

Part II

Work, Money and Property within Intimate Relationships: Expectations and Actions

Paid and Unpaid Work

Can Policy Improve Gender Inequalities?

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INTRODUCTION

WOMEN'S POSITION in the labour market has improved enormously in recent decades, both in terms of employment and in relative earnings. It was predicted that increasing gender equality within the labour market would lead to greater egalitarianism in unpaid work within the household. However, this has proved to be only partially true. Although employment reduces women's unpaid work, changes in men's contribution to domestic labour have been slight and uneven.

The last decade or so has seen a Europe-wide explosion of interest in the way social policies, labour markets, and motherhood are inter-related (Del Boca and Wetzels, 2007). In Europe, population decline is an issue and forecasts suggest that below-population replacement levels of total fertility will continue, with an average European total fertility rate of about 1.5 through to 2020 (Kohler, Billari and Ortega, 2006). With people living longer, there is concern that the proportion of people who are of working age compared with those who are too young or too old to work (the dependency ratio) will steadily decline. Thus there is an interest in improving the dependency ratio by alleviating family-work conflicts, so that women employees will continue to have children (the labour market of the future), and so that mothers will continue to participate in the labour force.

In this chapter we review some of the ways policies under different welfare regimes seek to influence work-family balance. Policy rhetoric in the UK tends to emphasise the importance of individual choice in making decisions about work-family balance, but this masks the degree to which people's choices are differentially constrained by gender. In particular, unless the unequal division between men and women of unpaid work can be addressed, policies that seek to reconcile paid work and family life are likely to be extremely limited in their capacity to improve gender inequalities both in the labour force and in the realm of unpaid domestic work and care.

In order to understand what policies might facilitate or mitigate against change in men's and women's division of labour, we review the changes that have occurred in division of labour within couples in Britain over the past decade and explore why gender inequalities in unpaid work are so slow to change. While much attention has been paid to child-care provision and parental leave policies, far less attention has been given to whether policies can be devised that will equalise men's and women's contributions to unpaid work (Dex, forthcoming). Our review leads to the rather pessimistic conclusion that, on the basis of the existing evidence, it is unlikely that state policies will have more than a minimal influence in reducing gender inequalities in a couple's share of unpaid domestic work. However, before examining in more detail the division of labour within couples, and associated policy initiatives, we first consider how far gender equality has been achieved in the UK labour market.

GENDER EQUALITY AND THE UK LABOUR MARKET

There are two very different stories that can be told about labour market changes over the past half-century or so, in terms of gender equality. One story emphasises the positive, while the other offers a somewhat less rosy picture. The positive perspective has plenty of evidence on which to draw: the proportion of women in the labour market has grown markedly; the pay gap has narrowed; notions that a woman's place is in the home have eroded markedly; and women have overtaken men in numbers pursuing higher education.

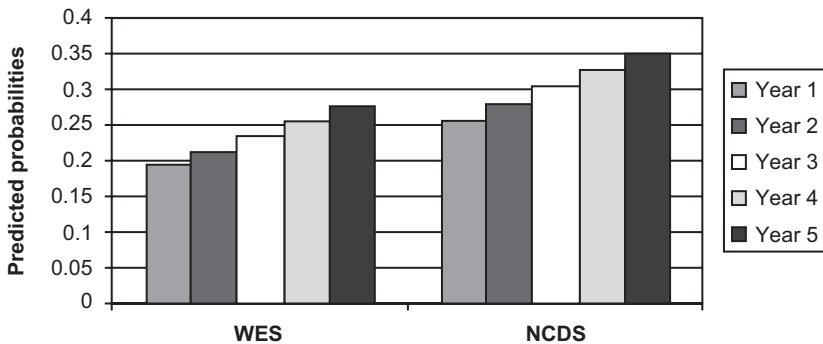
Half a century ago, the situation was very different. The 1949 Royal Commission on Population report was concerned that the then existing employment bars against married women working were harmful all round—to women, the family, and the community. True, the Commission was hardly giving a ringing endorsement to employed mothers. For example it observes that 'there is often a real conflict between motherhood and a whole-time career' (Royal Commission on Population, 1949: 160). Nevertheless it went on to acknowledge that, at least in part, the conflict is due to artificial barriers that restrict the contribution that women can make to the cultural and economic life of the nation. The report urged that a 'deliberate effort should be made to devise adjustments that would render it easier for women to combine motherhood and the care of a home with outside activities' (at 160).

In 1951, less than a quarter of married women in Britain were in the workforce; by 1991 this was the case for half of all married women, and the proportion continued to rise. By 2001, 65 per cent of married women were in the labour force and there is no longer any difference between the participation rates of married and single women (Gallie, 2000; Scott, 2008). In 1951, 30 per cent of women aged 20–59 were in full-time employment (Joshi, 1989). Forty years later in 1991 this figure had risen only slightly to 34 per cent. In the same period, the extent of women being employed part-time has quadrupled from 11 per cent of all female

employees in 1951 to 45 per cent in 1991 (Gallie, 2000). In 2002, 70 per cent of working-age women were economically active, with 42 per cent of those in employment working part time (WEU, 2004).

On the positive side, the UK has already surpassed the Lisbon target for a female labour force participation rate of 60 per cent by 2010. But there is little to be complacent about. Women and mothers in particular are often caught in part-time jobs that frequently bring disadvantages in pay and promotion trajectories. Mothers, according to national surveys, overwhelmingly prefer to work part time. However, whether their preferences reflect the fact that shorter hours help women to juggle family and work roles, or whether part-time work is the only realistic option because of lack of child-care alternatives and a traditional gender-role division of labour in the home, is less clear. What is clear from analysis of British Cohort Survey data is that although overall there has been a decrease in the downward mobility of women following childbirth, if women have longer breaks out of the workforce or return after childbirth to a part-time job, the occupational penalties in terms of downward mobility have *increased* over time.

Even professional women experience increasing occupational costs for taking longer periods away from work following the birth of their first child. As Figure 3.1 shows, a teacher born between 1922 and 1936 and between 1943 and 1953 (data from WES—the Women and Employment Survey) had a one in five chance of moving down the occupational scale after taking one year off work; for a woman taking five years off work, this increased to just over a one in four chance. For a teacher born in 1958 (data from the NCDS—National Child Development Survey), there was a one in four chance of moving down the occupational scale following a one-year break, which increased to a one in three chance if the gap was five years.

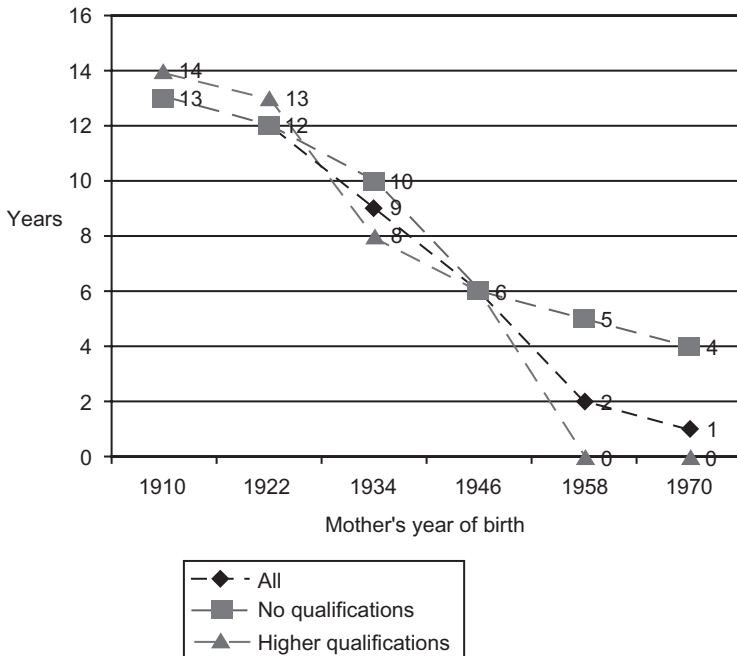


Source: Figure from Dex, Ward and Joshi (2008).

Figure 3.1: Predicted Probabilities of Downward Occupational Mobility after Childbirth (WES and NCDS teachers by years before first return to work)

There has been an overall trend of ever-faster rates of mothers' return to work after childbirth, as Figure 3.2 shows. For example, 50 per cent of mothers born in 1946 had returned to work by the time their first child was six years old. For mothers born in 1958, 50 per cent had returned within two years after the birth, and of those born in 1970 half had returned after just one year. However, these figures vary greatly for recent cohorts depending on the level of educational qualifications the mothers held, and it is those with higher education who were born in 1958 and 1970 who have returned to work fastest (less than a year after the birth of their first child), whereas those with lower levels of education or no qualifications return at a much slower rate.

The analysis of women's changing patterns of employment over time makes it clear that there has been some improvement in women's employment prospects. Moreover, these improvements go hand in hand with improvements in women's tertiary educational qualifications and the lessening of the pay gap. The percentage of women who had tertiary qualifications increased from 11 per cent of those born in 1946, to 25 per cent of those born in 1958, and 32 per cent of those born in 1970; whereas the equivalent percentages for men were 22 per cent, 28 per cent,



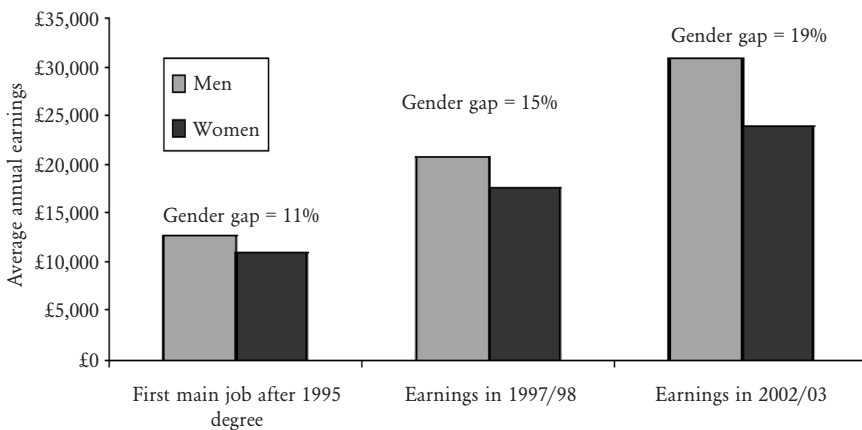
Source: Figure from Dex, Ward and Joshi (2008).

Figure 3.2: Median Number of Years between First Birth and Return to Next Job by Mothers' Date of Birth and Qualifications

and 31 per cent. If we look at the ratio of women's to men's hourly wage at age 26 for those working full time, then for those born in 1946 it was 0.63, for those born in 1958 it had increased to 0.84, and for those born in 1970 it was 0.91 (Joshi and Paci, 1998). This is a genuine lessening of the gender pay gap.

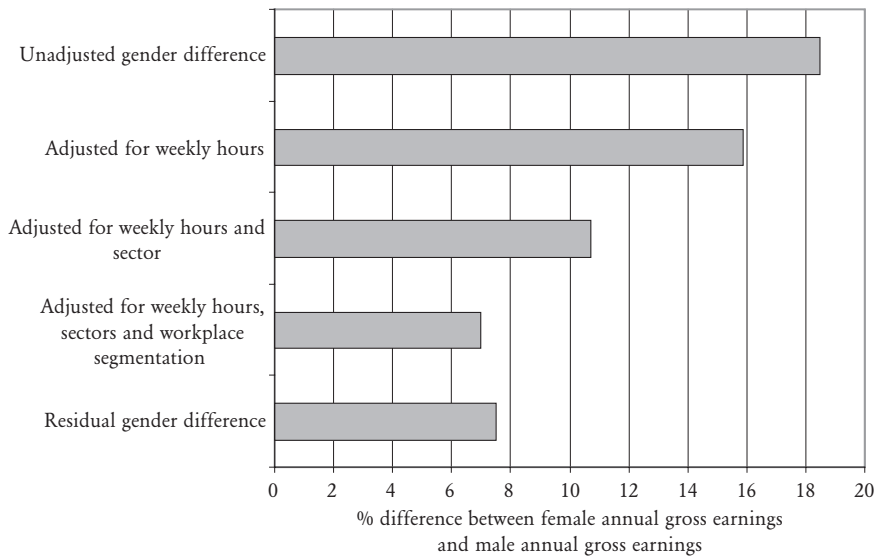
But there is also a story that is far less rosy. If we look at the average annual gross earnings of graduates, where one might expect to find younger generations of women with the opportunities and inclinations to achieve financial rewards comparable to their male peers, we find this is not the case. Using data from a longitudinal study of over 3,000 graduates who gained their first degrees in 1995, Purcell and Elias (2008) found that young women, even at this early stage in their careers, do not appear to have achieved equal earnings with their male peers and, moreover, that the gender pay gap continues to increase as their careers develop. As we can see in Figure 3.3, women graduates reported full-time gross earnings in their first job after graduation that were on average, 11 per cent less than those of male graduates. Three and half years later the gap had risen to 15 per cent, and by 2002/03 to 19 per cent.

So how can this 19 per cent pay gap be accounted for? The top bar on the chart shown in Figure 3.4 gives the unadjusted difference in the annual earnings of male and female graduates in full-time employment seven years after graduation. Each bar beneath this shows the effect on the gender difference in pay of introducing statistical controls for the different relevant factors. Thus controlling for weekly hours alone reduces the differential to about 16 per cent. Next, controls are added for sectors of employment. Women are much more likely than men to work in the public sector, which pays less than the private sector but may have more 'family-friendly' working conditions. The sector controls reduce the wage



Source: Figure from Purcell and Elias (2008).

Figure 3.3: Average Annual Gross Earnings of 1995 Graduates by Gender



Source: Figure from Purcell and Elias (2008).

Figure 3.4: The Combined Effects of Various Factors on the Gender Difference in Annual Earnings of 1995 Graduates Seven Years after Graduation

gap to nearly 11 per cent. Finally the additional impact of gender segregation at the workplace brings the gender gap down to only 7 per cent.

There may be some unmeasured workplace discrimination that helps explain a small fraction of the remaining gender inequality in pay. But, beyond the operation of any outstanding workplace inequalities in pay and promotion prospects, a more important explanation lies in the day-to-day practices of unequal division of paid work and caring activities in the household (Gershuny, 2004). The persistence of the pay gap between men and women is likely to be attributable in part to a gender division of labour among couples in paid and unpaid work.

HOW FAR HAS THE DIVISION OF LABOUR WITHIN COUPLES IN BRITAIN CHANGED?

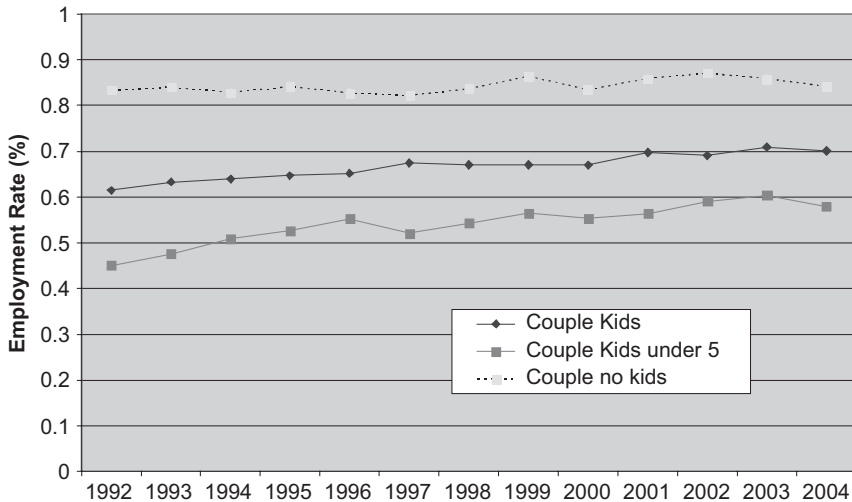
The main question addressed in this section is to what extent the divide of paid and unpaid work in couple households in Britain has changed over the last decade. The data used are from the British Household Panel Survey, which is a longitudinal survey of over 5,000 households in Britain. Here we report analysis by Harkness (2008) which concentrates on couples where the women are in their prime working age between 25 and 49. Couples need not be legally married but they must be cohabiting. Thus 'lat' couples (those living apart together) are excluded, not only because they are problematic to identify but also because,

given the sampling rules of the survey, data for both partners would be available only if they had children. The analysis looks at aggregate patterns of change over time—and does not follow individuals longitudinally.

In Figure 3.5 we can see the employment rate for women in couples by whether or not they have children. While employment rates for childless women have always been high, there has been a marked rise in the employment of mothers from 1992 onwards, with the greatest rise among mothers of young children. There is no evidence of any decline in the employment of the male partners in these couple households. The division of paid work in households is very dependent on the presence of young children.

While there has been a rise of 6 per cent overall in the proportion of female workers, as Table 3.1 shows, this increase rises to 10 per cent for households with small children (under the age of five). These figures combine dual-earner households (both parties working full time) and the one-and-a-half earner model (where the female partner works part time). This increase in labour may in part reflect the impact of a series of government initiatives supporting maternal employment, including increased support for child care and improved maternity leave.

In terms of hours spent on paid work and housework (including cooking, cleaning and doing the laundry, but excluding child care) we can see in Table 3.2 that the paid work hours of women rose on average by two hours per week from 1993/94 to 2003/04; whereas, for women with pre-school children, the increase over the same period was three hours per week to 18 hours in 2003/04. As paid



Source: Figure from Harkness (2008).

Figure 3.5: Employment Rates for Women in Couples (aged 25–49) (British Household Panel Survey)

Table 3.1: Household Work Patterns: Women aged 20–49 in Couples

	Dual career (both full time)	Modified (male full time and female part time)	Male bread-winner	Female bread-winner	No earner	Sample size
All						
1993/94	0.38	0.27	0.21	0.05	0.07	3,182
2003/04	0.42	0.29	0.2	0.04	0.04	2,760
Change	0.04	0.02	-0.01	0.01	-0.03	
With children under 5						
1993/4	0.17	0.29	0.41	0.03	0.1	871
2003/4	0.2	0.36	0.38	0.02	0.03	772
Change	0.03	0.07	-0.03	-0.01	-0.07	

Source: Table from Harkness (2008).

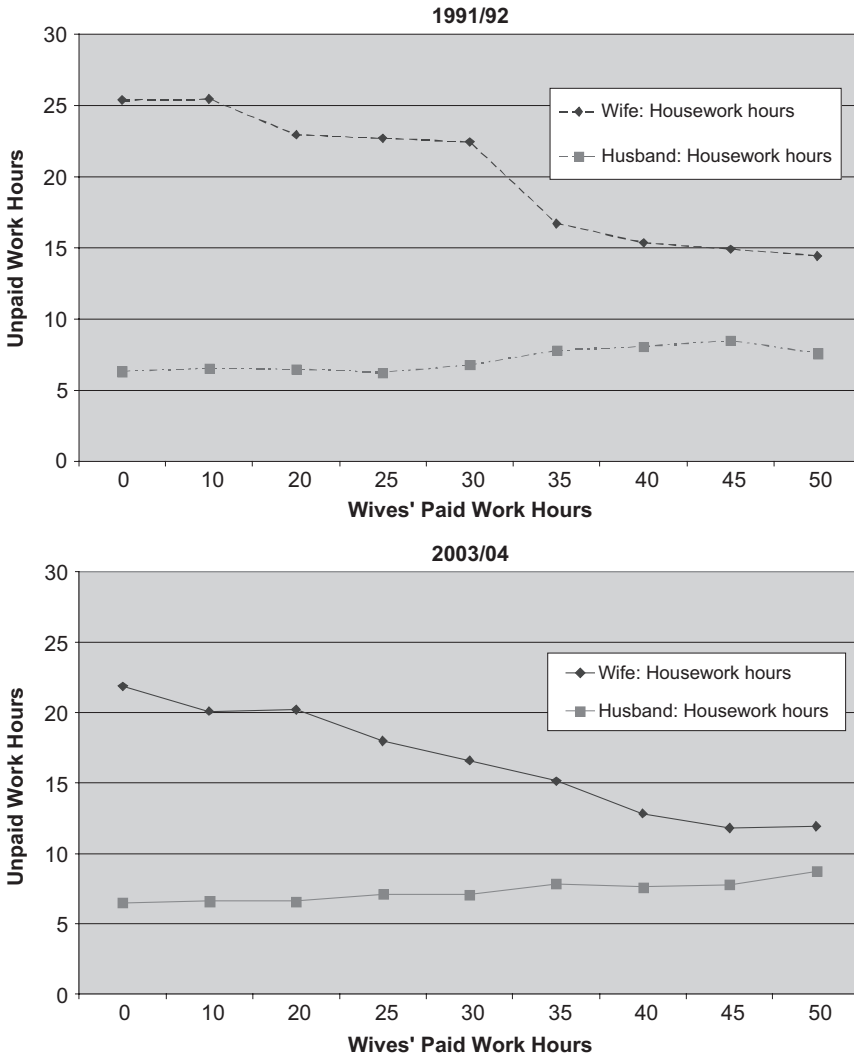
Table 3.2: Hours of Paid and Unpaid Work within Households

	Paid Work Hours			Unpaid Work Hours		
	female	male	total	female	male	total
All couple households						
1993/94	23.4	41.4	64.8	20.8	5.7	26.5
2003/04	25.2	41.7	66.9	16.2	5.5	21.7
Change	1.8	0.3	2.1	-4.6	-0.2	-4.8
Children under 5						
1993/94	14.9	41.8	56.7	24.7	5.9	30.6
2003/04	17.8	42.9	60.7	18.7	5.2	23.9
Change	2.9	1.1	4	-6	-0.7	-6.7

Source: Table from Harkness (2008).

employment rose there was a corresponding decrease in housework—a six-hour drop for women with pre-school children. By contrast, men's paid and unpaid work hours changed very little over this period.

Of course, households with different employment patterns do differ in the amount of time men and women spend on both paid and unpaid work; while full-time working mothers are employed for shorter hours than their partners (39 hours compared with 46 hours in 2003/04) they continue to do the bulk of the housework (14 hours compared with 7 hours for their male partner).



Source: Figures from Harkness (2008).

Figure 3.6: Husbands and Wives: Unpaid Work Hours by Wives' Paid Work Hours (British Household Panel Study)

Figure 3.6 shows the way the women's and men's unpaid housework hours are associated with the woman's employment hours. The figures for 1991/92 and 2003/04 show that the pattern has not changed over time: women's unpaid work diminishes rapidly, while men's participation in unpaid work increases only very slightly.

Other analysis, using the longitudinal panel data that follow changes in individual patterns of paid and unpaid work over time (Gershuny, Bittman and Brice, 2005), points to a pattern of ‘lagged adaptation’. Thus although women decrease their unpaid work immediately and dramatically on returning to full-time work, their male partner’s corresponding increase in unpaid work is both delayed and somewhat unreliable. Gershuny et al find a similar pattern for men in the UK, the US and West Germany. Their findings raise the interesting question as to who is doing the work—whether unpaid chores are being left undone, or whether there has been an increase in the use of paid domestic services. There has been a clear growth in the demand for and supply of domestic services in recent years, but such services are often arranged and paid for by women and do little to ameliorate the gender imbalance in unpaid work. These findings also suggest that different national policies towards work–family balance have little effect on the gender division of labour in paid and unpaid work.

POLICY INITIATIVES CONCERNING WORK–FAMILY BALANCE

It is usually considered desirable to have greater equality between men and women in the labour market—and a lot of policy initiatives and anti-discrimination legislation have been orientated towards that goal. A related issue that is less visible in policy debate is whether steps should be taken to try to equalise women’s and men’s unpaid work loads in the home. In this section we consider the types of policy interventions used by governments which might, in principle, change unpaid work behaviour within households.

As Lewis (2008) and others have pointed out, the policy regimes of many industrialised countries were designed and devised around the model of a male breadwinner family where the man worked full time and the women cared for the family and was not expected to be employed. This male breadwinner behaviour, in its pure sense, is hardly visible in industrialised countries of the twenty-first century because of the huge increases in women’s employment that have taken place. Although, as we showed earlier, many women do take time out of the labour force to have and to care for children, these periods have been getting successively shorter over recent generations (Macran, Joshi and Dex, 1996). For policy purposes the male breadwinner model still exists, albeit in a modified form. A common modification is for the male partner to be in paid work and working full-time hours, and the female partner to be in paid work but working part-time hours.

A range of models that address work–family balance, together with the associated policies and example countries, is set out in Table 3.3. Policies have grown up in very different ways in different countries, and the logic underlying the policies can vary considerably from country to country. Moreover, some countries have adapted more quickly to the new models of family behaviour that have emerged, whereas other countries are slow to change (Lewis, 2006).

Table 3.3: Range of Models of Work–Family Balance

Model/author	Description	Associated policies	Example countries
Adult worker model family (Lewis, 2001). Comes in two forms:	Men and women are responsible for participating in the labour market.	Stimulate provision of formal child-care services, possibly subsidised.	Model encouraged in EU.
a) supported	Focus on getting lone parents and low earners into work.	In work-benefits, tax credits acting as subsidy to low paying employers. Tax relief or subsidy for child care if women in paid work.	UK since 1999, more so since 2003.
b) unsupported	Gender neutral, equality defined as sameness.	Earned income tax credits to make sure it is economic to work. No support for workers, except what is provided in the market. Market may provide cheap affordable domestic services and child care (eg, via high levels of immigration to offer low-wage work if the state colludes). Little support in leave or pay for childbearing, or income replacement while childbearing and child-rearing.	USA
Gender participation model , sometimes called the Nordic model, or ‘gender-differentiated supported adult worker model’ (Hobson, 2004; Lewis, 2008)	Gender equality promoted, but makes allowances for difference.	Generous cash support for parental leave, services for child care and elderly dependents, but also for women to have extensive periods of leave (three years if two children born in quick succession) and rights to work part time until child is eight.	Sweden To a lesser extent in other Scandinavian countries. To a lesser extent in Germany.
Gender equality based on a women’s model of equality (Knijn, 2004)	All workers encouraged to reduce their weekly paid working hours to be part time.		The Netherlands

In principle there are two extremes that policy regimes can adopt: they can either support adults as paid workers, undifferentiated by gender, or they can acknowledge that men and women are likely to offer different levels of contributions to the labour market. No policy regime takes the extreme adult worker position, but the US comes pretty close to this, having only offered women rights to unpaid maternity leave since 1996. Scandinavian countries are often heralded as being more focused on providing equal opportunities to women and men, but their policies also allow women's employment contribution to be different from men's in having longer parental leave, and long periods of part-time work following childbirth. When policies allow or encourage women to behave differently in terms of their employment participation or their hours of work, gender differences in the home and in domestic contributions are tacitly endorsed.

In order to link specific country policies with different time use patterns, Table 3.4 shows the mean time in minutes per day that men and women spend on different types of work and unpaid work, in the UK, the US, Sweden, the Netherlands and West Germany. These data are taken from time diaries of a longitudinal cross-national sample (Gershuny, 2000). 'Paid work' is contrasted with 'core domestic work' (referring to housework and cooking) and 'other unpaid work' (child care, shopping and odd jobs).

Table 3.4 makes it clear that women in all these countries do a greater share of unpaid work than men. However, two other facts about the gender division of work are also worth noting. First, adding up women's and men's paid and unpaid work leads to near equality in the amounts of total work done by men and women (as in the Harkness figures cited earlier), or men doing slightly more total work

Table 3.4: Mean Time Spent per Day on Different Types of Work, in Minutes

	The Netherlands	UK	US	Sweden	West Germany
Core domestic work					
Men	29	28	33	56	11
Women	188	177	182	143	238
Other unpaid work					
Men	84	83	97	117	84
Women	124	111	142	146	132
Paid work					
Men	325	367	406	379	418
Women	94	178	187	262	168
Total work					
Men	438	478	536	552	513
Women	406	466	511	551	538

Source: Gershuny (2000: ch 7).

than women (the only exception being West Germany). Such figures suggest that claims of the 'double burden' (Hochschild, 1989) carried by women who are employed and still do the larger share of unpaid work may be exaggerated. Secondly, the average amounts of domestic work and paid work vary by country as by well as by gender, with relatively high total work hours in the US, Sweden and West Germany, and the lowest total work hours in the Netherlands.

We suggested above that policies that make allowance for gender differences in employment practice are likely to reinforce gender differences in domestic work.

In Sweden it is clear that women are spending more time on core domestic work than men, despite an explicit policy commitment to gender equality (Table 3.4). Nevertheless there is some evidence that policies supporting equality have some effect. The figures reported in Table 3.4 show Swedish men spending more time than their male counterparts elsewhere on core domestic work (56 minutes) and Swedish women spending the least time (143 minutes). However, even in Sweden, equality of unpaid domestic work seems an elusive goal.

Policies restricting working time affect the potential time available to share in unpaid work. The EU has taken the initiative to direct members to limit weekly hours of paid work to a maximum of 48 hours per week. However, the UK allows opt-outs from this 1993 Directive¹: it is not mandatory in the UK for all of its workers to comply with the 48-hour rule, and, not surprisingly, the UK now has the highest mean weekly paid working hours among men in Europe. Some countries have allowed parents the right to reduce their hours of work (for example Sweden and the Netherlands). But it is very largely women that use this ability to work part time. In 2003, the UK offered the right to request flexible working arrangements of their choice to parents of a child under the age of six. Employers were required to consider their request. This marked a new idea in UK industrial relations, moving away from voluntarism, but not as far as making this a statutory requirement. While such requests may be made by either parent, surveys show it is mainly women who make requests for and are offered flexible working arrangements (Palmer, 2004; Holt and Grainger, 2005).

Is it possible for policies to influence gender shares of unpaid work? There is no compelling evidence that policies addressing work–family balance have had a significant or sizeable effect on the male and female share of unpaid work within households where they have been used. Policies however, can affect whether and

¹ The European Union Working Time Directive was introduced in 1993 by the EU member states, with the aim of improving employment conditions. It was a legislative breakthrough, which changed employment law and set a maximum 48-hour working week. The 1993 Working Time Directive included Article 18, which allowed member states to opt out of the directive, and not apply the 48-hour working week if a number of conditions were met. These included: workers must sign individual opt-out agreements, and must not suffer any penalty if they refuse to do so; employers must keep records of staff who work more than 48 hours a week, and make them available to the appropriate authorities. The opt-out from the Working Time Directive was not specific to the UK, but the UK was the only country within Europe to make widespread use of its provisions. In 2009 the EU Parliament voted to end the opt-out, but the UK government says it will appeal.

when women and men are in paid work during periods of childbirth and family formation. For example, 'Daddy leave' in Sweden (which is lost to the household if not taken by the male partner) has increased slowly from its initiation in 1995 rising to a 17 per cent take-up by 2003. Of course, even small increases in father involvement in child care might be highly beneficial in terms of child outcomes. Research in Britain (Dex and Ward, 2007) has suggested that fathers who took some parental leave around the birth of a child were more likely to read to a child aged three on a daily basis than fathers who did not take such leave (53 per cent as compared to 43 per cent). Also they found a correlation between fathers taking parental leave and three-year-old children having fewer behavioural and emotional problems.

Studies have found women's returns to work after childbirth have been sensitive to the conditions of their maternity or parental leave period (Ruhm, 1998; Brewer and Paull, 2006). In some cases, and with the most recent policies, it is perhaps too early to say that they have not achieved the goal of changing shares of unpaid work. But in the case of the policies based on gender difference, one could argue that they give to women with one hand, but take away with the other, as they reinforce the traditional gender role divide.

This begs the question of whether the traditional gender role divide is what most women want. The case for preferences driving decisions about paid work has been argued by Hakim (2000), mainly in the context of the UK, although 'preference theory' is not without critics (Crompton, 2006). Hakim argues that it is possible to divide the female population into three groups according to their preferences: there are the career women who are focused on paid work; there are the homemakers who are focused on unpaid work and care; and, between these two, there is the adaptive group who will do paid work, but will give it up when it gets in the way of family commitments, since these have priority. The adaptive group is argued to be the majority of women among whom part-time work is very popular.

It is certainly the case that part-time work is popular among some women, despite it being low paid and low skilled in some countries. There is also evidence in many countries that many women who are in full-time paid work would prefer to work fewer hours per week although this is also true of many men (OECD, 2001). The desire for flexibility in working hours and the extension of maternity leave rights has also been evident in Britain, especially among women (DTI, 2000). In expressing support for such options, women could be seen as embracing the difference approach to being paid workers, with lower hours, less attachment, less work experience, and, consequently, less pay and fewer career promotion prospects than men. Such policies facilitate an accommodation of gender inequality and a continuation of the unequal domestic division of unpaid work since they do not require the household boat to be rocked. Contemporary theorists emphasise that both men and women are 'doing gender', and both partners are living out traditional expectations of who does what. O'Brien's review on 'shared caring' (2005) suggests that fathers do see the 'good father' role as including the role of primary breadwinner, but are happy for partners to contribute to the household income.

Counter to this claim that a redistribution of unpaid work is not what women want, others would point out that the so-called 'choices' that parents make are still being made on a playing field that is not level or equal between genders. There are a range of other policies that support the (higher-paid) male partner working longer paid hours than the female, and there is still the unequal wage rate issue. Nonetheless, we cannot discount people's expressed preferences. Fathers are largely content with the hours they work, even when their work hours are as much as 60 hours per week (O'Brien, 2005). Mothers like part-time paid work; they like flexibility in their working hours; they are generally happy with the care policies that acknowledge that women are different and treat them differently. It seems unlikely that equality in either paid or unpaid work will come from such preferences.

DOES GENDER IMBALANCE IN PAID AND UNPAID WORK MATTER?

If women do less paid work outside the home than men, then it seems only equitable that they should do more unpaid work in the home than men. In principle, the female partner could do more paid work than the man, but the relative wage rates are against this choice and in favour of women's specialisation in home work (Becker, 1991). Men will be able to earn more per hour, on average, than women. So it is more efficient for the man to work, and thus, he accumulates more human capital which will bring him higher wages in future. But this reinforces the unequal wage rates for men and women and locks women into unpaid home work. Does this matter? If the couple have committed themselves to living together as a unit, then they both stand to gain financially by this gender specialisation. In the past, couples were happy to do this, but times are changing. It is now seen as riskier for the woman to compromise her earning potential. She needs to maintain human capital (in terms of work experience and training) to cope with future uncertainties, such as unemployment or divorce (see Fisher and Low, chapter eleven, this volume). Moreover, the traditional female career pattern has exerted a heavily penalty on older women who are reliant on state pensions (see Price, chapter twelve, this volume). It is also a problem in countries like the US where health insurance is tied to employment.

So, what can be done and what should be done to address the gender imbalance? Is it possible to change the wage ratio in order to make a more level playing field for men's and women's intra-household decision-making? Is it desirable to coerce men to do more of the unpaid work and family care, even if that were possible?

It is sometimes suggested that compulsion to care goes against the inherent meaning of the caring activity. It is claimed that one cannot force someone to be responsible and attentive in a competent manner. Caring usually requires some feeling of empathy to shape appropriate actions. The most that is possible is to give people the choice to care and to provide favourable conditions in which they can

exercise such choice. One could argue, however, that many women are constrained to care because of lack of alternatives, whether nursery places or a partner who is willing and able to share in the caring. There are positive signs, however, that in practice men have increased their contribution to child care more than to other core domestic duties. Policies such as 'daddy leave' are surely to be welcomed, in so far as they help support men's wish to take a more active fathering role.

A more problematic and contentious issue is how to address the unequal wage rates of men and women. State policy attempts to change the female-to-male wage ratio in order to achieve changes in the shares of unpaid work are not in evidence. The idea of giving wages for housework has been suggested and discussed, but never implemented (for example Young and Halsey, 1995). In the US in the 1970s, the possibility of crediting homemakers with social security contributions was discussed but not adopted. Women's behaviour in entering the labour market in large numbers has made redundant any policy interest in such ideas. Cash for parental care is a policy that has many examples, including parental leave. More recent examples used in Finland and Norway offer parents the choice between cash to care for their own children at home or a subsidised place in formal child care. Such policies have been popular among lower-paid women, who are the ones who have taken the cash and stayed at home rather than choosing the child-care places. These policies are criticised by feminists, who think that women will only be emancipated through employment. But none of these policies have tried to manipulate women's wages in the labour market.

It is not likely to be possible suddenly to change the amounts of human capital that are embedded in individuals' wage rates, such as the differing amounts of paid work experience that men and women have. But legislating for equal pay for equivalent work is a policy that starts to tackle the issue, so long as it is actually implemented in workplaces. Similarly, gender pay audits and pay reviews, as well as enforced monitoring of pay and equal opportunities, can assist in making sure women do not fall behind when they are in paid jobs. Unfortunately, the current move in the UK to 'reflexive regulation' adopted by the Discrimination Law Review consultation document is unlikely to be effective in achieving greater pay equality, especially outside the public sector, at a time when collective bargaining has diminished and when there are no appropriate institutional mechanisms for carrying through equality change (Deakin and McLaughlin, 2008). Deakin and McLaughlin's pessimistic appraisal of the likely success of the current 'encouragement' of redressing gender pay inequalities is born out by cross-national data. The result of several decades or more of trying to achieve gender wage equality is that both raw and adjusted-for-work-experience female-to-male wage ratios remain resistant to equality in nearly all countries.

One approach to raising the wages of partnered women relative to men would be to tax partnered men's wages sufficiently to give women in paid work a sizeable tax credit to boost their hourly wage rate to the same level as their partner's after-tax hourly rate. This policy could, in principle, equalise wage rates and eliminate the incentive for the female partner to be the person who did more of the unpaid

work. Whether equality in wage rates would be sufficient to get the women to do more paid work is not clear, since there is still considerable evidence that women like caring (Houston and Marks, 2005) and some evidence that men cannot do ironing (for example, Moir and Moir, 2000).

Such a policy initiative, however, is not going to happen. No government would see such an aggressive approach for reducing gender inequalities in division of labour within couples as either feasible or desirable. So we are back to token or symbolic steps to try to encourage men to do a more equitable share of domestic and care work. Tokens and symbolic gestures, however, do matter, and signals from the state encouraging greater male participation in unpaid work could help advance the slow pace of gender convergence. There might also be useful steps that parents and schools could take to help the next generation reduce gender inequalities. According to data from the youth survey of the British Household Panel, the contribution that boys and girls aged 11–15 are making to housework show clear gender differences—with more than a third of boys doing little or no housework compared with one fifth of girls (Harkness, 2008). But whether such a difference is increasing or diminishing only time will tell. It may, however, be more feasible to tackle gender inequalities in youth through educational and parental encouragement than to change ingrained gender inequalities in paid and unpaid work among the adult population.

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