

Of Markets and Men

Lessons from the US and Europe for strategies to reach a better work/life balance

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1 *Introduction*

A new political fervor has recently emerged among American women who toil under the double burden of responsibility for almost all household tasks plus a full-time job. Groups such as MomsRising, which published the *Motherhood Manifesto*, stress that women are far too busy. They point out that the United States and Australia are the only industrialized countries with no paid maternity leave, poor child care facilities, few days of leave, and so on. These new groups are pressing for the kind of care schemes that are commonplace in many European countries. What is striking in the pamphlets and plans of these women's groups, however, is the almost complete absence of men and their potentially larger role in child care tasks and housework. These feminists want regulations and facilities, paid for by the government and employers, so as to help *women* take on the combination of the first and second shifts.

In *Families that Work. Policies for Reconciling Parenthood and Employment*, sociologists Janet Gornick and Marcia Meyers also look to European countries as models for solving the pressing problems of American families: "Many of the problems besetting American families are less acute in other industrialized countries that have more extensive public policies that help families manage competing demands from the home and the workplace without sacrificing gender equality. Although none of the countries (...) can be characterized as having achieved a fully, egalitarian, dual-earner-dual-career society, some provide useful examples of the ways in which government can support families in their efforts to share earning and caring work" (2003: 5). In contrast to organizations such as MomsRising, Gornick and Meyers do put an emphasis on the necessity for men to take up a bigger part of the household activities. They criticize "feminists' lack of focus on the involvement of fathers with their children" (2003: 302), citing an author who complains that "hardly anybody is talking over Dad... Other than occasional lip service, groups like the National Organization for Women and the feminist majority don't actively exhort fathers to get more involved." (ibid) They convincingly show in their book that men indeed do invest less time in child care than their spouses do, even if both partners work full-time. They also

demonstrate that the inequality is the greatest when it comes to routine housework activities such as doing the laundry and cleaning (2003: 71-72). Yet, in the conclusion to their book, they are fairly optimistic that gender inequality regarding the performance of household tasks will diminish as European policies are introduced in the US: “Family policies in several European countries (...) provide models of what government can do to help families resolve the tensions between workplace and caring responsibilities while promoting greater gender equality” (2003: 15).

Sociologist Arlie Hochschild also addresses the necessity of men making a greater contribution to care tasks throughout her work, up to her recent publication *Global Woman*¹. Firstly so as to unburden women of the second shift, secondly to create more harmonious heterosexual relationships and thus get to grips with the high divorce rate (more than 50% in the US!), and thirdly to give women in the Third World an opportunity to care for their own children instead of working in the US as nannies. Nonetheless, Hochschild’s work exhibits a remarkable shift in emphasis. Whereas the accent in her best-selling book *The Second Shift* was on a fairer distribution between men and women with a joint household, in *The Time Bind* it is less on the lopsided relationship between men and women in terms of care tasks, but more on the distorted relationship between ‘work’ and ‘home’. Rather than pounding away at the unfair differences between the contributions of men and women to the care for home and hearth, she points to the similarities in the lives of hard-working men and women. Women have started to resemble men in that they now work outside the home as well and, moreover, under ‘male’ conditions: overloaded working weeks and hardly any time for home. Women are also experiencing similar shifts in the values they ascribe to home and work. Whereas men had already said they felt more at home at work than around the house, many women have recently started to express the same view: “In a previous era, men regularly escaped the house for the bar, the fishing hole, the golf course, the pool hall, or, often enough, the sweet joy of work. Today (...) women (...) overloaded and feeling unfairly treated at home, (are) escaping to work, too” (Hochschild 1997: 39). Therefore, Hochschild’s greatest concern now is the marginalization of life

1 In this book, she writes: “One excellent way to raise the value of care is to involve fathers in it. If men shared the care of family members worldwide, care would spread laterally instead of being passed down a social class ladder. (...) For indeed it is men who have for the most part stepped aside from caring work, and it is with them that the ‘care drain’ truly begins” (2003: 29).

'at home', where children have to be content with something as strange as 'quality time', and where as many tasks as possible are outsourced.

In the American context, where the feminist ambition for women to take an equal part in paid labor is as good as fulfilled, the greatest problem now is that paid labor has become completely dominant in the lives of all Americans, men and women alike. From this perspective, the great emphasis placed on *family values* in American political rhetoric tells us something about how far removed this ideal has become from the daily reality of the devalued life at home. Especially many professionals and managers are far too busy (Jacobs & Gerson 2004), with *family life* paying the price. This is the context in which American sociologists such as Hochschild, Gornick & Meyers, and Jacobs & Gerson look longingly to Western Europe for solutions. To cite Gerson: "Many European countries have adopted programs, such as shorter workweeks, widely available child care, and generous parental leave policies, that reflect a concern for family welfare and women's rights" (2004a: 178). The Netherlands is an example of the first kind: nowhere in the world do so many men and women have part-time jobs as in this country. Norway is an example of the second kind: it has a highly-developed welfare state that Arlie Hochschild envies, not least because there are care schemes for both women and men: "In Norway (...) all employed men are eligible for a year's paternity leave at 90 percent pay. Some 80 percent of Norwegian men now take over a month of parental leave. In this way, Norway is a model to the world" (Hochschild & Ehrenreich 2003: 29).

The undervaluation of care tasks and private life are at the centre of this American perspective, and business, marketization, and the lack of good government policies are seen as the main culprits. The implicit rationale seems to be that as the pressure on the family from the outside eases, through part-time work and effective care schemes, men will start to assume their fair share of household and child care tasks and, consequently, women will be less burdened by a 'double shift'.

But is that what is happening in Europe? In this paper, we will have a close look at European realities. Do the Northwestern Europeans indeed have more 'family time' than US citizens? And if so, does this lead to a more fair distribution between men and women in both work opportunities and care tasks?

2 *Part-time paradise: the Netherlands*

“Families seem starved for time and resources”, Gerson writes regarding the US (2002: 12). The world of work makes such enormous demands on people’s lives, that of both men and women, because employees have to work such long hours. The working week of many Americans is long, longer than average in highly-developed European countries, even ignoring the wide-spread overtime that committed employees in the US ‘take for granted’. The quantitative difference with the Netherlands, the part-time work champion of the world, is the greatest. Let us therefore have a closer look at the Dutch situation. It is indeed far more common for Dutch women to work part-time than for American women (73% and 18%, respectively). In addition, the pressure of time is lesser still because the average part-time job in the Netherlands is small as well. Only 18.4% of Dutch women have a large part-time job (28-34 hours), while 38.3% have a job of 12-27 hours, and 16.4% an even smaller part-time job of less than 12 hours a week. Of the Dutch men, 80% work full-time and 20% part-time (8% have a large 28-34-hour part-time job, while 12% have a small part-time job of less than 28 hours a week).²

Based on the analysis of American sociologists, we would expect that Dutch couples are less likely to suffer from a time bind. The rhythm in the Dutch household can be calmer in view of the fact that each household works considerably fewer hours a week on average than American households do. And indeed, the mean joint weekly hours among dual-earner couples with children in the US is 80 hours, whereas in the Netherlands it is just 61 hours (Gornick and Meyers, 2003: 61). This low number of jointly worked hours in the Netherlands can be explained by the fact that of the couples with children under 18 in 2005, both the man and the woman worked full-time in only 6% of the cases; one parent worked full-time and the other part-time in 46% of the cases; both partners worked part-time in 6% of the cases; and one parent worked full-time and the partner had no job in 32% of these households. There also are some couples of whom one parent works

2 These figures relate to 2005.

part-time and one has no job (5%) and others where neither parent has a job (5%). In the situation in which one partner works full-time and the second partner has no job, the man usually is the working parent (SCP 2006: 77).

It is somewhat difficult to find comparable data of how Dutch and American people perceive the time bind. An indication of the more modest dominance of 'work' over 'home' in the Netherlands emerges from interviews among a representative random sample, in which Dutch people state what they consider to be most important in life, and what their ambitions are. The results suggest that Dutch people are generally relatively unambitious in their work. They do not assign a particularly important place in their lives to paid labor. Only 7% of the population considers more than three days of work a week to be ideal for a mother with small children. A majority of mothers of school age children consider a three-day working week to be ideal. (SCP 2006: 124). To put this statistic into perspective, it must be observed that the urgency to demonstrate ambition in the Netherlands by putting in long working hours may well be rather low, because almost all households with one and a half incomes can make ends meet.

The data for the US are somewhat more ambivalent: "Some observers (...) argue Americans work longer hours because they like to work long hours, relative to Europeans" (Gornick & Meyers, 2003: 80). Many studies show, however, that the 'choice' to work longer hours is mainly motivated by a higher income (Evans, Lippoldt & Marinna, 2001). Bell & Freeman conclude that "in the United States we work hard because we face a good 'carrot' for putting out time and effort, and because we also face a substantial 'stick' if we do not" (2001: 96). As Gerson puts it: "The rise of overwork does not reflect worker preferences. Instead, it represents a growing mismatch between job demands and reward structures, which equate work commitment with time spent at the workplace" (2004b).

Part-time work and the division of care tasks

Part-time work is indeed a good means to escape from the time bind 'as a household'. However, anyone taking a closer look at the figures will realize that the main reason is that Dutch women do little outside the home and much inside it. There is no other country where the proportion of hours spent on household and child work is as high as in the case of Dutch women; and nowhere do men on balance spend so little time on the household and the children as in the Netherlands (see table 1).

Table 1 Time spent on paid work/education and household work/family tasks by working people with children per hour per week

	Youngest child 0-6 y				Youngest child 7-17 y			
	Women	%	Men	%	Women	%	Men	%
The Netherlands								
Paid work/education	17.7	32	40.7	70	27.8	55	40.7	82
Household work/family tasks	38.2	68	17.1	30	22.9	45	9.2	18
Total	55.9	100	57.8	100	50.7	100	49.9	100
Sweden								
Paid work/education	20.0	35	36.9	61	30.7	53	38.1	68
Household work/family tasks	37.4	65	23.2	39	27.6	47	17.8	38
Total	57.4	100	60.1	100	58.3	100	55.9	100
France								
Paid work/education	26.6	44	38.5	70	29.5	50	40.4	74
Household work/family tasks	33.6	56	16.6	30	29.5	50	14.2	26
Total	60.2	100	55.1	100	59.0	100	54.6	100
United States								
Paid work/education	29.9	47	43.6	69	31.3	54	42.7	74
Household work/family tasks	34.2	53	19.2	31	26.6	46	14.7	26
Total	64.1	100	62.8	100	57.9	100	57.4	100

Source: SCP 2006

It turns out that in the Netherlands, women in particular tend to put paid labor into a broader context. The majority of women say it is important to be available for their children (Knijn & Van Wel, 2001; Kremer 2007: 199-202). Dutch men agree with that 'motherhood ethos'. Hence, 'home' is indeed more highly valued in Dutch culture than in the United States, but this is mainly because Dutch women put lots of work in their home and give private life a higher priority than their economic independency. Though some Dutch women do want to work more hours, they are clear about the conditions: a good compatibility between working hours and private life, and the ability to take time off for a sick child or sick family member (Knijn & Van Wel 2001; SCP 2006: 136).

Dutch men make longer working weeks than Dutch women do, taking both paid and unpaid work into consideration, but they do little at home in comparison with women, neither where chores nor child care tasks are concerned. In 2005, of the parents with children up to six years of age, women spent 23.7 and 20.7 hours, respectively, on housework and care for children or other household members. The corresponding figures for men with children up to six years of age were 9.2 and 10 hours. The care tasks of parents with children between 6 and 14 decline, for both women and men, but men and women still differ greatly: women in this category spend 24.5 hours on housework and 9.4 hours on care tasks, while the figures for men are 9.8 and 3.6 hours (SCP 2006: 106). The total contribution of men to care tasks was 34.9% in 1995, and 10 years later the situation is virtually unchanged (35.7%)! For sure, their share has increased compared to the 1980s, when women started to enter the labor market, but it seems to have reached a 'threshold' that is difficult to transcend (SCP 2006). Hence, men assumed some tasks at home when their wives started to take on more work outside the home (see also figures 1 and 2). However, this mechanism mainly operates when men are at home alone with their children - in this situation, they have no 'escape'. Moreover, they do not carry out all the tasks: they strongly prefer child care tasks to household tasks (see hereafter).

Part-time work and career penalties for women

The Netherlands shows that although part-time work can bring peace to the home front, this comes at the cost of women's career opportunities and economic independence. There is a conspicuous correlation between the proportion of Dutch women working part-time and the extremely low proportion of Dutch women in more highly qualified jobs. Whereas girls in

the Netherlands on average are even more highly educated than boys, women are greatly underrepresented in middle level and higher positions. In this regard, the Netherlands compares poorly with all other European countries, and certainly with the United States. Of the top jobs in the 500 largest companies in the Netherlands, 3.8% are filled by women (SCP 2004). The proportion of economically independent women³ is also lower in the Netherlands: only 42% of women between 15 and 64 were economically independent in 2004 (Misra et al 2006: 27).

That American sociologists give less weight to the problem of the glass ceiling than to the marginalization of private life, may be understandable in the American situation, where many women are wage self-sufficient (Bell et al 2007: 17) and make it to the top. As Arlie Hochschild writes: "In the early stages of the women's movement many feminists, myself included, pushed for a restructuring of work life to allow for shorter-hours, flexible jobs and a restructuring of home life so that men would get in on the action. Over the years, however, this part of the women's movement seems to have surrendered the initiative to feminists more concerned with helping women break through the corporate glass ceiling into long-hours careers. A time movement would have to bring us all back to the question of how women can become men's equals in a more child-oriented and civic-minded society" (1997: 250). Anyone observing the situation in the US and the Netherlands can see that Hochschild has a point: effectively breaking the glass ceiling is hardly compatible with a strategy oriented to part-time work and a more relaxed lifestyle. Many more women have reached the top in the United States, where there are few part-time jobs. In the Netherlands, where women in particular work part-time, they hit the glass ceiling with a bump (other factors also contribute to the Dutch backwardness regarding women at the top, but part-time work certainly plays a very significant role: see Duyvendak & Slegers (2006a). Opting for part-time work has, therefore, severe consequences for women's career opportunities. Or to be more precise: encouraging part-time work without men changing their attitudes regarding the relative importance of 'work' and 'home' will lead in practice to solving the time bind by assigning to women by far the greatest responsibility for the second shift (or, in the case of the Netherlands, letting them keep that responsibility).

3 In the Netherlands, a person is considered economically independent if he or she earns 70% of the net minimum wage.

Note that this is not necessarily a case against part-time work, but it is a warning against encouraging part-time work in a situation of gender inequality. Where this inequality does not occur, such as in homosexual relationships, Hochschild's dream indeed comes true: Dutch homosexual couples of whom both partners work part-time, enjoy an egalitarian ideology and do actually also share most household and child care tasks (Duyvendak & Stavenuiter 2004; Duyvendak & Stavenuiter 2006b). However, to this a qualifying remark should be added. The group concerned is privileged and relatively highly qualified, and is able to escape the time bind because two part-time incomes are more than sufficient for their household.

3 *Leave schemes: Scandinavian welfare states*

Many American scholars view the Scandinavian countries, with their relatively lavish schemes for leave of absence (e.g. for pregnancy, parenthood, and holidays), as providing another solution for the time bind that families now have to contend with. Furthermore, some of these schemes explicitly encourage men to take their responsibility at home (Sainsbury 1999), which could be a way of reducing the double load borne by women. Let us look at the practical consequences of these schemes, starting with the impact that care schemes have on men's participation in child care and household care in Sweden and Denmark.

Leave schemes and the division of care tasks

When we compare their contribution with men in other European countries, it would indeed seem that Scandinavian men, with the help of numerous schemes, play a larger role at home (Table 2).⁴

Table 2 Time spent on paid work and household work/care for children per hour per week (2003)

	Women		Men	
	Paid work	Household work and care for children	Paid work	Household work and care for children
Denmark	36.5	22.4	40.8	13.3
Sweden	37.0	18.9	40.4	13.6
The Netherlands	27.4	23.8	39.8	11.6
France	35.9	18.2	40.0	10.4

Source: (SCP 2006)

4 On the other hand, the situation for women is even worse in Southern European countries. Women in Greece and Spain, for example, spend 69.8 and 67.9 hours, respectively, on work and care, which is considerably more than women in the Northern European countries spend. This situation is a result of the fact that they both work more (poor leave arrangements) and care more (poor day-care).

However, when we look at Scandinavian men's participation in *household* tasks, we see that their contribution is not large, and is not even larger than that of men in other countries, such as France. This is even more surprising if we consider that Scandinavian men have more time, in particular in the periods in which they are at home more. Scandinavian men seem to enjoy child care tasks. However, this in no way means that they also strongly identify with all other aspects of 'home'. Research has shown that Scandinavian men, despite being less affected by the time bind, put their work just as much at the centre of their lives as other European and American men. There is no sign of a fundamental shift in gender attitudes in the Scandinavian countries (Ellingsaeter 1999, Ellingsaeter & Leira, 2006). Furthermore, many household tasks continue to have a 'female' connotation for Scandinavian men. In Sweden, as in other countries, the division of household tasks is traditional. Women take care of the supply closet, iron clothes, and buy the children's clothes, while the men look after the car and home maintenance. "Men have difficulty viewing household work as a joint responsibility if it involves cooking or doing the washing and cleaning" (Fürst 1999: 33). The fact that they do more with their children than their counterparts elsewhere does not imply other gender attitudes, nor that they view child care tasks less in terms of masculinity and femininity. Scandinavian men still maintain this view, because they perform these tasks as *men*. Scandinavian policy does not attempt to unlink care tasks and gender. On the contrary, the core of policy consists of binding men by tackling them on their specific role as fathers. They must assume their indispensable 'male' role in parenting (Duyvendak & Stavenuiter 2004; Brandth & Kvande 2003).

The above is not to deny that Scandinavian families suffer less from the time bind than their American counterparts do, certainly when the children are young, in life's rush hour (see Table 1). But in this case, too, as with part-time work, it is mainly women who spend more time at home, which is not exactly what the women's movement had in mind, to put it mildly. When the terms of the leave schemes are 'gender neutral', it is mainly women who make use of them. Only when a regulation is targeting men specifically and exclusively, some emancipatory effects are discernible. For example, two months of parental leave in Sweden are meant exclusively for the father; these two months cannot be used by the mother ('use or lose') (Koopmans & Schippers 2006). However, as Seward, Yeatts & Zottarelli conclude: "Yet, despite years of encouragement, the most generous paid leave program available, and growing societal support, only in the 1990s did a slight

majority of Swedish fathers take at least some of the regular paternal leave” (2002: 396).

Leaves schemes and career penalties for women

The fact that it is women who develop a greater home orientation, explains the negative impact on their career prospects. Research has shown that generous welfare state schemes of this kind have a negative impact on women’s promotion chances in Scandinavia, also because women returning to work after a career break gravitate to the public sector (Pettit & Hook 2002; Mandel & Semyonov 2005: 952). “The question of gender equality raises vexing concerns in the design of leave policies. Women’s disproportionate use of long leaves can result in extended absences from the workplace, exacerbating gender inequality in the home, and gender differentials in paid and unpaid work” (Gornick & Meyers, 2003: 101). Moreover, Sweden’s labor market is also one of the most gender-segregated ones in the world, with women and men occupying jobs traditionally associated with their sex, and with women seldom holding positions of power (Haas & Hwang 2007: 58). In Sweden, there is a strong glass ceiling effect (Albrecht, Björklund & Vroman 2003: 171), whereas there is little evidence of a large and systematic glass ceiling effect in the United States (Albrecht, Björklund & Vroman 2003: 147; Baxter & Wright 2000: 289; Bihagen & Ohls 2006: 39). These studies conclude that the glass ceiling in Sweden is the result of the family-friendly policies, which give women longer breaks in their careers than men. Employers who expect less career commitment from their female employees enhance this effect. As we stated before: from an American perspective, it might seem that more modest promotion chances are outweighed by peace on the home front, but the question remains why it is mainly women who pay the price for solving the time bind.

Conclusion

Both the Dutch solution to the time bind (part-time work) and the Scandinavian one (leave arrangements) appear in practice to lead to less time pressure, mainly because women are more often at home and assume, or continue to accept, the lion’s share of both child care and household chores. This is clearly no reason to oppose part-time work or generous leave arrangements, certainly not in the context of the enormous time bind to which many American households are exposed. However, it certainly gives cause to ask

ourselves whether it is possible to design schemes for part-time work and leave of absence in such a way, that men will make maximum use of them. Research has shown that schemes that provide for men to be at home without their partner, possibly together with their children, generate the most favorable effect for women. In these situations, men cannot avoid rolling up their sleeves. In general, however, there is no clear correlation between the amount of women's paid work and men's share in household tasks (Knijn, Van Nunen & Van der Avort, 1994; Hochschild, 1997:184). Julie Brines (1994) has even argued that American working class husbands do less in the home when their wives earn more, in line with the research results of Bittman et al. (2003), who show that American husbands reduce their housework slightly when they earn less than their wives do. As we discussed, in the Netherlands, men took up some additional care tasks when women entered the labor market, but quite quickly, their share seems to have reached a 'threshold' that appears to be difficult to transcend (SCP 2006). Hence, both American and European studies teach us something fundamental: men do not take up their fair share of households tasks. The *quantitative* problem is that in all countries the increase of paid work by women is much larger than the growth of men's participation in care tasks. Moreover, even if men - thanks to all kinds of policy measures that American scholars hope for - will have more time and will be at home more, they will still be reluctant to perform certain tasks. This *qualitative* problem disappears from view in most American analyses because these, under pressure of the time bind, focus on the issue of the similarly strong commitment of both men and women to work and their weak commitment to home. As valuable as this perspective may be, it should not blind us to the fact that, regarding the home, women everywhere still assume the lion's share of the care tasks. This is true in the United States, but *even more so* in a part-time paradise like the Netherlands. And in a welfare paradise like Sweden, where men do invest somewhat more time in care tasks, research shows that this time is exclusively spent with children; Swedish women are as responsible for household tasks as are other women in Europe and the US.

The harsh reality is that men cannot and will not identify with care tasks that they consider to be female. In other words, as long as care tasks have a gender connotation, even if they have the time, men will show little enthusiasm for performing these tasks.

4 *A conditio sine qua non: de-gendering care tasks*

The greatest merit of the recent work of American sociologists is that they show that the emancipation of women has taken place on 'male' terms: women have en masse taken the step to the world of paid labor, but this move has not been accompanied by the necessary changes in that world, which would enable work and care to be combined. Nor have men taken on a fair share of the care tasks. Consequently, 'home' is threatening to be marginalized. The tasks at home are under enormous time pressure and, as a result, many men and women report that they enjoy being at work more than being at home. The enormous demands made by paid labor on the lives of American men and women is the unforeseen and unintended outcome of the emancipatory development, in which women, too, wanted to become economically independent and participate in the world outside the home.

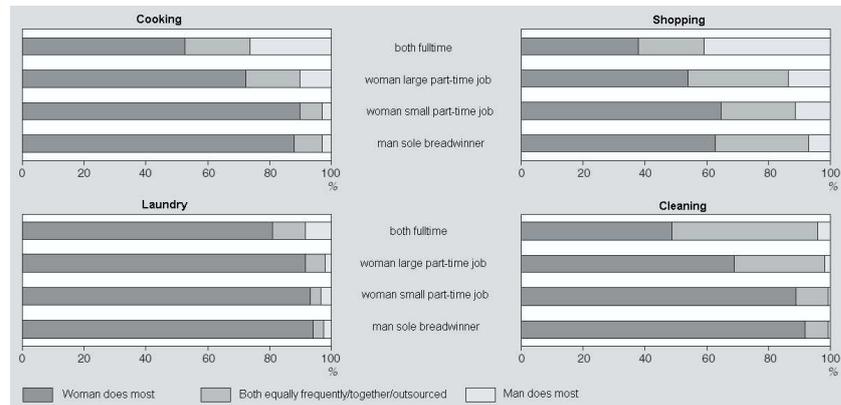
Given this situation, the re-evaluation strategy proposed by Hochschild for 'home' appears relevant. However, the European cases show that striving for a more relaxed distribution of work and care through part-time work, more generous leave arrangements, and good day-care can mean that women return to a traditional position of being those primarily concerned with 'home'. As necessary as it is to put the market in its place and make paid labor less totally dominant in the lives of men and women, de-commodification is at most a necessary, but certainly not a sufficient condition to emancipate both men and women. In addition, the need remains for a fairer distribution of care and work between men and women. Otherwise, the latter run the risk of retaining the double load, or of being punished by means of a career penalty.

Our analysis pointed out that preventing this situation requires men to start identifying more with 'home', and to do so in a more comprehensive way than before (i.e. not only with the enjoyable or gender-stereotyped tasks, such as playing the father role). This is possible only if the tasks that men now avoid lose their female connotation (see Knijn, Van Nunen & Van der Avort, 1994). If the decoupling of care tasks and their gender connotation does not take place, the introduction of leave arrangements and part-time work may lead, not only to less participation of women in paid

labor, but also to far more modest career prospects for women on the labor market.

To ‘strip’ these tasks of gender, we have to look for conditions that explain why and when a certain task has turned into something ‘beyond gender’. The figures for the Netherlands show that shopping and cooking rank first and second in household tasks performed by men (see figure 1). Doing the laundry and cleaning, on the other hand, remain largely gender-specific, meaning that these tasks are mostly done by women. (As discussed earlier, the figures show that in the Netherlands, men with full-time working wives do take a somewhat larger share in some household tasks than men with a part-time working partner).

Figure 1 Household tasks by household type and gender (2000)

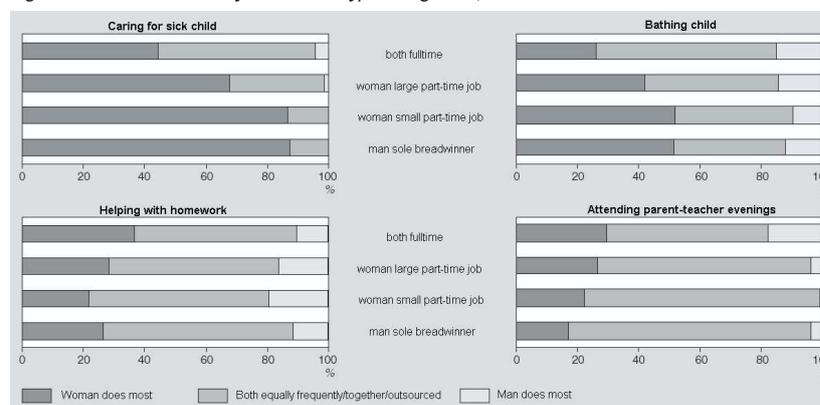


Source: CBS (2002) *Maandstatistiek van de bevolking*, 50, 10, p. 10.

If we compare household tasks and child care, it becomes clear that Dutch men, like Swedish men, are more willing to perform child care tasks than household tasks (see figure 2).

Basing ourselves on case studies we carried out in five European countries (the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Poland and Latvia), we conclude that there are a couple of factors that either encourage or discourage men from taking up certain tasks (Duyvendak, Stavenuiter & Ter Woerds 2007). A number of mechanisms can be listed that appear to be ‘operational’ in certain tasks becoming more gender-neutral. What are these factors?

Figure 2 Child care tasks by household type and gender, 2000



Source: CBS (2002) *Maandstatistiek van de bevolking*, 50, 10, p. 11.

As mentioned before, the mere fact that men are more often alone at home (without a spouse) can be a stimulating factor. We know this from men who are divorced (though we are definitely not advocating divorce), but also from fathers who choose to take parental leave or start working part-time, thus providing themselves with opportunities to be home alone. Doing more at home or with the children can in itself work as a catalyst. For example, a father who takes his child to school or kindergarten will be more involved in the daily activities of his children, and will be more inclined to do other tasks as well.

For household tasks in particular, a clear hierarchy is evident (also see Knijn, Van Nunen & Van der Avort 1994). Some tasks are almost never performed by men, while others are more popular among them. In this perspective, it is important to think strategically about the question of which tasks to stimulate first. For instance, stand-alone tasks are less promising for future change than tasks that are linked in a chain-of-actions: men who cook meals at home (either during the week or at the weekend) are more inclined to shop for the ingredients for the meal as well.

Finally, tasks that are to be performed outside the home in the public arena, like doing the shopping and taking kids to school, seem to be more popular among men than those performed within the privacy of the home. As men see increasing numbers of other men in the supermarket, in the school playground, or in the doctor's waiting room, it will be easier for them to overcome their reticence and take up these tasks themselves. However,

this mechanism works in two ways. First, this logic may hinder any change, since no man dares to be the first to perform 'female' tasks. However, since men like to perform tasks in public, where they can get recognition and approval, when some men start to perform formerly female-connotated tasks the vicious circle may become a virtuous one.

5 *Conclusion*

A reviving women's movement in the US and leading American social scientists are looking to Europe in the hope of a solution to the American problem of overburdened women and families under time pressure. The hope is that part-time work, such as the work arrangements in the Netherlands, and leave arrangements such as those in Scandinavia will provide the much-needed relaxation in American time-bound families. On the other hand, many in Europe, and certainly in the Netherlands, look to the United States, where far more women hold substantial jobs and have managed to reach the highest echelons of industry (the four female CEOs in the Netherlands all come from other countries).

Can the two continents learn and benefit from each other? In other words, is it possible to combine the best of both worlds? This paper has shown that this is a possibility indeed, if one condition is met: the relaxation that Europe might offer Americans, the escape that European welfare states can offer to the dominance of work & market, is conditional on men simultaneously assuming their role in all care and household tasks. Otherwise, women will either continue to carry the double load, or they will once again find themselves confined to the world of 'home', while men will continue to identify primarily with the world of 'work'. It is, therefore, of great importance for women on both continents to combine a quantitative strategy (more time for care on average, less time for paid work) with a qualitative one: care tasks must lose their gender connotation, to make men feel more inclined to take them on. There can be no truly fair distribution until men also take on the less attractive tasks within a household (cleaning and doing the laundry) as well as the enjoyable jobs (playing with the children). When we look at fairness, therefore, the goal is not only a balance in terms of quantity (how much time) but also in terms of quality (are the less enjoyable tasks not left for women; who will carry out the tasks that cannot be postponed, such as the care for a sick child?).

Policies that refrain from attempting to achieve a fairer (re)distribution of tasks generate a huge risk. Indeed, it sometimes seems that women are supposed to be 'glad' that men are at least doing something, which means in

practice that men get the opportunity to do the enjoyable things (often activities with the children), while certain household tasks automatically devolve to women. Although in practice an equal distribution of tasks between men and women may never fully materialize, even a *fairer* distribution requires policymakers' unstinting efforts to ensure that no single task is regarded as specifically male or female. In order to initiate a fairer distribution of tasks between men and women, it is important that all tasks turn into activities 'beyond gender'.

Whether changes will occur, -we showed some possibilities and mechanisms-, eventually depends on the power relationship between men and women. As all investigations have shown, the negotiating position of women at 'the kitchen table' is stronger when they have achieved more on the labor market. The higher their position and salary, the harder they can bargain. Thus, the new generation of American feminists should be aware that achieving objectives such as part-time work demands powerful positions, which, paradoxically enough, American women are actually able to derive from their considerable full-time labor market participation and earning capacity. It is only from this position that they can insist that men take on their fair share and consider part-time work as a serious option for themselves, too. In a certain sense, American women are far better placed to bring about more equal and relaxed households because, according to the logic of the market, they are in a far stronger position than their European sisters are. At the same time, however, this could also be the greatest risk that American women run. Since they identify so strongly with the market, money, and power, they might lose interest in a reassessment of 'home' and might prefer totally outsourcing the care tasks (to other women) to worrying about de-gendering care tasks so that men can make a fair contribution at home. Yet, American women also have an opportunity to use their power differently, and to make sure that the introduction of European measures will not inevitably produce a gender-stereotyping effect.

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