here as a comprehensive and diverse set of loving relationships – with the postulation that both partners have assumed conjugal commitments with each other and integrate them in their way of life – including situations of part time cohabitation under the same roof. In these cases, called Living Apart Together by Anglo-Saxon literature or 'cohabitation intermittente' by French sociology, couples are perceived by themselves and by others as a couple, despite both partners living in separate households and the sharing of a common home is not continuous in time but sporadic and episodic, at weekends, on occasional days or during holidays. Although assembled under the same designation, there are a number of situations, depending on the underlying motivations, self-perceptions and forms assumed. Unfortunately, in my study I have just interviewed three couples in this situation. For specific literature see: Bawin-Legros & Gauthier (2001), Caradec (1996); Gierveld (2004), Haskey (2005); Levin & Trost (1999), Milan & Peters (2003), Rindfuss & Hervey (1990), Villeneuve-Gokalp (1997).

⁵ I choose not to address the paid work time, the reconciliation between private and professional life, or the impact of state policies, such as childcare and family policies or private support for maternal employment.

Table 1. Concepts and dimensions

Concepts	Meanings	Dimensions
'Time for one's own'	Personal satisfaction or 'confirmation of the self'	Isolated and autonomous activities
		Desire to be 'lonely'
'Conjugal time'	Confirmation of the couple's identity	One-to-one chats
		Joint practices or 'making together'
'Domestic Time'	Strengthening interpersonal relationships with 'significant others'	Daily meals and special yearly events
		TV programming regulation
'Professional time'	Obligations of paid work	Choice of the profession
		Career management

My research hypotheses refer to the way in which people, who spend longer time in paid work and have higher level of education as well as labour income (both in relative and absolute terms), are involved in domestic work. It is hypothesised that:

Hypothesis 1. Spouses' relative resources (economic resources and educational level) are important determinants of the housework division.

Hypothesis 1.1. The greater each spouses' income, the less his/her participation in household tasks.

Hypothesis 1.2. Higher education is associated with a propensity for a more equitable sharing of unpaid work between men and women.

Hypothesis 2. Patterns of household division of labour are also shaped by spouses' employment schedules since time availability constraints will affect the time each one spends on the performance of household tasks.

Hypothesis 3. The household size and composition, namely the presence of small children (infants), affect domestic labour time.

Hypothesis 4. Traditional sex role attitudes determine a lesser involvement of men in domestic labour time, although women's share may be compensated by paid household help the more she earns in market labour.

The dependent variable is the *division of household labour*. The independent variables are *relative resources* (earnings and educational level) and *time availability* (employment status and working hours in paid labour). The control variables are *gender role ideology*, *presence of children* and *household income*.

Concerning the methodology used in my extended research, I have applied semi-structured, in depth interviews based on open questions, combined with direct observation (ethnography work at different emergency departments and infirmary services) and documental analysis (sociological information, statistics, legislation, political data and newspaper news)⁶.

⁶ I preferred not to use time-diary data or time-budget study since it is acknowledged that in these types of measurement, men tend to over-estimate the total amount of hours spent on housework (Presser & Townsley, 1998) and also because it is not possible to access to speech and deep motivations. Furthermore, doctors themselves often complain about lack of time, so it was not expected that they would have availability to spend time recording their daily activities.

The fieldwork was conducted in three public hospitals of Lisbon (Portugal), where I have interviewed 51 doctors (27 male and 24 female). I have also interviewed 20 partners of other professions (nurses, lawyers, economists, managers, psychologists, sociologists, etc.) in many different locations (at home, at work, in public gardens, etc.). I have gathered information on both members of 31 couples since in nine cases it was not possible to contact the spouse. The data was collected during 10 months, from July 2006 to April 2007.

The personal and socio-professional information of the respondents, obtained through a written questionnaire, was subjected to a synthetic and descriptive analysis, not very exhaustive or thorough in statistical terms. The information gathered proved to be relevant for the global characterisation of the surveyed population, and namely to articulate some of the socio-demographic variables with the explanation of the observed trends from the analysis of interview data.

After a full, verbatim transcript of all the recorded interviews, the corpus of texts was subjected to a content analysis. To the extent that most questions – except the last one – were open, I decided to apply a thematic categorical analysis of meanings (Bardin, 1977), rather than a statistical computer processing. Therefore, I did not employ software for qualitative analysis but instead the procedure for description, explanation and systematisation of the material content was applied manually in the text of the interviews transcribed.

Through coding (the process of transforming the raw data by cutting, bundling and enumeration in the text) I intend to identify the themes or units of meaning in order to infer the values, symbols and motivations and therefore to draw comparisons between different attitudes and behaviours. Consequently, the unit of meaning selected was the theme, whose length varied from the sentence to the paragraph. The unit of context was set with the size required to understand the complex significance of the items of meaning and to contextualise them. Thus, the index was an explicit reference to the theme or the ‘core meaning’ and the respective indicator was the frequency of their appearance compared to others.

The high amount of material collected, along with a more flexible nature of the data processing, implied a subsequent categorisation, i.e., the total system of categories and subcategories was only operationally defined until after a careful reading of all 71 interviews, which involved greater time expenditure. The analysis was made by searching for consensus on the distribution of the coding units by categories and subcategories under a conceptual title, according to a semantic criterion in order to respect the rules of mutual exclusion, homogeneity, exhaustiveness and objectivity.

Housework Division and Domestic Leisure Time: Some Gender Features

The gendered division at the level of daily time management – namely what concerns housework division and domestic leisure time – refers to a plurality of everyday situations, but often on the basis of differentiated roles, characteristics and behavioural norms, in terms of social identities within the couple.

a) *There are different ways of looking at the same leisure activity, such as the gender differences in television watching. The male partner watches a TV program in a very attentive and concentrated posture (translated into a high degree of abstraction that makes it difficult to engage in a dialogue) compared to the female who watches it in a more superficial and fragmented attitude (permeable to disruptions and likely to be combined simultaneously with other activities such as domestic work).*

Currently, the development of new audiovisual technologies and the lack of time available have resulted in an over-representation of domestic media consumption in what concerns leisure and entertainment, including television, although there are differences based on gender. In fact, some studies (Delaunay, 2001) point out that women, because they assume a set of domestic duties and obligations, choose leisure activities that require little space, equipment and money, exclude travel, and particularly involve brief or at least fragment periods of time to allow interruption whenever necessary.

On the contrary, for men, since domestic responsibilities are not so pressing, the time spent at home becomes a period of rest and evasion from the daily routine of paid work⁷. For this reason they have the ability to enjoy, without worry or guilt, their moments of leisure. Therefore, while in most cases so far studied (Delaunay, 2001; Jackson & Moores, 1995; Singly, 2000) as well as in this research, men watch television in a focused way, women can carry out this activity more distractedly, in alternation or simultaneously with the performance of household chores (like cooking or ironing), at certain moments of their daily lives. Work and leisure sometimes appear intricate and interdependent. This contradiction between, on one hand, an uninterrupted and attentive male way of watching TV and, on the other hand, a more distracted and intermittent one typically feminine, can occasionally create some mutual incomprehension. In fact, for women, the act of watching television, if pursued exclusively, can become a waste of time. For that reason, women combine it with the performance of domestic tasks or with other leisure activities such as reading or handwork.

Different tastes and preferences regarding television programming make sometimes necessary a kind of negotiation process over program options within conjugal dynamics, especially where there is only one television set. However, in my surveyed population, it prevails the rule of negotiation or compromise with both sides giving up, which results in the situation where the spouses seek to watch alternately the TV programs that each one likes in particular (mutual adaptation) or in an attempt to watch the programs in which both have an interest (lowest common denominator). In either

⁷ However, almost all doctors interviewed of both sexes have said spending an extremely small number of hours (minimum half an hour and maximum two hours per day), and not always on a daily basis, watching television programs. There are three main reasons for the relatively low importance attached to television overall, in the domestic temporality: the lack of spare time (there are always something else to do), the impossibility to follow TV series (atypical and irregular work schedules) and also the level of physical fatigue (especially after 12 hours or 24 hours emergency shifts).

case, the respect for individual preferences with regard to television programming prevails.

It should be noted that some studies (Daly, 1996; Delaunay, 2001; Singly, 2000) point out that, in most cases, men hold the remote control device. This physical monopoly seems to play an important symbolic function, as it condenses power relations over the TV options. This male total control is referred by some women as vaguely obsessive when there is a systematic switch of TV channels, so-called *zapping*. Nevertheless, western households are nowadays smaller (prevalence of nuclear family) and more democratic, especially in terms of gender relations – a trend towards greater equality of roles, rights and responsibilities – and so family life becomes a subject of adjustment and compromise.

b) There is a relative prevalence of women in the management of temporal domestic production, namely the decision about the moments or times to perform unpaid work (such as house cleaning), despite the trend towards a more shared domestic task accomplishment between spouses.

In most cases, the combination between the external delegation of household chores and the sharing of its daily performance within the couple prevails. In younger and new couples, the sphere of domestic production is submitted to an equal sharing principle, i.e. the joint responsibility for task accomplishment, especially when they are not yet using the services of a maid. There are two situations: the couple performs together the same tasks at the same time (simultaneity) or each spouse does the same chores at different moments in time (alternation). Despite the absence of gender differentiation in the division of housework, there is a natural and spontaneous process of attribution of privileged areas according to skills or personal preferences of each spouse. However, these assignments may be interchangeable between the spouses, according to their temporal availability (e.g., who gets home first starts cooking dinner).

In older generations, the marital share of domestic chores is sometimes lower, but in terms of task allocation it is usual that the wife be in charge of doing the laundry and cooking, while the man takes responsibility for vacuuming, taking out the garbage, or even clears the table and loads the dishwasher. I have not found any differences in the division of domestic tasks comparing unmarried cohabitations and marriages, and in what concerns L.A.T. relationships, there is no housework sharing in a daily basis.

Nevertheless, it is the woman who usually manages the time for household maintenance, deciding the moment when these activities should be carried out – men considered themselves to be more messy, carefree, indulgent or careless in what concerns this aspect – although there is a sharing trend regarding its execution. Despite the completion of chores being something usually shared within the couple, the management of organisational issues and logistics is mainly a female role (deciding when to clean, what to buy, leaving messages to the maid, etc.). Women often take the responsibility for monitoring and supervising the housework performance, even when they purchase labour saving devices and paid domestic assistance, or delegate the household tasks to others.

Similarly, it is often women who say they feel more burdened with household chores, in part because of their own fault since, while acknowledging the availability of the male partners to help – which shows its optional nature – the fact of having to be prompted or reminded instead of collaboration arising spontaneously, means that some women prefer to ensure immediately those home obligations, even to take less time than in the case they had to ask for help or to explain how to do. Women are ‘doing gender’ (see Greenstein, 1996; Gupta, 1999; Halleröd, 2005; South & Spitze, 1994) by the enactment of domestic responsibilities according to social expectations. There seems to be a gender specialisation in domestic labour since women assume being more skilled and having more productivity in performing some household tasks, although it is difficult to empirically assess housework efficiency.

c) The pattern of gender attitudes and roles changes across the family life course. After children appear, there is a more gendered allocation of competence domains between the spouses, with a decline in unpaid work-sharing within the couple. Usually the man takes care of the little child while his wife takes over the household chores, namely the preparation of family meals.

The conjugal integration by reference to time – but also regarding the home space and its equipment – is based on shared home chores under the joint participation in the domestic organisation, as already argued Kaufmann (1992). At first, there are improvisation habits and test routines, but over time it evolves to a relative institution of timetables and roles, often dependent on how professional time is structured. In fact, rotating shifts, especially when there is not overlap between spouses’ employment schedules, makes it difficult to establish a fixed day for performing household tasks. As already mentioned, the big clean up of the house is usually taken by the maid, while the daily tasks of home maintenance tended to be shared between both spouses, namely in younger couples.

However, the birth of first child represents a change in the division of household labour and corresponds to a phase of increased negotiation between marital partners concerning family and domestic responsibilities. In couples with young babies, usually the man takes care of the offspring while the woman assumes the household chores, including preparing meals on a daily basis. In these couples, after parenthood, the ideal values regarding fair sharing of domestic work are abandoned. I have found situations where the tasks associated with maintaining the house fall on women’s shoulders, while men, regardless of their professions, reserve themselves for the playful aspect of children’s care (to play with or to entertain the child), as help to liberate women so that they can undertake the performance of home chores. Therefore, subsequent to the transition to parenthood, sometimes there occurs a step backwards in terms of unpaid work division between the spouses, or at least a more clear assignment of activity areas translated into a specialisation process. It seems that fathers trade time spent on household tasks for time spent with children.

d) There are visible differences in the experience of motherhood and fatherhood, more pronounced in the older generations, which are reflected in household sharing. Women tend to opt for a reduction in working hours – especially in early stages of

childhood – by a feeling of personal need or social pressure towards more time available for educating and monitoring their offspring. Men perceive fatherhood as a major constraint in economic terms, which implies a greater time allocation to paid work in order to meet the new charges that a young child represents and less temporal availability to perform domestic tasks.

Parenthood continues to be strongly associated with conjugality, because the first child is a founding principle of the ‘we-family’, albeit expectations regarding gender identities influence the representations and practices of motherhood and fatherhood.

After the birth of children⁸, women choose to reduce working hours, mainly decreasing or quitting supplementary work, refusing to work overtime in emergency medical services, or claiming the right to enjoy the day off after night shifts, not only because they have a desire to spend more time with their offspring, but also because there are new family obligations with schedules (to pick up the child at nursery or school). Women feel not only the need to spend time with young children and thus follow an important phase in the formation of their personality, but also to compensate for the time away at work, at a stage when those are more dependent on the physical presence of parents in terms of support and attention. The primacy of the caretaker role is of higher importance for women during early stages of childrearing. Therefore, family demands temporarily decrease labour force participation and socioeconomic achievements of women, since they have less time and energy for market work, and also for leisure.

In general, female doctors try not to have work overload – even postponing investment career and giving up promotion chances – when children are small, dependent and require more time. However, usually they return to a heavier work pace and invest in professional achievement as children grow up, becoming more autonomous and beginning to have other requirements, no longer regarding time, but mostly in economic terms. Consequently, along life trajectories there is a progressive reevaluation of personal autonomy within the family through greater investment of women in professional time.

In my sample, both partners in all couples have a secondary or university degree and the education level ratio between spouses is very small. The majority of women were employed full-time – at last for a period of their lives - highly investing in market human capital. Only two women, who worked as nurses at the beginning of marriage, were out of the paid labour force, one of them during the childhood of her offspring and the other

⁸ According to official population statistics for Portugal (INE), in 2007 the average age of women at birth of first child was 28,2 years. However, in higher levels of education (higher academic qualifications) was 32,5 years (Oliveira, 2007). Women's age at birth of first child is increasingly high and is related to the influence of the rise and extension of female education on fertility and hence the fact that the higher the educational level, the greater the probability of women are integrated in the labour market (Aboim, 2006; Almeida et al., 2002; Almeida et al., 2004). In the case of female doctors interviewed, the average age at first birth is 31 years, on a scale from 27 to 39 years. More specifically, six respondents had their first child in their late twenties and the other nine at the age of 30. The transition to motherhood is usually postponed till after the end of Medical Residency, a professional stage very time-consuming.

during a problematic phase of her son's adolescence. Therefore, family and market work are both domains of self-fulfilment and personal gratification for men and women in the dual-career couples.

In some cases for men, the birth of children increases the will to intensify workload or at least its payment, opting for tasks that are better remunerated. This pressure to fulfil adequately the breadwinner role is justified by some respondents as a basic and inexplicable behaviour. Male doctors often gradually increase the time devoted to medical profession as the rise in costs from the enlarged size of the household, but also because they have to correspond to the requirements of their career progression. However, especially in younger generations, the appearance of the offspring causes a change in the management of professional time by men because their small children require more attention and time availability for interaction: in the medium term they may temporarily freeze the investment in certain professional fields or in a short-term strategy they try to concentrate emergency shifts during the week to free the week-end. Nevertheless, there is a difference between what one ideally aspires – regarding time to be devoted to children – and what one has to do in practical terms, according to financial constraints, since reducing working hours means having a lower economic income and therefore more difficulties in balancing the household budget. Now and then there is a dilemma of having to choose to work less in order to have more time for their children, or, alternatively, to work longer hours in order to provide better living conditions and opportunities to their offspring. Hence, the conflict between the emotional and material needs of the offspring.

e) I have found the 'feminine' gendered nature of the tasks concerning the organisation, promotion and maintenance of celebration moments at family gatherings during Christmas season.

In relation to the time of domestic rituals, particularly the mobilisation around special yearly events as Christmas, I stress the process of conjugal socialisation or acculturation in the 'interaction order', with the assumption, by the partner with lower traditions in his/her family origin, of the practices that the other has learned and internalised, and whose memories s/he wants to keep by strength of primary socialization.

Usually it is the woman who seeks to preserve those inherited habits, because there is still a prevalence of female intergenerational maintenance and revitalisation of these extended family festivities associated with Christmas time. The common practices described above fall in to what Singly (2000) calls the rituals of confirmation of social ties between close people, these being emotional relationships within the couple or the family.

In most of the cases, the female predominance is justified by a greater talent for doing the Christmas decorations and arrangements, but especially by the congregation of a large number of women available to accomplish the logistical and organisational tasks (especially cooking and decorating). So, they dispense of men, even those that, in day-to-day routine, are governed by the criteria of joint responsibilities allocation within the couple and by the ideal of equal sharing of household tasks. In those particular

moments of a larger family reunion, is thus tolerated a certain retreat to traditional gender roles.

f) *I have found several situations of outsourcing the domestic work (employing professional domestic workers) and delivering child care to third parties, not only individuals (such as grandparents, namely grandmothers) but also institutions (state and private nursery and primary schools).*

When we study the division of household labour it is essential to take into account the sporadic temporal arrangements or the pressing informal solutions that actors draw (coordinating schedules between spouses, delegating the domestic chores, using the support from family members, purchasing services in the market, etc.).

Demanding assistance from their parents or parents-in-law or from the maid to take care of a little child is considered by the respondents an “external help” for occasional situations of overlap in spouses’ employment schedules (e.g. both are doctors and have emergency night shifts), resulting in a lack of time availability. It is therefore highly important the support given – systematically or not – by the extended family, namely the help from grandparents, either in terms of taking care of young children (picking up and leaving children at daycare centre/school, staying with them when parents are working until late or when both spouses are in emergency shifts), or in terms of domestic assistance, particularly in what concerns food (the couple eat at their parents’ home or bring meals made by their mothers or by their mothers’ maids)⁹.

The grandparents, by taking custody and transport of children, continue to play an important social role of aid and support to the performance of family tasks in dual-career couples, especially for the female population. I must also highlight the help, given by relatives in a vertical line upward, concerning the domestic chores associated with the co-resident group, especially meals in difficult times. The dynamics and vitality of family sociability outside the restricted nuclear family (couple and offspring) is therefore based on reciprocal visits, especially in early stages or after children appear.

In this sense, the good support of parents and parents in-law is considered by the couple as essential to achieve better domestic time management and, for that reason, is very important to have geographical proximity in terms of place of residence. The geographical distance between the couple plus their offspring and their parents’ household has a strong repercussion on the volume of support received in the context of restricted kinship networks of informal solidarity and thus in household sharing. These networks of family support, based on mutual help practices between close relatives, are against the thesis of the sociology of the family which advocates the trend towards conjugalisation and even isolation of the households from the outside world.

In fact, my data corroborate the results of other research developed for the Portuguese reality (Vasconcelos, 2002; Vasconcelos, 2005) that point to larger volumes and more intense daily support received by couples with higher socio-professional and educational levels, including scientific and technical professions. Regarding the relative

⁹ In general, the decision to eat meals out at a restaurant is not a strategy to overcome the lack of time, but especially in order to rest, to change surroundings and to be with other people.

differential position in the social space, family groups holding larger economic and educational resources – such as the professional group in my study – benefit from a net of daily flow of goods and services as well as primary solidarity benefits.

Given the lack of time available to both spouses in order to perform household labour, it is common to pay to a third person, who is delegated a part or all of the most time-consuming domestic chores, namely housecleaning and laundry (including washing and ironing clothes) and in some cases cooking meals. Access to paid services of a maid, with the subsequent transfer of part of routine house tasks, allows time savings. Therefore, to hire paid household help is considered a primary value and an essential aid to housework.

The advantage of having a maid – even a few times a week – is that in their spare time people don't have to be worried with cleanliness and tidiness of the home, because this is already provided by third parties. Otherwise it would be a source of distress and burden, especially for the female of the couple. Thus, hiring a maid marks a rupture between a more complicated stage, at the beginning of conjugal life, and an easier one in terms of domestic time management, that corresponds to an increase in quality of life.

Couples living together at an early stage or that have recently transitioned to parenthood have stressed the importance and urgency of hiring a domestic professional worker. In a context of strong professionalisation and career investment of both spouses, the strategies of delegation to third parties via the outsourcing of domestic work by hiring paid services, releases the couple – and particularly women – from a considerable part of the routine household labour.

g) Although the participation of women in the labour market has been growing constantly within the last decades – as well as their higher educational levels – I was confronted with the persistence of asymmetries and imbalances in terms of gender relations, with no equal sharing of unpaid work between both sexes.

The daily responsibilities of caring for the offspring as well as cleaning and maintenance of the household continue to emphasise gender divisions (Perista, 2002; Torres et al., 2000; Torres et al., 2004; Wall & Amâncio, 2007). The subjective identity of women is still partly based on the traditional binomial wife-mother, i.e. for domestic and family responsibilities. The processes of the social reproduction of subjective identities resulting from the differential objective and symbolic inclusion of women in different systems of social and family relationships gives rise to these gender identities at the same time they are reproduced by practices.

The patterns of time allocation by women and men show that, regarding certain types of unpaid work, there is not yet an equitable division between the sexes – although the greater degree of gender symmetry in higher levels of education and in younger generations – but rather the situation of outsourcing domestic chores, already referred. So far there is not a full participation of men in the domestic space regardless of the rising employment rates of married women, because women invest more time, effort and expertise in household work. Women participate simultaneously in the economic production (labour market) and the domestic (re)production (daily chores).

Besides, the results of the European Research entitled *Policies and the Division of Paid and Unpaid Work*, for the gender division of paid work (labour outside the home) and unpaid work (housework, childcare and care for the elderly) point out to contradictions between ideology and practice¹⁰. In Europe in general, the division of work within the couple has the following patterns of time and energy expenditure: in comparison with men, women spend almost twice as many hours to take care of the children and three times as long to perform chores. There is a 'traditional' division of tasks based on gender, resulting in a strong inequality in this domain. In contrast, women spend significantly fewer hours in employment, especially when there are children or they are not even engaged in any paid work.

In what concerns Portugal, this same research points out that increased participation of women in the labour market is not balanced by greater participation of men in unpaid work (housework and child care). Although Portugal is currently the European country with the highest rate of female full time work (unlike the countries of northern Europe where female employment is very high but mainly in part-time jobs), there are strong asymmetries in the domestic sphere. It should be noted that 'in Portugal, women do almost all the unpaid work, even working outside home about the same number of hours than men' (Torres et al., 2000: pp. 1-2).

According to data from the study cited, the participation in the labour market is very similar for women and men (they only work an hour longer per day than their female partners), but it is women who perform most or almost all household chores. This trend is autonomous from educational levels, although the asymmetry is attenuated in higher levels of education, particularly regarding some chores as preparing meals and home shopping. However, the lowest participation of more educated women in the tasks related to cleaning, housekeeping and laundry does not result from increased male participation but from delegation of such activities to unpaid workers (family members, like mother/mother-in-law or daughter) or paid workers (maids).

It is the paradox of the coexistence between change and continuity. The persistence of significant gender inequalities in the private domain (transcending issues of class, gender or social status), cross-linked to dynamics of compliance (updating social expectations regarding the inculcated roles and rules) and job-related (utility maximisation), coexists with changing trends and parity – or at least mitigating asymmetries – that are more common among certain groups (more educated and with the widespread situation of women working outside the home) and in the 'public' dimensions of gender relations (education and employment). Carrying out the research in Portugal, Anália Torres and Miguel Cabrita synthesise this scenario with the following sentence: 'a non-emancipatory modernisation' of gender relations at work. Similarly, there is discordance between values ('modern') and practice ('traditional'). For example, with the birth of a child, men tend to increase the time spent at paid work, while women

¹⁰ Vide Instituto di Ricerche sulla Popolazione (2001), *Demotrends – Quadrimestrale sulla realtà demografica italiana*, n.1/2001 (Presentation of the main results of the 'Paid and Unpaid' research projects in Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and United Kingdom).

began to devote additional hours to carry out domestic tasks. These movements of opposite direction can be explained by the existence of gender discrimination in wages and labour market integration.

The Female Bread-Winner: Reversal of the 'Traditional' Model?

According to traditional gender roles, namely the male breadwinner model, the man should provide economically for the family, and therefore is encouraged to participate in the labour market, and the woman is seen as responsible for the home and the family (caring for the household and childrearing). The reproduction of inequalities in the division of housework derives from persistent gender wage differentials (Coverman, 1983) and paid-work segregation. However, these aspects of gender stratification within the labour market don't apply to the professional group under analysis.

Despite gender relations and roles in unpaid labour and family, the results of my study reveal an interesting feature. Considering all couples in which only the wife is a doctor, there is a clear trend towards reversal of the 'traditional' male bread-winner model, where the man assumed the responsibility for the economic provision of the family. Actually, I have found some cases of occupational hypogamy – marriages/cohabitations/LAT where the woman holds a more qualified or favoured professional status than the man – in which the female partner assumes the provider role, although in a framework of dual-earner couples.

In the professional universe of physicians, unlike what happens transversally to labour market participation of women and men – i.e. men's advantaged position, strong gender division in paid employment, discrimination of female wages, precariousness of female employment contracts, women's part-time jobs – there are not strong gender differences in what concerns earnings and the occupational status of male and female doctors; although, there may be a prevalence of men in some leadership positions, such as director of medical department.

Given the economic equality in the workplace, i.e. same doctor wages for both men and women, in general, female doctors earn substantially more than their non-clinicians partners and make a greater contribution to the household budget. Therefore, these women work overtime to maintain an accustomed standard or to reach a desired standard of living, being responsible for ensuring certain aspects of family daily lives, such as the monthly payment of the private school for their children or the bank loan for purchasing their own housing. Consequently, women feel incapable to reduce the pace or intensity of the workload, despite its negative impact in terms of nights spent outside home as well as physical and mental exhaustion.

The allocation in paid work time seems to be mostly related to economic rationality (opportunity costs and comparative advantages) and not dependent on gender identities, emphasising human capital investment. This can be explained by the fact that medical activity allows one to obtain additional income by working extra hours in emergency departments at public hospitals and private clinics. In fact, the specific

conditions of medical practice – multi-employment strategies and differential payment for overtime work – create the opportunity to complement the household budget.

We have witnessed an historical period characterised by the rising of a more egalitarian model, in which both spouses contribute almost equally in terms of household income, but at the present time, and in what concerns the group of physicians, there seems to be emerging a relative female bread-winner model in asymmetrical status couples (four in twelve couples). The wife has the strongest earning capacity and her time management is governed by the will to maximise economic utility, especially before motherhood or after children grow up. In fact, even in these women the responsibility for small children has a negative impact – at least temporarily – in their individual capacity to compete in the labour market and therefore determine their careers and wages, partly confirming Becker's human capital model (1985).

Discussion and Conclusions

It is possible to observe gender patterns in the division of domestic time. We have seen how there are different ways of leisure experience between spouses; how women assume a manager role in household labour time; how the roles and tasks become more gendered after parenthood; how maternity and paternity remain different and determine the allocation of domestic work; how women are more active, dynamic and participative in larger family gatherings such as Christmas time; and how gender asymmetries in unpaid work have not yet totally disappeared.

The main conclusions drawn from the results of my study confirm the rational choice theory emphasising the effect of time spent in paid work by both spouses on domestic role sharing, as well as the relative resources theory which stresses the impact of income, education and position on the labour market on individual contribution to domestic work.

The division of labour in the home depends on resources, both in relative and absolute terms, as predicted. Women with greater job earnings, and therefore higher shares of household income, are associated with a propensity for a more egalitarian division of housework. However, this relative equal sharing between partners is not due primarily to a higher male participation in domestic activities, but mostly on account of a decrease of time women spend on home chores by delegation of some of the housework and childcare to others. In most cases, although part of housework is commonly shared between spouses, especially young ones, both partners seem to withdraw from specific household tasks such as house cleaning or taking care of laundry. The socio-economic conditions of couple-existence thus determines women's share on domestic work.

We have seen how upper class women (high occupational status and income) are capable of decreasing the time spent on household labour through external services, namely the capital of extended social relations within kinship networks (informal aid), together with higher economic resources that afford hiring external services (maid, ironing services, etc.). This capacity to purchase more supportive services on the market, such as provision of external childcare or domestic assistance, depends not only on the

ratio between spouses' earnings (relative economic resources) but also on absolute household income. It seems interesting to refer the conclusion of Pahl's study (1989), that the amount of money spent in home maintenance depends on three factors: the household income level, the sources of that income and the control of the income within the household (1989: p.138).

Nevertheless, both partners' earnings are partly determined by the time each one spends on the labour market, i.e. the average number of weekly work hours. As expected, I have found that time availability, in terms of response capacity, affects also the level of involvement in domestic labour. For women, longer working hours increase the probabilities of having a more equitable division of labour in the home. Therefore, full-time female labour force participation in the labour market is associated with increasing odds of a more egalitarian allocation of household responsibilities. However, the negative effect of time constraints in the division of household labour is that the more hours a man works as paid labour force in relation to his wife, the less they share the household chores equally, independent of average level of schooling. These results confirm the ones found in previous studies (Geist, 2005; Halleröd, 2005). In other words, time constraints and high levels of education have opposite effects on individual contribution of husbands to domestic work. Highly educated men are more likely to share housework with their partners, in part because both spouses hold more egalitarian gender role ideologies, but longer hours in the labour market reduce their time available to perform housework. Since women also have lack of available time, part of the household labour is made by third parties, specifically paid workers.

The greater male investment in market work time can be explained by the fact that, on average and for equivalent positions, men are better paid and occupy most of the chief posts. However, the gender gap in earnings is narrowing. In my surveyed population, I have couples where the woman, by being a doctor, earns a higher income than the male spouse and, as such, she invests more time and effort in paid work. In fact, in hypogamic unions where the female partner is the only doctor, there is a relative inversion of the male breadwinner model or even the overcoming of equal dual earner couples – in which both man and woman contribute equitably to the family budget – since women assume the role of provider for the family, based on rational choice principles (economic advantages of multi-employment and overtime payment).

Furthermore, I believe that my research opens new perspectives and insights concerning the study of domestic time management and stresses the epistemological advantage in the complementary nature of different theories and explicative models of household division of labour, given the conceptual links between common predictors. The allocation of household tasks is influenced by both spouses' earnings, education, employment hours, gender beliefs, along with the presence of children, although sometimes in opposite directions. Methodologically, I think that it is important to conduct more case studies and interview-based research projects to produce qualitative data, crossing conjugality, gender, household labour time and atypical work schedules. To go beyond the quantitative analyses generated by time-budget studies, time dairies or survey questions allows researchers to access to the deep social meanings behind the

facts. In addition, it is important to incorporate measures on paid domestic assistance, also made by women but from lower socioeconomic status.

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