

## Judith Treas and Sonja Drobnic (Eds.): Dividing the Domestic: Men, Women, and Household Work in Cross-National Perspective

Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010. 280 pp.

This book represents an important contribution to the current sociological literature on the gender division of labour. As Judith Treas writes in the introductory chapter, ‘studies of the division of household labour have only rarely addressed the broader context within which preferences are formed and housework arrangements are worked out’ (p. 7). Remediating this omission is precisely the key motivation of this book, which consists of a collection of 12 chapters from leading international scholars in the field. *Dividing the Domestic* suggests that scholars working on the gender division of labour should avoid ‘monocausal explanations’ and move on to a type of analytical framework that considers the complex intersection of cultural, normative, political, demographic, and socio-economic factors.

*Dividing the Domestic* starts with a well-structured introduction by Treas (Chapter 1). It provides a summary of the different chapters of the volume and presents the key theoretical debates on gendered patterns in housework. Married men and women, as she argues, tend to divide their housework in line with a rational adaption to their comparative advantages and time constraints. But women and men also adjust their behaviour to gendered preferences and attitudes embedded in everyday life interaction. In addition, Treas stresses the importance of studying how societal values and welfare regimes influence gender inequalities in domestic work. This last point is in fact a central underlying motivation of all chapters of the book.

In Section I, Liana Sayer (Chapter 2) provides a useful overview of the trends in housework performance in nine countries with different gender regimes and social policy traditions. In line with previous studies, she finds an overall historical reduction in the housework gender gap since the 1980s. This applies to non-routine activities, but in general also to routine housework (i.e. cleaning, washing, and cooking). However, as Sayer’s empirical results imply, the gender gap in housework is associated with variations in welfare regime traditions and gender egalitarian policies. In contrast, absolute levels of housework (for both men and women) appear to be related to cultural standards of housekeeping, combined with the intersection of socio-demographic structures and institutional contexts. Yet, the narrowing gender gap in housework is in general explained by an

important reduction in women’s time, rather than by an increase in men’s input.

In Section II, the reader finds a diverse picture of how policies are correlated with demographic, cultural, and socio-economic scenarios, a broad analytical approach that has usually been neglected in previous research. To begin with, the multilevel study of 33 countries carried out by Tanja van der Lippe (Chapter 3) demonstrates that those countries with strong gender egalitarian family–work policies have more equitable outcomes in housework and lower absolute levels of domestic work burdens than other countries. Lynn P. Cooke (Chapter 4) argues that, despite the proven predictive power of Esping-Andersen’s welfare regime typology in explaining households’ behaviours (including domestic work), within-regime variations should not be overlooked. She finds that the historical legacies of Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States (three liberal countries) present distinctive policy packages associated with divergent outcomes in the gender division of labour across the income distribution.

Also in Section II, Shirley Dex (Chapter 5) points out that people’s preferences and behaviours in housework do not simply operate as a mere function of a given policy menu. Yet, she argues, policies that promote increasing the length and quality of paternity leave and women’s wages might create circumstances that would lead to a progressive transition towards more gender equality in the society. In the last contribution of Section II, Sanjiv Gupta, Marie Evertsson, Daniela Grunow, Magnus Neremo, and Liana Sayer (Chapter 6) undertake a comparative analysis of Sweden, Germany, and the United States. They investigate the hitherto under-studied question of how women’s housework performance is correlated with income inequality and public policy scenarios. In social democratic Sweden, where women’s income inequality is relatively low and social policies are strong, the housework gap between the richest and the poorest women is significantly lower than in Germany (with a conservative policy tradition and intermediate levels of income inequality among women), and especially the United States (a liberal country with minimal state intervention and a high Gini coefficient).

Section III focuses on the cultural dimension of housework, an important subject that has received little attention in most cross-national research on couple specialization. In her cultural perspective on ‘family models’, Birgit Pfau-Effinger (Chapter 7) proposes to look deeply into how gendered housework patterns vary across countries that adhere to either a more ‘servant culture’ or a rather horizontal notion of domestic work outsourcing (i.e. southern Europe versus Scandinavia). Further, she argues that we have to examine the interaction between cultural frameworks and policy

contexts to fully understand the division of child care and housework. She argues that non-trivial differences between Germany and France are observed (two Continental European countries). But differences also exist between Norway and Finland (two Scandinavian countries). Although Finland and France have significant differences in terms of gender equality, both countries cluster within the ‘dual breadwinner/external care provider model’. In contrast, Norway and West Germany, as put by Pfau-Effinger, represent the ‘male breadwinner/female part-time care model’, even if universal family-work policies are stronger in the former than in the latter. Maria Charles and Erin Cech (Chapter 8) expand on this cultural approach. Their findings suggest that cultural ideals and beliefs about motherhood and maternal full-time employment vary across countries with different gender regimes and policy contexts, even among women with similar socio-demographic characteristics. However, in line with the proposals of Pfau-Effinger, the study by Charles and Cech also implies that distinct links between policy and culture exist within similar welfare state contexts.

The final chapters of Section III include two original studies of how partners’ attitudes and practices lead to different outcomes in the division of domestic work within couples. Carrie Yodanis (Chapter 9) conducts a cross-national investigation using survey data on a topic that has received little attention in the literature. She examines the extent to which Giddens’ theory on the revolution of intimacy in contemporary marriages corresponds to differences in how heterosexual couples divide their housework activities. Interestingly, she finds a connection between the values of closeness and communication within marriages and the degree of gender equality in the division of housework tasks. Using a similar approach, Karl A. Röhler and Johannes Huinink focus on couples with different emotional ties and housework arrangements in East and West Germany. Their analyses based on mixed methods reveal that the underlying mechanisms behind the gender division of housework might vary between East and West Germany. Furthermore, their study implies that family norms are not necessarily related to the degree of gender equality in individuals’ housework performance. This finding, however, as the authors themselves stress, needs further replication with related data sets.

In Section IV, Claudia Geist (Chapter 11) conducts a cross-national investigation of 33 countries, focusing on differences in men’s and women’s reports of time spent on housework. First of all, her results show that women’s responses regarding their own housework time are consistent with men’s perceptions of their wife’s housework. In contrast, men’s self-reports of housework time exceed

women’s perceptions of their husbands’ housework time by 1.5 hours. Geist also shows that where the total volume of housework is relatively high, the gender gap between one’s self-reports of housework time and reports about the partner’s housework is (in relative terms) higher than where individuals allocate less time to housework. Similarly, she suggests that in those countries where men do more housework, they might feel normatively biased towards this overestimation of their housework time, whereas ‘women may underestimate their partners’ efforts perhaps to maintain that they are the ones who still do considerably more housework’ (p. 236).

Finally, the book ends with a chapter written by Sonja Drobnic (Chapter 12) summarizing the lines of research to which the book contributes. This chapter emphasizes the rich variety of empirical approaches represented in the book, uncovering the links between cultural and policy frameworks. The chapter also shows how the gender division of housework interacts with critical variables, such as attitudes and norms, the structure of inequality, and demographic characteristics.

*Dividing the Domestic* provides rich empirical evidence and includes a diversity of relevant theoretical discussions. Nevertheless, some important questions that require further scholarly attention are not fully considered in this book. In light of the goals and implications of the book, two main issues deserve examination in future work on this subject: (i) more effort needs to be made to use complex data sets, implying not only a need to fully exploit the data already available within existing data sets, but also a need to invest effort in creating new surveys, and (ii) a wider (multidimensional) concept of domestic work needs to be used to better understand the gender division of labour across countries.

First, as Tanja van der Lippe argues (p. 56), ‘it is necessary to collect more precise macro indicators—cultural, economic, and policy related—to gain better insight into the influence of country characteristics’. Access to longitudinal cross-national data with accurate information on individuals’ daily routines in the domestic sphere might help us to better understand gender inequalities in domestic work performance. The analysis of complex data (qualitative and quantitative) combining indicators of people’s time use allocation, well-being, normative expectations, relationships, or social contexts would be a good way to follow up the analytical approaches that are proposed in this book.

Second, as is hinted at by Pfau-Effinger and Drobnic, a multidimensional and richer approach to the variable ‘domestic work’ is needed. *Dividing the Domestic*, perhaps for reasons of space, tends to lack a broad conceptualization of household work and gendered patterns in family life. First of all, care work should be more

explicitly defined as a part of household work. Childcare activities, and other related types of care work, have huge implications for the degree of gender equity in a society. Moreover, care work has some differences in relation to housework that should be widely considered in cross-national research on gender inequalities. Another important research agenda deals with multitasking in the domestic sphere and with the interrelated question of how individuals' daily interruptions and strains are associated with gender inequalities inside and outside the home: Under what micro- and macro-level conditions do men and women have more hectic and stressful daily routines? Are these indicators associated with different levels of satisfaction and well-being by gender across different socio-economic and demographic groups in different countries? These types of questions could complement and expand the scholarship of this book.

Notwithstanding these few issues that require further attention, *Dividing the Domestic* is an important reference for social scientists interested in the analysis of the gender division of labour. Family scholars and students will find in this book an updated and complex way of understanding and expanding current research in domestic work, a topic that is critical for a better interpretation of key sociological phenomena, such as gender inequalities, social cohesion, and social change.

**Pablo Gracia**

*Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, Spain*

*pablo.gracia@upf.edu*

DOI:10.1093/esr/jcs072, available online at [www.esr.oxfordjournals.org](http://www.esr.oxfordjournals.org)

Online publication 5 October 2012

## Heikki Ervasti, Jorgen Goul Andersen, Torben Fridberg and Kristen Ringdahl (Eds.): *The Future of the Welfare State: Social Policy Attitudes and Social Capital in Europe*

Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2012. 288 pp.

*The Future of the Welfare State* is an edited collection of comparative studies that focus on attitudes towards the welfare state. Using data from the 2008 European Social Survey, representing almost thirty European countries, the main issues analysed are social risks, shifts in the

structure of family and associated challenges, and the impacts of immigration and heightened societal heterogeneity. An overarching aim of the book is to demonstrate the complexity and nuance involved in understanding welfare attitudes.

Chapter 2 is a study by Andersen and Ringdal that explores subjective risk experiences. The results of the study reveal that, in contrast to what some versions of 'risk society' theory (Beck, 1992) would imply, risk is not distributed randomly. For example, the higher a household's education and income, the lower the chance of unemployment being perceived as a risk. The authors also argue that the large country differences that exist in risk perception are best explained by country characteristics related to their 'welfare regime' classification. Finally, the research indicates that country wealth (which is closely related to welfare regime classification) has a negative relationship with the level of perceived risks. The authors state that it is difficult to know whether this is a wealth effect or the effect of a combination of factors relating to both wealth and politics that are captured within the welfare regime categories. Perhaps, as a result of analysing such a large number of country cases, the authors do not develop the argument that important contextual factors exist within each welfare regime classification.

Continuing with the focus on social risk, Chapter 3, written by Chung and van Oorschot, examines the factors that can explain actual and perceived employment insecurity. The authors find that the perceived and actual unemployment benefit generosity, in addition to perceived and actual unemployment rates, are important in explaining why, on an individual level, employment is perceived to be insecure. Additionally, the actual context and perception of this context are found to be significant for shaping employment insecurity. Despite the fact that the study only examines two labour market factors, it provides valuable insights into the largely under-researched area of individual perceptions of employment risk.

In Chapter 4, Finseraas and Ringdal focus on the objective and subjective risks of income loss and relate these to welfare state preferences. One of the study's interesting conclusions is that its findings do not support the theoretical claim that those whose employment position is more open to trade (and therefore exposed to greater risk) will be more supportive of the welfare state. Similarly, welfare state preferences are found to be unaffected by the comparative advantage of the sector in which an individual is employed. The chapter makes interesting links between individual preferences and the global-scale risks associated with economic dynamics of employment.