

MEN AND THE FAMILY¹
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Introduction

The gender composition of Argentina's labor force, like that of most countries in the region, underwent profound changes. The economic crisis, which accelerated since the mid 80's, had different effects upon men and women. As a consequence of these changes, the model of the traditional 'single (male) earner' family became less frequent, whereas the opposite was true for the 'two-earners' families. In the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires, the figures make the point quite evident. Between 1980 and 1994, among nuclear families, the traditional 'single male earner' model of household (active male and inactive female) decreased 23.3 per cent, from 67.9 per cent to 52.1 per cent, whereas the 'two-earners' model increased 68.4 per cent, from 23.1 per cent to 38,0 per cent. Moreover, during the same period, the most critical type of the single provider model, formed by an unemployed or inactive male and a female head of household, almost doubled, from 1.7 per cent to 4.9 per cent.³

Women who entered in greatest numbers in the labor force between 1970 and 1980 were those aged 25 to 55 years. Among them, those in the 35 to 44 age group increased the most, at the level of the whole country, from 28 per cent to 34 per cent. They are mostly married women, with children. At the same time, men were decreasing their participation from the 89 per cent they have reached in the 50's. These movements increased the 'feminization' of the labor force. Again, one decade later, between 1980 and

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3 Data come from unpublished tables of the Argentine Household Survey provided to us by INDEC (National Institute for Censuses and Statistics).

1990, in the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires, the female percentage in the labor force increased from 32 per cent to 37 per cent whereas men's stood constant in 74 per cent, thus accentuating the feminization started decades ago. And it was again married women with children which contributed most to the labor force.

The flow of married women with family burdens into the labor force has meant a quasi revolutionary transformation. From a female labor force mostly populated by working daughters (as it was up to the 60's), it shifted towards one formed by working daughters **and** mothers. For indeed, up to the 60's, the female labor force was mainly formed by young, unmarried, or married childless women who, after having the first child, quitted work to devote full-time to homework and childrearing. Their husbands, instead, had no choice. They entered the labor force and stood there, employed or unemployed, until retirement or death. Whether they got married, they became fathers, their youngest child entered school, did not affect their stable relation with the world of work. For women, instead, entering and leaving work was closely knitted with family changes.

Today, many women enter and stay into the working life - either as employed or unemployed- as men do, whichever its family situation. It makes no difference whether they enter marriage or not, whether they have children or not, whether they have babies, young children or adolescents at home. But at home there still is a great difference with men, however. Women did not resign their daily work as housewives, thus becoming 'second shifters'.^{4 5}

The changes in the labor force summarized are associated with a number of dramatic socio-economic and demographic changes that occurred along the last three decades (see Wainerman and

4 The term 'second shift' is due to Hochschild (1989). It names work at home (second shift) that must be accomplished when the workplace (first) shift is over.

5 The description of the changes in the female labor force is based in Wainerman, 1995; Cortés, 1990; García de Fanelli, 1991; and Sautu, 1997.

Geldstein 1994). In fact, during this period the life expectancy of the population, and mainly the proportion of people over 65 and 75 years of age, notoriously increased, more so among women. At the same time, education expanded, also relatively more among women. In the meantime, fertility and marriage decreased, but the age at marriage, consensual unions, divorces and separations, and re-marriages increased. The number of step-families, of one-single parent (headed by females but also by males), 'outside bed' couples, female-headed families which replace the economic headship left vacant by unemployed husbands, etc., have all increased. The major engine of these changes was the growth in women's participation in the labor force, accompanying the increase in male unemployment.

Men have also been affected as evidenced, among others, by the increase in single male parent households, the emergence of ANUPA (New Parents Association) which fights for the legalization of the shared custody of children, the development of men's groups discussing psychological issues concerning 'the new masculinity', etc.

We still do not know the extent to which these transformations have had effects upon the family dynamics, in particular, men's (and women's) participation in familial roles. That is, to what extent taking 'the double role' by an increasing number of women is being accompanied by a larger share of domestic and childrearing work time by men at home. To what extent the role of father solely defined as 'provider' is being redefined to also include 'parenting'.⁶ According to Kimmel (1987), in US the increase of 'dual-earner couples' has created not only new role demands for women, but also new demands for men. I.e., as women have expanded their roles in the paid labor force, men also have expanded their roles.

6. Bernard (1981), Pleck (1987), have often noted that the dominant, although not exclusive, cultural image of 20th. Century US fathers has been the 'father-breadwinner' or 'good provider' model, an image which started to fade away after the 60's.

The study of men can be approached from at least three perspectives. 1) as a social category in itself, in the sense one studies own-account workers, or jazz musicians, or marihuana users, or adolescents; 2) as a comparison or a control group, in relation to women, in order to assess the extent to which their behaviors, ideas, values, or attitudes are or are not gender specific; 3) as arto of a broader unit, and in relation to another part of a unit, like for instance, as one of the spouses or mates of conjugal couples within family units.

In this paper I will summarize the results of an exploratory study in which I addressed the study of men from the third perspective, as husbands and fathers, within family units, **in relation to** women. The study is part of a research on middle-class dual earner families, addresses this question. We have interviewed men and women breaking up the traditional approach that takes women as the single informants on family dynamics, reproducing the equivalent practice of assessing the socio-economic level of the family on the exclusive basis of the occupational characteristics of the (male) head of household, even when the wife has a job.

During the course of 1996, we separately interviewed the wives and husbands of 35 middle-class dual earner couples residing in Buenos Aires city.⁷ We studied, among other themes, the gender division of labor along 25 activities in two areas: housework (12 activities), and childcare (15 activities). Both sets contain daily and occasional activities. Thus, cooking, washing the dishes are to be done everyday, as well as changing diapers, or putting children to bed. On the other hand, paying bills, doing small repairs at home, or fixing the car's breaks are occasionally done, as well as, in the second activity set, organizing a birthday party, or buying clothes for the children, or attending school

⁷ Interviewing was conducted by six sociology students, members of the seminar on 'Family, work, and gender' which I directed at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Buenos Aires University.

meetings. In addition, we inquired about the gender division of labor in their parents family, when they were children, aged 10 or 11 years old. For the previous generation, we asked about a shorter list of activities taking into account memory effects. With these data we are able to answer for this small sample of middle-class two-job couples, the following questions:

1. which is the role of men *vis à vis* women in domestic and parental activities at home, as defined today,

2. which was the role of men *vis à vis* women in domestic and parental activities at home in the parents generation, and the extent to which it has changed inter-generationally, and

3. to what extent the perceptions of husbands and wives on the gender division of labor at their homes today coincide or not.

The ultimate question I am interested in is the one posed by Goldscheider and Waite (1991): will these movements end in 'new families' -with men and women sharing family burdens in a more egalitarian arrangement-, or else they will end in 'no families' -stimulated by the decrease in marriage, the delay of the age at marriage, the shortening of fertility, or the increase of childless couples- sponsored by the dissatisfaction with the non-equitative division of 'the second shift' among husbands and wives.

The context

We separately interviewed both spouses of an intentionally selected sample of 35 middle-class, nuclear families, aged 25-45 years, with at least one young child. We choose dual-earner, families, rather than the traditional one-single (male) earner for it is in this kind of families where men, as well as women, are subject to greater time constraints, and also to greater demands from both, family and work (Hochschild 1989, 1997). Moreover, middle class families formed by well educated working couples, are at the forefront of value changes, hence they may show more clearly than others if changes are taking place in family

dynamics. We choose an early stage of family life for it is one at which there still exists a strong demand for childcare that competes in time with the demands from the working life.

All husbands and wives were employed, the former for an average of 50 weekly hours (ranging from 25 to 80 hours), and the latter for an average of 27 weekly hours (ranging from 6 to 60 hours). In sum, men worked daily an average of four hours and a half more than women. Among wives, 16 worked less than 25 weekly hours, whereas only 7 did it for 40 hours and over. None of the husbands, instead, worked for less than 24 weekly hours whilst 22 did it for 50 or more weekly hours.

All in all, the 35 couples had 67 co-resident children, ranging from 1 to 4 in number, and with an average of 2. The age distribution of children ranged from 2 months to 19 years; they were concentrated below 7. Near two-thirds of the couples have paid domestic aid, for 3 to 80 weekly hours. Most of the children aged 2 and over were in the school system, whether at the nursery or at the primary level. Only a few couples had family aid, mostly from mothers or grandmothers who shared the care of babies or the transportation of children to and from school, or staying at home with them when they were sick.

Most husbands and wives were highly educated: at least secondary level and mostly university level. They had middle-class occupations. There were school teachers, high-school professors, psychologists, physicians, and administrative employees among wives; and insurance agents, bank employers, lawyers, brokers, architects, psychologists, physicians, salesmen, among husbands.

They came mostly from middle- and upper-middle class families, and only in a few cases, from lower class ones. Somewhat over one-third of their mothers were in the labor force. They worked as teachers, administrative employees, and small business owners, unpaid family workers at their husbands' workshop or small store or jewelry. Their husbands were land-owners, architects, physicians, lawyers, members of the armed forces, businessmen, administrative employees, or eventually, qualified workers. At

home, when they were 10 or 11 years of age, a little over half of their parents had servants for work in the household. Of these, about two-thirds had full time maids (over 35 weekly hours), and only very few had short-time aids (less than 16 weekly hours). In today households, those who enjoy domestic aid are similarly over one half. But now full-time aid is scarcer.⁸ Among today couples, a clear negative association exists between the length of the wives' working time and the length of paid domestic aid suggesting that wives pay their replacement as housewives and mothers.⁹ This was not the case for the former generation, when paid domestic aid was much more frequent.

Men and women: the home and the children

The interviews were conducted at home or in working places, coffee-shops and bars. A great effort was put in securing independent responses from both members of the couples, avoiding as much as we possible could that they influence each other. In addition to formally asking not to comment one another their answers, we kept tight and complex schedules of time and place of the interviews to decrease the chances of mutual contagion.

We inquired husbands and wives about a series of activities and ask them to tell us who did it. The question was phrased as follows: 'Would you say that you do all of it, most of it, part of it, a little or nothing of each of the following activities?'

As regards the realm of domesticity, the activities were: cooking meals, washing dishes, setting the table, doing laundry, ironing, cleaning the house, shopping, paying the bills, fixing

8. At the family of origin of the women we interviewed, the length of weekly time of domestic aid (649 hours) was shorter than at their husbands' homes (804 hours) where, incidentally, some families have more than one paid domestic servant.

9. 29 per cent of couples where the wife worked short time (less than 19 weekly hours) had paid domestic aid for 20 or more weekly hours, whereas the same domestic arrangement was present in 35 per cent of couples where wives worked part time (20-34 weekly hours), and in 50 per cent of those working full time (35 weekly hours and over).

the car, repairing household appliances, hiring a house painter, a plumber or a mason, and arranging going out with friends. When it came to child caring, we asked about: changing diapers, feeding, bathing, dressing, putting to bed, controlling tooth brushing, taking children to school, helping with school duties, arranging birthday parties, talking to school teachers, attending school meetings, nagging, staying home when children are sick, taking children to the doctor, and shopping for children's clothes.

Women tended to keep closer than men to the question as we put it. They accepted and used without any trouble the categories 'all', 'most of it', 'part', 'a little', and 'nothing'. Men, instead, found the question problematic. They would keep running around in circles, avoiding the subject, refusing to comply with the request, making use of percentages of time, which allows to measure smaller fractions of time than the categories we offered them. Thus, rather than answering 'I do "a little" of cooking, changing diapers, or the like, they would estimate their share in '5 per cent', or '10 per cent'. They would also use expressions like 'sometimes', or 'from time to time' (i.e., using frequency rather than quantity), which are less drastic than 'a little'. They will also use to remember single, exceptional, events such as: 'Once I went to see my child's teacher and told her that...', or 'Last week, when the child got sick [he didn't stay at home but], I phoned once or twice everyday inquiring how was he doing', or still 'Once, when I was in Miami [on a business trip] I bought him [his child] sneakers'. In doing that, they would transform single acts into substitutes for sharing childrearing in equal terms with their spouses.

In sum, whereas wives answered quickly and in an expedite way, husbands would stop, think, make jokes, tried to make their point clear, remind themselves of anecdotes, etc. Husbands look uncomfortable with the subject matter and eager to justify what they themselves judged as a low level of participation. Some others even show certain degree of irritation with the subject, or lack of interest in it. They often showed signs of relief when

coming to inform how things were at their families of origin. Many of them said: 'Oh!, things were much clearer then', or 'Oh!, roles were much more defined then'.

Let us go into the results now. I will first examine the view that men have of their division of labor at home, starting with the world of housework, which they treated differently from that of childrearing. Among most of the 35 two-job couples, domestic chores are strongly segregated by gender, meaning that men do not get involved with 'the second shift'. To say it differently, there are activities, by the way the majority, which 'are not men's activities'. These are the ones in which 90% to 100 per cent of the husbands do not participate at all, or just a little. They are part of the daily routine, or are to be done very often: cooking, doing the dishes, cleaning the house, doing the laundry, ironing. In turn, there are few activities which "are not female's. When it comes to doing occasional chores like small domestic repairs or maintaining the car, when they have one, men contribute all or most of it, and women very little or nothing at all.

That most daily domestic activities 'are not men's activities' does not mean that they are done exclusively by the women. Women take complete responsibility for household tasks, but the doing of it is only **partly** a matter of wives and **partly** of their 'assistants', be it paid domestic personnel, close relatives or, less frequently, older children. The same happens with men and domestic repairs, when they are not done by the husbands, are done by paid services, not by the wives.

In brief, the responsibility for the execution should be differentiated from the doing itself.¹⁰ In the case of the 35 couples we interviewed, it is the responsibility that is clearly not shared between spouses, the doing may be shared with others.

10. Fassinger (1993), who also distinguishes between 'doing' and 'being responsible for', asserts that 'a key factor that helps perpetuate gender inequality in housework is the different perception men and women have of responsibility for these tasks' (p. 213). She assigns to these differing perceptions the perpetuation of gender inequality at home.

Thus, when it comes to cooking, doing the laundry, washing the dishes, cleaning the house, or ironing, women shared their second shift not with their husbands but with paid domestic services, in most households for just a few hours per week. Cleaning the house and ironing are among the tasks women more easily delegate.

There are some activities where gender segregation exists but with a lower level of consensus, which suggests they are in a state of change, either towards feminization, or towards sharing. They are occasional, and are traditionally 'men's activities': hiring plumbers, home painters or other service personnel, and paying bills. The couples interviewed split in two halves: either husbands/wives do all or most of it and wives/husbands nothing or just a little, or else they are shared.

In fact, there are very few domestic activities which are truly shared by men and women, and where gender segregation does not prevail. It is the case of planning the social life of the couple, shopping, and the daily setting of the table. The former two are shared by about half or over of husbands and wives. Sharing also characterizes setting the table, which is done daily. But this is a **family**-shared activity, for many middle-class parents use it to start building up their children's responsibility with housework duties.

Things are quite different as regards childrearing. Firstly, they are much fewer the couples, and with regard to relatively fewer activities, among which a neat gender segregation prevails, whereas the number of couples which share parenting is larger. Secondly, when segregation does exist, it takes the form of fathers doing nothing or just a little, and mothers doing all of it, as with housework. But unlike housework, in this case mothers have almost no assistance whatsoever from others at home, be it paid service or unpaid relatives. Aside from the custodial function of the school system, the caring and rearing of children at home are almost exclusive responsibility of the parents. They are not transferred nor delegated, except for buying clothes, staying at home with children when they are sick, or taking them to and from

school. In these cases **mothers** may be replaced by a relative, a domestic servant, or by a school bus. These activities diverge from housekeeping, which in many respects and many families women delegate in paid services -be it domestic, or other kind- who do the cleaning, ironing, or the fixing of a faucet, an electrical appliance, or the bathroom shower.

When it comes to nagging the children, attending school meetings, taking children to the medical doctor or, less frequently, taking them to bed or dressing them up, between one half and three-quarters of the husbands interviewed share responsibilities with their wives. But the situation is different when what is at stake is bathing, changing diapers, feeding, buying clothes, planning birthday parties, talking with the teachers, or assisting children with their school duties. In these cases, barely one-third of the fathers share with mothers. The other two-thirds do not contribute at all or just a little and it is the mothers who do all or most of these daily and occasional chores.

Changing diapers is paradigmatic. It is among the child caring activity most rejected by fathers. Men would say 'my "religion" forbids me to change diapers'. Women would tell us that 'He doesn't change diapers, not even touches them, for its most disgusting for him'; or else, 'When he stays at home with the baby, he tries not to change his diaper but waits for me to do it'.

In sum, as it has been found in other societies (Dunn 1997; Durán 1988; Hass 1993; Hochschild 1989; Hood 1986; Morris 1990; Ramos Torres 1990; Szinovacz 1984, among many others), in these middle-class, dual-provider families, men's behavior is less gender bound when they act as fathers than as husbands. Men do engage more with children than with the house. The domain of housework is defined as feminine whereas childrearing is defined as a joint enterprise.

Some men felt sorry for women for they have to work at home and with the children, in addition to doing it at the workplace.

But, as one man said, 'I agree with what psychologist say: babies are very much in need for their mothers...It is culturally dictated. When I'm at home (and I work 12 hours a day), I try to help, but just with the children'. Another one was aware that 'She does everything and, in addition, she works 8 hours a day. That's why I have pity for her. I do help, but I don't dare washing one single dish'.

Even when participating, fathers often don't assume the full responsibility for the task but only for its doing. They act as their spouses' assistants or complements. Thus, husbands would say: 'If my daughter has to brush her teeth, my wife reminds me of it, and I urge her [my daughter] to do it'. And wives say: 'He dresses the children **if** I have their clothes ready'; or else, 'He feeds her **if** I ask him to do it'. In other cases, they participate because they like the task, not because it needs to be done. One of the husbands said: 'I take charge for the maintenance and the painting of the house for I like to do it'. And wives comment that: 'He cooks once in a while because he likes to make pizza'; or 'He polishes the furniture from time to time, he has a kind of sudden attack and does it'.

It is worth recalling that what was summarized above, describes the distribution of domestic and childrearing activities of conjugal couples in which not only the husband-father is in the labor force, but also the wife-mother is. It is true that while most men work on a full-time, and even over full-time basis, barely one-third of the women do the same, one-half of them work part-time, and one-fifth just for very few hours weekly. But all of them have one or two, and even three small children at home. Somewhat less than half of them do not have hired domestic help, while one fourth have it only once, and exceptionally, twice a week, for just 3 to 5 hours per day.

The parents' generation: the home and the children

How do the situation of these men and women differ from that of their own fathers and mothers, i.e., members of the previous generation?

Nearly two-thirds of their mothers were full-time housewives when the men and women we interviewed were 10 or 11 years of age. The activity rate of this group (41 per cent) was relatively high for the mid 70's. For the female population to which they belong - mostly middle-class, 35 to 45 years of age, with secondary education, married, with husband and two or more children at home - was between 34.0 per cent and 36.5 per cent (Wainerman 1979). Among families where mothers did not work, over one-third had full-time paid domestic aid. In those where mothers were economically active, many full-time, only near half had paid domestic aid, the rest had no aid at all.

How was the division of labor among husbands and wives then? Since no previous research has been done in Argentina on this topic, we could not rely on data of the previous generation for comparison. We could not afford the cost of interviewing the fathers and mothers of our interviewees, neither shortening our sample because of the "mortality" which this kind of diachronic design produces. Hence, at the risk of lowering the validity of the data, we adopted this strategy of collecting past information through proxy informants. As pointed out by Sudman, Bradburn and Schwartz (1996), we are aware that the retrieval of autobiographical memory traces we asked our informants to perform is a complicated process which may be influenced by both, the actual behaviors to be retrieved, and by events that happened and/or information that was incorporated into the memory later on.

We are relatively confident in the validity of the proxy information we collected for at least two reasons. The coincidence between the information **separately** gathered from husbands and wives concerning their own families of origin. On the other hand, the coincidence between the socio-demographic and economic

parameters of the parent's population with those of the universe from which they came.¹¹

Taking into account the difficulties involved in retrieving past information from proxy respondents, we inquired for only 18 of the 25 activities we studied for today couples, 9 related to housework and 9 to childrearing. It is only in relation to these that we may assess the extent to which the division of labor at home changed over generations.

In the parents' generation, the behavior of men and women also varied depending on the realm of activities: men had greater presence as fathers than as husbands, and shared more with women as mothers than as wives.

The difference with today generation as regards housework is just one of degree, for segregation operates today after the same patterns as in the past. The same activities were female's and the same were male's. Cooking, doing the dishes, ironing, cleaning the house, shopping, was the wives responsibility. Doing small repairs at home, or caring for the car, were the responsibility of husbands. Paying bills was mostly a male activity but in one-third of the couples, women were in charge of it. The perception of the men and women we interviewed were extremely coincident as regards the division of labor between their parents at their families of origin.

The inter-generational difference consists in that many men today participate **a little** when it comes to cooking, doing the

11 One of the indicators is the educational structure by gender of husbands and wives in today families and in their families of origin. Indeed, in the parent's generation, 70 per cent of both members of the conjugal couple have achieved at least incomplete secondary education, but with great differences by gender when it came to the highest educational level. Only 20 per cent of the mothers *vis à vis* 44 per cent of the fathers achieved incomplete university level and over. The equivalent figures today are 91% of the mothers and 80 per cent of the fathers. The data show the trend towards the expansion of education (more marked among females), and of the equality of opportunities for both genders which have been widely documented by aggregate data. The inter-generational trends towards greater female participation in the labor force is another indicator of the relative validity of the information gathered from both generations using first hand data for today's and proxy data for the past generations.

dishes, or cleaning the house, whereas most men in the parents' generation did not participate in these activities **at all**. In addition, even though still scarce, sharing has become much more popular among spouses today. Paying the bills and shopping are good examples: only 10 per cent of the parents of the early 70's shared, compared with between one-fourth and one-half of their sons and daughters, the parents of the late 90's.

It is with regard to parenting that the inter-generational change is truly evident. The scale of this change is huge. Almost all fathers of the previous generation refused getting involved with bathing or dressing their children, or with their school work. These were defined as 'mothers' activities for 'parenting' was culturally perceived as 'mothering'. Today only barely one-third of the fathers of their grandsons and granddaughters continue refusing to participate. The role of father has been re-defined. Men have assumed it to a much greater extent, sharing the caretaking of their children with the mothers. Nagging, which traditionally has been the domain of the father -'you'll see when your father is at home'- is shared by both spouses in three quarters of the couples we interviewed. Fathering seems to have acquired a social value it never had before, and one housework has not reached so far, and doubtless it will.

This trend reproduces the one found in the US since the mid 80's, alongside with the rise of the "nurturing father". Many studies have given consistent evidences of the increase in men's involvement in child rearing while keeping a similar low share of housework as in the past (see Coltrane, 1995; Gerson, 1993; Marsiglio, 1993; Goldscheider and Waite, 1991; Pleck, 1987; among others) for a extended literature on the topic). As Gerson noted,

A growing group of fathers, most of whom are married to work-committed women, are changing diapers, pushing strollers,

cuddling their children, and generally sharing in the pleasures and burdens of child rearing. (p. 9)

The trend seems to have acquired greater strength in the middle classes and among dual-earner families. In Argentina, psychology, mostly psychoanalysis, which has permeated educational concepts and methods since the late 60's, have reinforced these changes. The 'School for Parents', a creation of psychologist Eva Giberti in the 60's, is paradigmatic of this movement. It widely diffused modern ideas about parents-children relationships, and fueled a new meaning of fatherhood through radio, newspapers, feminine magazines, conferences, and a four-volume book which was in the shelves of most middle-class educated families (Giberti 1961).

Children's schoolbooks supply interesting evidences which are of special value since the school is one major agents of socialization and of cultural imposition. Up to the 70's, these books taught children that

Fathers and mothers have quite different functions, almost without any point of contact. While mothers are in charge of the routine domestic tasks, fathers -displaying creativity, initiative, and wisdom find quick solutions to the problems that arise at home. If an electrical appliance fails, they fix it; if bookshelves are needed, they build them. Their main activity is working to provide economic support to the family. (Wainerman and Heredia 1996, p. 86)

Nothing like this is found in the books published early in the 90's. In most of these books, boys and girls share the same games, and also the doing of domestic tasks. In the family this co-existence of roles is also present.

Most mothers in these books are in the labor force, even those with small children.... Though in the labor force, they retain the leadership over domestic chores... and the care of children... No redistribution of homework between spouses has occurred. As up to the 70's, men are more involved with parenthood than with housework: they share time with their children, help to dress them, participate in school meetings, take them for a stroll, etc. But they don't wash the dishes, cook, or clean the house. ...

What has greatly changed is boys and girls involvement in homework. Whereas in the 70's girls played to be little mothers to their dolls, and boys played at tasks demanding strength and ingenuity, in the 90's they both help in equal terms with domestic chores cooking, making the beds, setting the table, doing the laundry. (Wainerman and Heredia op. cit., p. 92)

Two tales from the family: husbands' and wives' views

Husbands and wives argued about the time availability and the degree of flexibility of the work schedule to justify the unequal division of labor between them at home.¹² Women used to make such comments as: 'In former times we use to share much more for he was more often at home'; 'He used to work less time, and we did everything half and half; I'm doing much more now, ... he has to work longer hours'; 'He would like to do more than he does now, but it's all a matter of time'; 'Next year, when I start working twice the time I do now, we'll both do the same'. Men, in turn, said that 'It's because of my job that I can't, it's not because I don't want to do it'; or 'In the past I was more at home for I didn't work as much as today [before taking the second job]. My wife, instead, had to take shifts at the hospital, working longer hours than I did, hence, it was I who took care of the children'. The arguments seem to reflect reality for, it worths recalling, that husbands nearly work (in non-domestic activities) five more hours a day in average than their wives do.

Let us look now at the picture men and women have of what goes on at their homes. In the realm of domestic activities, husbands view the situation as being much more shared and wives much more segregated. Overall, men perceive their own

11. According to Greenstein (1996) the 'time availability' perspective -which draws on Becker's human capital theory- is one of four major conceptual approaches social scientists have developed to explain inequalities in task allocation between husbands and wives. The remaining three being: the 'relative resources', 'the economic dependency', and 'the gender ideology'. Greenstein found no support for the adequacy of the "time availability" perspective in his review of research on the domestic division of labor.

participation in domestic tasks somewhat greater than wives do. Both perceptions do not fall so far apart, though. Where wives estimate husbands do **nothing at all**, husbands estimate they do **just a little**, but not **part, most of it**, or **all of it**. In fact, when it comes to cooking or washing the dishes, two-thirds of the wives said their husbands contribute **nothing at all**, while only one-third of the husbands agree with it, and over one-third declared they do **just a little**.

In sum, the perceptions of both members of the married couple as regards the way the domestic division of labor at home occurs, coincide, in general. Husbands and wives are aware that most of homemaking is segregated (and it is the privilege of the women), with the exception of such tasks as setting the table or hiring the service of plumbers, house painters and masons. But against this background, men attribute themselves greater involvement in the second shift than women to them.

In the realm of child caring, again, there are more occasions when husbands perceive they share activities with their wives than it is the other way round. This is true with regard to changing diapers, dressing the children, staying at home when they are sick, taking them to the doctor, attending school meetings, and even planning birthday parties. They have, instead, a less shared, or more segregated view of taking children to bed or to have their teeth brushed, or nagging, activities which in higher or lower degrees imply to set limits, to mold behavior.

To sum up, men see fatherhood and motherhood as being much more shared than women do, and they do it via increasing their participation relative to what wives attribute to them. Studies that include both husbands and wives (such as Berk 1985, or Greenstein 1996) also report that husbands and wives systematically underestimate each other's effort. In our case this may be the consequence of men's compensating what they see as a fault on their part (in the presence of the interviewer, through

the effect of the social desirability mechanism), or a truly distorted perception of reality. According to Hertrich (1997), 'Three conditions are needed for information to be adequately given: it is necessary that the person knows the data, that he/she remembers it, and that he/she accurately (faithfully) reports it'. The question is: to what extent men and women have equal knowledge of these data? To what extent they remember them with equal accuracy? To what extent there are equally able to accurately report on it? The methodological consequences of a negative answer to these questions are self evident. The importance of it merits to pursue further empirical research.

Conclusions

The evidences summarized here are a first step on the way to exploring fatherhood in middle-class dual-earner families. Not only we do not know how it works but also we do not even know how men and women function together at home, what they do and how they feel about.

The question which these data arise is the one Goldscheider and Waite (1991) put for the US: 'new families, no families?'. Are Argentine families on the way to fading away due to the increase in singlehood, chillness, and divorce, or will they become more egalitarian as a result of men coming to share with women 'the second shift'?

It is too soon to advance a definite answer, but the couples we interviewed are sharing somewhat more housework and much more child caring responsibilities than their own parents did thirty years ago. Today children being socialized in this climate might at least reproduce it, if not widen it, when they come to the age to form their own families.

The uneasiness we discovered in many of the husbands we interviewed when faced with telling about how much they contribute to housework and childrearing at home, gives evidence on the

pressures which have recently been building up on men to become more involved with the family and its tasks.

Women will keep on entering the labor force in greater numbers in the near future. Since not all of them can be superwomen, able to take on both parental and economic roles, one can foresee that men will increase their involvement in housework and parenting, thus sharing the burden of the second shift borne by their working wives and making for 'masculinity' not to be exclusively equated with men's ability to provide financially. Hence, we vote for 'new families' rather than for 'no families'.

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