

Are Power Structures and Empowerment Reasons for the traditional Division of Household Tasks within Couples? An inter-European Comparison

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Starting problem: The (modified) male breadwinner and the female housework model

In the last decades, we observe a rapid modernization in most European countries. In particular, equal rights in the private sphere were implemented and supported by family policies. Gender equality as a political goal is highly valued among couples. Nevertheless, if comparing the division of household tasks in European countries, we observe a striking discrepancy between attitudes and behaviors: On the one hand there exist emancipated attitudes, but on the other hand traditional behaviors within couples are still predominant - a “modernized family traditionalism¹” (Levy et al. 2002)?

Comparing European countries, our ‘Task-Participation-Index’ (preparing daily meals, doing the dishes, shopping for food, vacuum-cleaning the house) for Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Netherlands and Norway indicate country-specific differences, however, in all countries women do more housework than men. The traditional division of household tasks seems to be a general trend in most European countries (Batalova/Cohen 2002: 750; Fuwa 2004: 764; Huinink/Feldhaus 2008: 4; Lott 2009: 327; Meuwly et al. 2001: 37; Plantenga 2009: 30; Schmid/Schön-Bühlmann 2003: 131; Schulz/Blossfeld 2006: 469)². While at the beginning of a partnership an equal distribution of housework is quite common, this frequently changes during the partnership and especially after the birth of the 1st child. Several studies confirmed, that the birth of the 1st child is the driving factor that reinforces a traditionalization in the division of housework (Levy/Ernst 2002: 120; Lott 2012: 6; Zabel/Heintz-Martin 2013: 663; Dechant/Schulz 2014: 593ff.).

Subsequently, the traditional division of housework and childcare is often linked with a change in women’s employment status into part-time arrangements just after maternity leave (Vogel 2009: 170). Especially in “West Germany, the traditional male breadwinner model was gradually replaced by the modified male breadwinner (where the man worked full-time and the woman worked part-time)” (Trappe et al. 2015: 238f.). Thus, lacks in the social integration of mothers is lowering their participation on the labor market. “Female participation profiles pivot around the family” (Levy et al. 2002). In most cases where men and women worked full-time, nevertheless women do the routine housework.

Based on these considerations, we can formulate the pivotal **research question** of our dissertation project as follows:

How do power structures and empowerment determine the division of household tasks within couples in different European countries?

- Which connection exists between power structures and domestic job-sharing?
- How far determine societal dimensions of power the division of household tasks?
- Which connection exists between job-participation and domestic housework?

¹ In this context, ‘traditionalism’ means that domestic tasks are still a female domain while ‘egalitarian division’ is defined that man and woman do the household tasks equally and ‘de-traditionalism’ denominates as role reversal, where the man always/usually do the housework (Grunow et al. 2007: 163).

² One little restriction for Germany: This effect is stronger in West- than in East-Germany (Pfau-Effinger/Smidt 2011: 219; Klärner/Keim 2011: 121).

There are a lot of studies explaining predominantly gender inequalities, therefore power within couples, or traditional role-taking. The usual research-perspective is focusing either on the micro- or the macro-level but is hardly taking into consideration the interaction of these levels. Research based on a multi-level design is lacking. By consequence, we can briefly describe our **research goals**, which are: (1) to create a theoretical meta-analysis of central studies with reference to the state of the art, (2) to develop a theoretical typology of power dimensions, (3) to carry out a multilevel analysis that integrates the dimensions societal empowerment and the power division within couples and (4) to explain the division of household tasks within couples in selected European countries.

According to the 1st and 2nd goal the developed **typology of power** includes five dimensions of power, which are located on the micro- and/or on the macro-level (table 1):

Interactional power (resource constellations within couples, control over income, decision-making), *Cultural power* (latent cultural principles, which are manifest in attitudes, educational background/attainment, religiousness), *Institutional power* (differentiation of family forms, marriage/divorce rate), *Power of participation* (employment status, economic participation and opportunities) and *Structural power/Empowerment* (political (women's) rights, electoral system, childcare institutions).

Following the reasoning set forth by the state of the art, we could hypothesize that:

H1: The division of household tasks could be explained by structural conditions, institutions, participation, cultural values, attitudes and individual differences.

H2: Between European countries are differences prevalent, however communalities could be observed for regime typologies. Communalities will be expected for South and East-European countries, as well as for North and West-European countries.

H3: The modified breadwinner model is predominant in West-European countries.

H4: Micro sociologically explanations are dependent on the context:

Within countries, where a lot of people live below the poverty line, Gender theories have stronger explanations. Within countries, where a lot of people live in prosperity, rational choice theories have stronger explanations.

H5: The longer the marriage, the more traditional is the division of household tasks (Honeymoon-Hypothesis).

Our analyses are based on the **Generations and Gender Programme** (GGP). The GGP is a panel survey, including a contextual database with macro-level information and national Generations and Gender surveys (GGS; representative sample of 18-79 year old population) with micro-level information (GGP 2015). We will integrate all European countries, as far as practically possible, for which the first and second wave of GGS data are available in order to develop an appropriate **multilevel model** for longitudinal, nested data.

Conclusion: Comparing European countries, our 'Task-Participation-Index' indicate country-specific differences, however, in all countries women do more housework than men. Which factors determine the division of household tasks? The analyze of this question is currently a work in progress. The division of household tasks is a social topic which was often analyzed. However, there is a central restriction: there exist hardly any analyses that include micro- and macro-level power-indicators to explain the gap between liberal attitudes and traditional behaviors in European countries. Our future plan is to develop such a multilevel model to explain the division of household tasks.

Table 1: Theoretical framework

Micro-level Inter-role-conflict			Macro-level National differences: value- and norm system		
Theories	Individual Indicators	Dimension of power	Theories/ Macro-Indexes	Contextual indicators	Dimension of power
Symmetrical resource theories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic theory of family (New Home Economics) • Intrafamily bargaining and household decision • Social exchange theory • Time-availability theory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • income (+relation man/woman) • educational background (+relation man/woman) • employment status (+relation man/woman) • work quota: full-time/part-time/unemployed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interactional power • cultural power • power of participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GDI (Gender-related Development Index) 	Differences men/women: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • health: life expectancy • education: years of schooling for children, years of schooling for adults ages 25 and older, literacy rate of adults • estimated earned income 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • structural power/empowerment • power of participation • cultural power
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GGG (Global Gender Gap Index) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • economic participation and opportunity • educational attainment, health and survival • political empowerment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • structural power/empowerment • power of participation • cultural power
Asymmetrical Gender theories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doing Gender • Work and Family identities • Honeymoon-Hypothesis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • birth of the 1st child/birth of the last child, number of children • attitudes • marital status: marriage vs. cohabitation duration of marriage/partnership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interactional power • power of participation • cultural power • institutional power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GEM (Gender Empowerment Measure) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • political empowerment: parliamentary seats • economic power: female administrators/ managers, professional and technical workers, women's share of earnings income 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • structural power/empowerment • power of participation • cultural power
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GEI (Gender Equality Index) 	equal sharing of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • paid work • money • knowledge • power • time • health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • structural power/empowerment • power of participation • cultural power

Source: Own description. Further socio-demographic determinants: age, religiousness

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