

different types of State intervention. The consensus according to which men and women constitute two sub-types of humanity accompanied the gradual development of a "*separate spheres*" ideology. The State has played an important role in imposing differentiated gender norms for men and women, based on the belief in their "natural capacities" to fulfil certain social roles. The industrialisation process creates the sphere of economic production, i.e. the factory, as a distinct arena from the domestic sphere. Within this context, the idea of a "natural specialisation" of the sexes in one or another of these spheres became the dominant ideology, although the degree to which this value system formed the basis of State intervention differs quite significantly from one society to another. It also varies over time. Whatever the national or historical context, the legitimacy of women's presence outside the domestic sphere is at the heart of the welfare politics which accompanied the industrialisation process across Europe. Through a series of direct and indirect policies, the majority of Western states have progressively reinforced the sexual division of labour which has seen men specialise in productive paid work and women specialise in domestic non-paid work. In other words, from the end of the 18th century onwards, the majority of the developed world have promoted the "*male breadwinner model*" through a series of economic, family, fiscal and social protection policies. The form of social organisation based on the norm of discontinuous economic activity patterns for married women and on their economic dependence on a spouse are based on the nationally specific forms of production which precede industrial capitalism. They differ from country to country, but also between different social classes within the same society. An analysis of the historical significance of the "*male breadwinner model*" in Australia provides an interesting way of understanding the patterns of women's employment at the end of the 20th century.

### **The "*male breadwinner model*"**

This analysis refers to both the material conditions of the sexual division of labour and to the collective and ideological representations of women's employment outside the home. It offers an analytical continuum, marked at one extreme by the strongest version of the "*male breadwinner model*" and at the other by the weakest version of this model.

- The **strong** version of the "male breadwinner model" is characterised by the norm of women's discontinuous economic activity patterns. The State intervenes (or fails to intervene) in favour of a specific distribution of men and women between the economic and the domestic spheres. Men of working age are expected to devote themselves to their professional life and women i.e. especially married women and/or mothers are expected to devote themselves primarily to unpaid domestic responsibilities. In this case, women obtain their social citizenship rights (health-care, retirement pensions, etc.) indirectly - they only possess secondary rights through their status as "wife" or "mother". The State intervenes directly to discourage the professional activity of married women and/or mothers, who are considered *a priori* as "dependent adults".

In countries characterised by the strong version of "male breadwinner model", the tax system penalises both unmarried couples and dual-earner households. From the point of view of child-care, this version of the model favours private / family-based solutions. In the absence of adequate publicly funded child-care facilities, parents must assume this responsibility alone. Public and private-sector employers are encouraged to offer long periods of unpaid or partially paid parental leave, directed almost exclusively at women workers. This model is based on a strong differentiation between the professional and domestic investment of men and women. For men, the primary investment in waged labour takes a specific form, based on long working-hours, high levels of overtime and trade union activity, etc. For women, the "housewife" model implies that women take primary responsibility for domestic labour, child-care and the care of dependent relatives, with, at most, a couple of years of paid work before and possibly after the many years of "domestic burden".

- The **weak** version of the "male breadwinner model" is based on the idea that every adult of working age should participate directly in the national economy. Individuals gain their social citizenship rights directly through their own

participation in paid labour. The fiscal system is based on individuals and does not take household income into account. In this version of the model, domestic and family responsibilities are born collectively. On the one hand, the State provides a large proportion of child-care facilities, e.g. creches, nursery schools etc. and / or makes significant contributions to parents for child-care. On the other hand, public and private-sector employers are encouraged to provide child-care facilities and flexible working hours for staff who combine family life with a career. Women are still the main beneficiaries of any parental leave, but they are paid during this period of temporary absence from the labour market. In some cases, their remuneration is calculated on the basis of their salary level at the time of childbirth. In some countries, a certain amount of parental leave is reserved for fathers.

- The **intermediary** version of the "male breadwinner model": this can be identified in certain countries by the coexistence of contradictory elements of the two preceding versions of the "male breadwinner model". In some cases, it is hard to define a clearly established and coherent model of state intervention. In France, for example, the tax system is generally disadvantageous to dual-earner households, while public-funded child-care provision is amongst the best in Europe, i.e. 100% of children are in full-time school education from the age of 3 years old. In the United Kingdom, the almost total absence of public-funded child-care facilities contradicts the fiscal system which is based on individual rather than household income.<sup>4</sup> Implicit in each society is a concept of a "gender contract". The "gender contract" corresponds to the idea that in each national context there exists a cultural consensus on gender norms. According to Pfau-Effinger, the nature of the gender contract in each country can be identified with the help of the following variables:

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<sup>4</sup> Bulletin on Women and Employment in the E.U. 1996, No 9 : 1

"the social fields which constitute the main spheres of social integration of men and women, i.e. work, the family, etc. ;

the degree of institutionalised equality or inequality between the sexes ;

the social field in which the upbringing and education of children is assigned in a prioritised way (public/ private sphere);

the relative importance of living as a couple, compared to other types of family life, e.g. single parent families, celibacy, communal life styles etc."<sup>5</sup>

Explanation of variations between different societies lies in the precise history of the industrialisation process, particularly in relation to :

- "the nature of the organisation of agrarian production which preceded the beginning of industrialisation, the norms of family organisation and the traditional place of women in rural society ;
- the precise forms of industrialisation, more precisely a) the historical moment of the beginning of industrialisation with regards rural development and state institutions and b) the way in which industrialisation was inscribed in the continuity of agrarian structures in society, economics and culture, or provided a radical rupture in relation to the structures of traditional society ;
- the system of values (notably concerning the sexual distribution of tasks) of the class or social strata which has played the biggest role in the transitional process towards industrial capitalism." <sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Pfau-Effinger, Birgit (1993) "Modernisation, Culture and Part-Time Employment", Work, Employment and Society, Vol 7, No 3, September: 383-410.

<sup>6</sup> ibid

As Pfau-Effinger notes, the model of social integration with differentiated male and female roles which characterised Germany at the end of the 20th century reflects the urban bourgeoisie's system of values at the second half of the 19th century. In the German case, industrialisation was accompanied by a high level of urbanisation, leading to a rural exodus which largely destroyed the structures of the traditional agrarian society. Once in charge of the new economical and political system of the country, the urban bourgeoisie succeeded in imposing its own version of the sexual division of labour which corresponded to the strong version of the "male breadwinner model". The progressive development of the German welfare system and the democratisation of access to education were essential tools in the process of the "top down" imposition of the cultural values of gender relations. They still shape the dominant practices and beliefs about women's employment and the sexual division of labour in Germany today. Up until the economic boom which followed the Second World War, few German families could achieve the bourgeois ideal of married women's discontinuous economic activity, i.e. the level of male workers' salaries was insufficient to allow men to maintain women and children. Opinion polls nevertheless indicate that people aspired to this model in all social classes. From the 1970's onwards, the gradual increase in women's employment which accompanied the transition towards a tertiary economy does not seem to have challenged the basis of this dominant model. This has been largely been maintained through the norm of discontinuous career patterns, i.e. German women still tend to leave the labour market when they have a child and through high rates of part-time employment.

The Australian situation is similar but due to other social factors operates with a somewhat weaker model. This example demonstrates the socially constructed character of the sexual division of labour, which takes different forms according to the society, the historical period and the system of values and representations which maintain it. Whether a national "gender model" is based on a "differentiated" or an "equality" vision of gender, the norms and social expectations directed at men and women will differ quite considerably.

## **The conceptual distinction between "work" and "employment"**

The theoretical and conceptual tools forged for an analysis of men's employment are often problematic when it comes to looking at women's work and employment patterns. Several key concepts of traditional disciplines have been the object of feminist critique. The basic concept of "work" has been questioned. The feminist critique of the concept "work" has been conducted on at least three different conceptual levels. Each of these levels has produced a wide variety of empirical research which illustrates many distinct frameworks for the theoretical analysis of the sexual division of labour. While "gender" has become the main analytical tool in this field, there is relatively little consensus between authors about exactly what they mean by this term, or about how, for example, it differs from previous concepts such as "sex roles".

## **Questioning the concept of "work"**

The first level of critique of the classical sociological approach to work is the deconstruction of a concept situated exclusively in the field of economic production. The sociology of work has traditionally defined its main research object uniquely in reference to economic production of goods and services. The concept of work in sociological analysis has thus only included paid employment. Within such a conceptual framework, the rare analyses of women's work could only conclude the specificity or marginality of this work. This reference to a **norm** which was always implicitly or explicitly defined in reference to men's behaviour is what is called an **androgynous bias**. This tendency to view women in employment as a "*specific case*" has served to heighten the conceptual and social invisibility of women's employment in traditional research.

One of the key criticisms made by feminists consisted of defining the unpaid domestic labour to which women devoted a large amount of time in the *private* sphere as a dimension of the work which is as necessary to the reproduction of society as the paid work carried out by men. Most of the activities which were labelled as 'domestic labour', e.g. preparation of meals, laundry, child-care, housework and even handicrafts, could in

fact be considered as the equivalent of a market exchange of goods and services on the labour market. However, in so far as these activities are carried out within a specific social relationship - that of marriage, they are rarely recognised as a specific type of market exchange, quite simply because they are not 'paid' in the traditional sense of the word. Traditional classifications have thus termed these activities **domestic tasks**, rather than **domestic labour** and have placed the women who devote all their working time to these **tasks** in the **non-working** category, along with groups such as pensioners and students.

In the 1970's it was important to stress the effects of a well known neo-classical economic theory called the **Pigou paradox**. According to this paradox, a man who marries his housekeeper lowers the GDP of the country. The housekeeper who marries her employer will carry on cooking, cleaning, darning socks, etc. for her ex-boss, but, as his wife, she will do all this free of charge (or for love as the story goes) and no longer for the payment which she received as his housekeeper. Thus while the quantity of work she provides remains (at best) the same, the general amount of monetary exchange on a national level is diminished by the amount of her salary.

Initially it was important to recognise socially, but also theoretically and conceptually the truly productive function of the domestic work carried out by women in the family.

Quantitative research in this area has shown that the equivalent value of this *non employment* amounts to between 32% and 77% of GDP in European societies, since the exact value varies according to different ways of calculation and that this *non-work* this represents more *working time* than paid employment<sup>7</sup>

This first conceptual critique has also stressed the transfer which exists between this domestic unpaid work and paid employment. From the middle of the 1960's onwards, many researchers noted that the paid and the unpaid work carried out by women bore

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<sup>7</sup> Chadeau, Anne and Fouquet, Annie (1981). "Peut-on mesurer le travail domestique?", *Economie et statistique*, No 136: 29-42.

great similarities, e.g. repetitive tasks, attention to detail and manual dexterity<sup>8</sup>.

Furthermore, women's paid work tends to be concentrated in economic sectors which are in many ways similar to domestic work. Women are over represented in the food and textile industries, the tertiary sector, in direct personal services such as healthcare, education, secretarial work, sales and of course as nannies, child-minders and cleaners.

Research has also identified a **vertical division of labour** between the sexes, whereby women generally receive lower rates of pay than similarly qualified men and bear the brunt of job insecurity. Employers are often eager to employ women whose domestic socialisation has trained them particular tasks. Contrary to the professional training and qualifications obtained by men, there is a tendency to see women's abilities as "natural". The most flagrant example of this process of skill transfer between unpaid and paid work is that of the electronics industry. Throughout the 1970's, employers sought female labour and were particularly interested in those who had some form of training in needlework. This **domestic activity** requires similar abilities to those used in the assembly of electronic components, but, by using female labour with this type of qualification employers could classify them as unqualified manual workers and pay them at a lower rate than men with similar levels of qualification. Although their training in needlework met the needs of the employers, they could not be considered as being *qualified* for the job they were doing since they were effectively qualified in needlework and not in electronics!

At the end of the 1970's, research questioned a number of dominant ideas in the sociology of work. This included the "Human Capital Theory", according to which the inferior professional status of women was due to their lower levels of qualification. Using example like the electronic industry's, it was possible to see that women were far from unqualified, they were and still are perfectly qualified for the work they carry out but, as a gendered category of labour, they had never managed to obtain recognition and therefore payment for their qualifications on the labour market.

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<sup>8</sup> (Bulletin on Women and Employment in the E.U. 1995, No 9: 4).

**Wage discrimination is maintained through the idea of the innate nature of women's qualifications and their close ties with non-paid domestic work.**

Women's relatively marginalised position on the labour market and the inferiority of their salaries cannot be attributed to the weakness of their sex, either in physical or intellectual terms, as the biological determinism perspective would have us believe, nor to their family commitments, identified by the sex roles theories as an explanation of women's lack of availability for paid employment. It is the social and economic mechanisms of the market place that assign women primarily to the family that create the conditions for gender segregation in the labour market. The gender segregation of the labour market in turn determines the nature of the gender division of family and domestic responsibilities.

#### **The social construction of the sexual division of labour**

The second break with traditional sociological analysis of work follows on from the first and stresses the process of gender categorisation as it relates to 'work'. Research shows how the distribution of gendered groups between the productive and the reproductive spheres, i.e. men in paid work and women in non-paid domestic labour, produces a sexual division of labour which permeates all levels and spheres of society. The sexual division of labour is thus a historically constructed phenomenon, is both constituted by and constitutive of social organisation. It should be seen as a phenomenon which concerns all structures in society and not only women.

Behaviour with regard to both economic production and domestic reproduction, is largely determined by the fact that individuals belong to one or other gender category. Thus the sexes are considered as social categories and the position in or other category, i.e. male or female, creates different behaviour, beliefs, interests, etc. in all the social domains, much in the same way as the other forms of classification used in sociology, i.e. social class, age groups, etc., categories which need to be analysed more closely in relation to gender.

Within this new framework, it is necessary and legitimate to deconstruct - reconstruct the traditional concepts and methods of research, which often show no awareness of gender difference. **Work** is a prime example of this approach, but a similar stance has been taken in reference to the concept of **parenthood** which has been constructed to explore the relationship between professional work and family duties for both men and women. Traditional research has tended to refer solely to motherhood, as if fatherhood was irrelevant to an understanding of men's employment patterns. Since this change in perspective, research has shown that fatherhood tends to favour men's careers on the labour market, in terms of salary and promotion chances, while motherhood often constitutes a handicap for women's professional careers.

Once sex is no longer taken as a simple variable, but as a socially constructed category, analysis can move beyond a straightforward observation and description of differences between men and women. This new perspective implies that each gender is constructed in a material system of practice and simultaneously in an ideological system of representations. Thus the reconstruction of 'work' to include paid and unpaid work as two interacting facets of the same concept, covers both the material and ideological or symbolic levels of social reality. Empirical research needs to be sensitive to the idea that any research object articulates gendered practices and gendered representations. The articulation between these distinct levels of reality form the basis of the production and reproduction of gendered social categories and of the sexual division of labour.

### **The social construction of gender**

As soon as the socially constructed nature of gender categories is recognised, it is equally necessary to understand that "gender" does and can not exist independently of the social or power relations that unite and divide the two gender categories. These categories are united in so far as they play an equally important role in the construction of the binary divide according to sex, i.e. **male** or **masculine** have no intrinsic meaning, they need the female or feminine to exist. The categories are divided in so far as they are constructed through an objectively antagonistic relationship, whereby any gains for one category are

necessarily made at the cost of the other. However, the precise nature of this antagonism may vary considerably according to time, i.e. the historical perspective, according to the nature of the societal **gender contract**, i.e. a comparative perspective, but equally according to the nature of the articulation between the gender system and the other types of social relation, e.g. class, age, ethnicity, etc.

It thus becomes vital to question the **natural** division of gender categories in any societal context and to analyse the precise ways in which men and women are allocated to different places in the various spheres of human activity. This implies a radical break with the biological determinism of the past.

### **Gender and part-time work**

The debate on part time work is articulated around the following two positions :

- on the one hand, a position basically favourable to the development of part time work, providing, of course, that it is aimed at women. This is the reconciliation point of view, which sees part time work as an efficient tool to allow working women with children to better reconcile the often contradictory demands of their careers and family responsibilities. The position in favour of women's part-time work can be expressed through two radically opposed visions of women's place in the labour market. In the first case, the argument for women's part-time employment questions the legitimacy of women's employment and calls for a partial return of women to their housewife role. This position presupposes the existence of a working spouse and places part-time work within the traditional sexual division of paid and domestic work. However, not all of the arguments in favour of women's part-time work necessarily indicate a desire to send women back to where they belong. According to another point of view, part-time work offers an efficient means of enabling women to avoid a career break at motherhood and thereby to circumvent the difficulties encountered by many women returners. This argument recognises the importance of domestic duties

which especially affect women and defends women's right to part-time work as an alternative to a career break. In this second perspective, part-time work is seen as a right for salaried women workers; a right which is often denied them by their employers.

- On the other hand, there is a critical view of part-time work which stresses the dangers of this phenomenon for women. In this perspective, part-time work is analysed in relation to market flexibility and is viewed essentially as a tool used by employers in order to increase the flexibility and productivity of their female work-force, thus increasing their own competitiveness in business. When analysed in this way, part-time work can be seen to increase the job insecurity which threatens women, i.e. part time work = partial salary = partial retirement benefits, etc. and to constitute a phenomenon which should be opposed in the name of sexual equality, often in relation to a struggle in favour of reducing the working week for all employees.

### **Sociological analysis of part-time work**

It is generally admitted that this form of employment is due to a combination of economic and institutional constraints which prevent women from entering the work place under the same conditions as men. At least three analytical perspectives can be identified in contemporary research on this theme :

### **Part-time work and the flexible job market**

The management drive for increased flexibility constitutes one of strategies adopted by business to cope with the increased competition linked to the globalisation process. The growth of part-time work has occurred in a context marked by the increased questioning of traditional labour relations. Due to their concentration in the service sector and the concomitant discrimination they face, women in particular suffer the effects of this drive for greater flexibility. Internal flexibility in a company favours hiring part-time staff

whose work hours correspond to the most busy time for the business, e.g. supermarket cashiers working evening and weekend shifts, cleaners working after offices hours, etc.). Numerical flexibility allows business to control productivity and staff costs in line with demand, e.g. two individuals hired on a part-time basis give employers greater flexibility than one person employed on a full-time basis.

**Part time work and public (fiscal and / or family) policy.**

Viewed from the supply-side perspective, the analysis of women's part-time work stresses the importance of state intervention. State fiscal and family policies tend to create favourable conditions for the creation of full or part-time work for women. On the one hand, through its fiscal policy, i.e. joint or individual taxes for adults in one household, tax deductions for child care costs, etc., the State can favour or penalise dual earner couples where both partners are in full time work. In countries where the man is considered to be the head of the household, i.e. in the strong version of the male breadwinner model, the tax system is based on the household. Tax regimes which are based on the household rather than on the individual impose bigger taxes on any second wage than those imposed on the principal wage earner. In discouraging the full-time employment of spouses, these systems also tend to grant subsidies to households where the wives are either totally dependent on their spouse or where their length of work or their income does not exceed a certain threshold.<sup>9</sup> Family policies may also influence the forms of women's employment. In countries where public child care facilities are non-existent or where the school day is very short mothers who wish to work have no other choice than to work part-time. It is therefore generally admitted that countries with a high rate of female part-time employment also have the lowest levels of public-funded child care facilities. However, this thesis has never been tested on the basis of systematic and comparable data. To do this, it would be necessary to consider the possible combination of formal and informal child care systems available to families and to evaluate the direct costs associated with access to collective child-care facilities in each country. Results

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<sup>9</sup> Macewen Scott, Alison. (ed.) (1994) *Gender Segregation and Social Change*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

would seem to suggest that the relation between the organisation of child care and the rate of women's part-time work is less direct and linear than expected. This indicates the generation effect which characterises female employment; namely that the category women without children includes both women who have never had children and older women who have had children at some point in their lives, but are no longer directly responsible for them.

### **Part time work and the cultural construction of motherhood**

The third way of analysing the differences in female part-time employment rates is based on a different point of view to the two previous demand and supply-side perspectives. It questions the type of causal relationship that is usually postulated in research on part-time work and starts from the point of view of women themselves. While not denying the interest of traditional analysis which show how women may be forced into part-time work due to various constraints, this approach uses the gender contract idea to broaden the analysis to the cultural basis of this *atypical* type of work in different national contexts. As discussed above, the idea of a gender contract suggests that a specific consensus about gender norms exists in every national context. Rather than starting from the idea that all mothers would choose to work full-time if they were not prevented from doing so by the absence of public child care facilities or by public policies which favour women's part-time work, it is suggested that the social construction of motherhood and femininity in different national contexts also has an effect on women's desire to adopt different employment patterns. The characteristics of any nationally or historically specific gender contract do not only exist at an institutional level, e.g. as expressed through work organisation or public policy. They are also present in the minds of all the members of that society; anchored in the mental and symbolic representations of all social actors. These collective representations are organised into a relatively coherent vision of what is and should be considered normal for a woman or a man to do in each societal context.

In societies which have a differentiated gender contract based on a strong version of the *male breadwinner model*, members of that society will be socialised to accept the traditional sexual division of labour as *normal*. They will come to believe, for example, that young children really are better off when their own mother looks after them at home. Societies characterised by this form of gender contract will thus experience high levels of female part-time employment and/or discontinuous economic activity rates. The vast majority of women will believe that it is in their own and their children's best interests that they sacrifice their career aspirations during their child-rearing years. This belief will be further reinforced by the gendered staff management practices adopted in the public and private sectors, which will also reflect this hegemonic national value system. Far from being forced into part-time work through a combination of various material, economic or political constraints, women will play an active role in choosing this form of employment, because it is compatible with the system of values and beliefs about the *gender order* that each individual member of that society will *naturally* come to recognise as legitimate and thus assimilate into his/her own world vision.

There is no claim that this gender order perspective should supersede all previous attempts to explain differences in the way part-time work is conceived and practised in different countries, but this perspective offers a useful framework for explaining, at least in part, differences in the proportion of women who work part-time and those who declare that they occupy part-time jobs under some form of constraint. In order to test this hypothesis more fully one would also need to know the proportion of full-time women workers who would prefer to work part-time and the number of women at home who would like to work either full or part-time.

We should remember that the economic and social consequences of part-time work are far from identical for the women concerned.

## **Economic Analysis of Part Time Work**

The opposition between the *reconciliation* theory of part-time work, i.e. women choose to work part-time in order to reconcile their professional and domestic responsibilities and the *flexibility* theory, i.e. employers force women into part-time work in order to improve productivity, is not really very useful for discussing part-time work given the diversity of women's experiences. Whether one adopts a reconciliation or a flexibility perspective, it remains that women are socially designated as the typical part-time worker. Even if this form of work allows some women to enter or stay on the job market, part-time work nevertheless constitutes one of the major ways in which women's career prospects and promotion opportunities are limited.

In economic terms, the ambivalence of part-time work raises a supplementary issue. The nature of any part-time employment contract, in terms of working conditions, will depend of the laws of supply and demand. Part-time employment is not only a question of the number of hours to be worked, it also raises the issue of the organisation of employment and remuneration. Part-time work should be seen in the context of current economic changes.

Although employers often declare that part-time work has developed in response to women's desire to reconcile domestic and professional responsibilities, they frequently offer evening and weekend working hours, with no effort to organise part-time shifts in the best interests of their employees and their families.

Whether it is freely chosen by women or forced upon them, part-time work should be analysed within the general context of the labour market, i.e. in relation to the normal working week. Part-time work implies several consequences which part time workers can not control and that they unlikely to be in a position to negotiate with their employers on an individual basis. These include: low pay, increased work loads, low levels of trade union membership, lack of promotion prospects, reduced pension benefits, etc.

Employers inflexibility with regard to the distribution of the working hours of part-time

workers will have consequences on their travelling costs to and from work, as well as on their ability to manage family life and child care in relation to their jobs.

The complexity and ambiguity of the issue of part-time work should be stressed. Part-time work is a phenomenon which encompasses such diverse realities.

There are obvious dangers in to a too hasty and partial analysis of part-time work, which encompasses diverse realities, but one should equally beware of arguments in favour of women's part-time work in the name of their right to choose. The notion of control of one's working hours and autonomy in choice of work place and time is significant given that there is an acceptance in public health literature that lack of autonomy in the workplace is strongly associated with personal stress and concomitant poor health of the worker.

There is a strong correlation between salary differentials and the gendered segregation of the labour market in all countries. The female working population is densely concentrated in certain sectors of activity and in certain professions. There is a horizontal division of the labour market and it is precisely in the most feminized sectors that the levels of remuneration are the lowest, Vertical segregation of the labour market, i.e. the concentration of women in the lower echelons of the professional hierarchy, reinforces the effects of horizontal segregation and also accounts of women's low wages.

The forms of women's employment are only partly explained by the **individual features of working women, their level of training or their family responsibilities; the social environment** also plays its part. Employment and tax policy, like any action by employers and trade unions, affects women's access to paid work, the organisation and remuneration of this type of work, and the distribution of unpaid work.

### **The Sexual Division of the Labour Market**

The gender division of labour takes two distinct forms, i.e. "horizontal" and "vertical" segregation.

### **Horizontal segregation**

**Horizontal segregation** refers to the concentration of women in certain sectors of the economy. Traditionally, analysis of this form of segregation starts with a review of the distribution of men and women in the three broadest economic sectors: the primary sector, i.e. agriculture and mining, the secondary sector, i.e. industrial production and manufacturing and the tertiary sector, i.e. services. Throughout the evolution of industrial societies, there has been an increase in the proportion of the working population concentrated in the tertiary sector.

**Vertical segregation** is the concentration or the over-representation of women in certain levels of the professional hierarchy. This dimension of the gender division of labour should be analysed in light of women's access to higher education and training. Although the role played by formal qualification in obtaining the most prestigious posts varies from country to country, the *qualifications lever* has proved a key influence on women's access to the most prestigious professions.

Women's labour market experiences cannot be adequately explained without reference to another type of sexual division of labour, that in the so called "private" or domestic sphere.

### **The sexual division of domestic labour**

#### **The attribution of domestic responsibilities to women**

The distribution of domestic labour is fundamental in the analysis of women's work, both from a conceptual point of view and in terms of the very practical reality of Australian women. The differences in rates and kinds of employment of men and women are explained to a large extent by the exclusive attribution of the domestic sphere to women.

The exclusive nature of this attribution varies according to the historical period and to the history of individual societies. It nevertheless constitutes one of the common experiences of women, which transcend national and historical variations.

The attribution of domestic and family responsibilities to the female sex is linked to the "*separate spheres*" ideology, which defines the distinct domains of competence for men and women. This differentiation is justified with reference to the dichotomous model of sex categories which became dominant in European societies precisely at the time when industrial production introduced a material distinction between the place of productive work, i.e. the factory and the place of reproductive work, i.e. the home. This is also the origin of the dominant "*male breadwinner model*". As women were excluded for several decades from the most prestigious positions in the labour market, under the pretext of their "*natural inferiority*", they were actively encouraged to develop the specific qualities required for work in the *private* sphere, in their roles as mothers and wives.

Historically speaking, women gained the right to education on the basis of the **Home Economics** courses which were introduced into the school curriculum in all the industrialised societies during the late 19th or early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Far from gender equality objectives, young women were originally given access to education on the understanding that they should be adequately trained for their future roles as wives and mothers, i.e. mothers of the future male citizens.

The type of education women were expected to receive up until the middle of the 20th century was in no way aimed to train them for a profession. It corresponded to the desire to codify and rationalise the work they were destined to carry out within a marriage rather than an employment contract. Despite the technical progress in the domain of housework, i.e. the introduction of washing machines, central heating, cookers, etc., women still spend more time on domestic work than they do in employment (Bittman ?). This can be explained by the constant transformation of domestic work norms. **Every advance in the mechanisation of heavy domestic tasks has generally been accompanied by a concomitant change in the social demands placed on "housewives".** Any time women

have been able to gain through the use of *labour saving* domestic appliances has rapidly been eaten up by the new kinds of domestic responsibilities they have taken on, notably those concerning their *caring* role within the family.

Domestic labour does not simply involve carrying out a series of thankless and repetitive tasks. It also involves the ability to manage and co-ordinate the specific needs and timetables of each member of the household. While it is possible to effectively measure more or less accurately the time devoted to different domestic tasks, the mental burden of co-ordinating these tasks largely escapes accurate analysis. Beyond the question of a more egalitarian *sharing* of domestic work between men and women, the "*mental burden*" of domestic labour continues to weigh almost exclusively on women.

### **Men's participation in domestic labour**

Men's participation in domestic labour has to be analysed in relation to the largely invisible "mental burden" dimension. The objective behaviour within the essentially *private* domestic sphere is notoriously difficult to measure with any degree of accuracy. It is likely that the male and female declarations also reflect, at least in part, the gender value system that governs men's and women's roles in each respective country. It would seem that the image of a spouse who helps out at home is supported by women, who are tempted to overestimate the real participation of their spouses in the domestic sphere, while, in some instances, men are more tempted to distance themselves from tasks they consider 'feminine', even if they do not grudge giving a discrete hand in practice.

We are a long way from the "**new man**" which has appeared in the media in recent years.

Women thus not only carry out the majority of domestic tasks, they also have to spend time and energy co-ordinating the *helping hands* which different members of the family may offer from time to time.

The task of "**domestic management**" is undertaken by women of all social classes, even by the most privileged women who earn enough in paid work to delegate some of the domestic tasks which society has assigned to them to persons outside the home, usually to other women cleaners and child-minders. This task exposes the whole significance of the primary allocation of domestic work to women. Although women are paid less than their male counterparts, they are more likely to use their own salary to remunerate the people hired to carry out domestic tasks or to look after children than to expect a financial contribution to these costs from their spouse. This unequal distribution of expenditure linked to the smooth running of the household reveals the extent to which women are considered, and may sometimes consider themselves, as being solely responsible for domestic work and child care. Paid work may also be experienced as something which prevents them from carrying out **their** domestic work correctly, i.e. according to the standards set by society generally and by their spouse in particular. Women often seek to limit the consequences of their employment for their families, either by eroding what little free time they have to do this work themselves, or by taking responsibility for the financial cost of finding a substitute-worker to cover for their *absence*.

### **The production-reproduction interface**

There is also the need to consider the **double standard** which characterises the relationship between the paid and unpaid work of men and women. One needs to pay particular attention to the dialectical relationship between what happens to men and women in the employment sphere and their behaviour in the family. This is known as the **production-reproduction interface**.

It is important to analyse the characteristics of women's paid work solely in terms of their so-called **specific** needs or interests. Whilst more traditional conceptual approaches tend to explain women's employment patterns, i.e. career breaks, part time work, etc. in terms of their desire to **reconcile** their contradictory roles of mother, wife and worker, more recent research has underlined the inevitable theoretical impasses of such perspectives.

Failing to analyse the sexual division of paid and unpaid work, leads to an analysis of the gender division of the labour market solely in terms of the domestic duties which weigh unequally on women, e.g. women perform less well on the labour market, in terms of qualifications, promotions, salary, etc., because their careers are slowed down by the weight of their domestic and family responsibilities. Any explanation along these lines tends to **naturalise** the sexual division of domestic labour, i.e. it takes the sexual division of domestic work as a given, as something which is inscribed in the genetic makeup, the physiological and psychic features of men and women.

Although the sexual division of domestic labour has an undeniable effect on women's professional and career opportunities, it nevertheless constitutes a socially constructed phenomenon, determined by the norms of masculinity and femininity which are dominant in a given society at any given time. The domestic division of labour is thus equally as likely as any other socially determined hierarchy to be modified over time. One should therefore consider, at least from a conceptual point of view, that the precise nature of the gender division of domestic labour can be influenced retroactively by changes to the sexual division of labour in the paid job market. It is thus crucial to understand the importance of the dialectical relationship between the economic and the domestic spheres, i.e. of the production-reproduction interface, in determining the precise nature of women's economic and social experiences. As Francoise Battagliola (1984) states :

*"The sexual differentiation of jobs and career paths is based on the different positions of men and women in the domestic sphere of reproduction, but is not a direct result of it. Personnel management policies, along with a number of informal rules and strategies of individuals, also play an important role in producing and reproducing the sexual division of labour, with regard to both paid and unpaid work". (Battagliola 1984 : 64).*

The mechanisms of this dialectical relationship play a key role in the development of atypical employment patterns for women. Women's **choice** to work part time is an expression, on the individual level, of a major social contradiction. This contradiction

might be summarised in the following way: Firstly, women have increasingly, although to differing degrees according to social origin, level of qualifications, family situation, social context etc., integrated the labour market and recognised their right to employment. One the other hand, they have experienced almost no change whatsoever in men's share of domestic and family responsibilities, nor in their own working conditions or career opportunities.

The dialectical nature of production-reproduction interface can perhaps best be illustrated with the help of a concrete example. In her analysis of the employment and family careers of men and women employed in the Social security offices in France, Francoise tries to bring together the subjective and objective dimensions of the sexual division of labour<sup>10</sup>. She shows that both men and women enter the Social Security at a relatively young age, in the proportion of one man to ten women, with similar levels of training and qualification. At the beginning of their professional careers both men and women occupy positions low down in the professional hierarchy. After a period of about 10 years continuous employment, the women are still to be found in the least prestigious jobs, whereas the men have either been promoted to management posts or have moved sideways into more specialised jobs, which provide them with greater freedom to organise both the content of their work and the structure of their working day/week.

It would appear that men gain from their minority position in the institution. Due to the relative lack of promotion opportunities and the limited staff training programmes available to Social Security employees, the male minority of new recruits are singled out by management. Male supervisors and Heads of Department ensure that the young male employees follow the same career paths as they themselves followed at the beginning of their career. As the author of this research states, the discrimination women face is less the result of a deliberate attempt to exclude them from the top of the professional than the expression of deeply entrenched beliefs and subjective representations that management holds as to the potential of its male and female employees (Battagliola 1984: 65). The

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staff management practices and the individual promotion strategies of the men are legitimised by an ideology promoted at all levels of the institution, according to which:

*"Since they have a family to support, the men will leave the institution if their promotion prospects are hampered. Women, on the other hand, are generally considered to be working for "pin money" and to be less sensitive than their male counterparts to the promotion opportunities offered. They will stay whether they are promoted or not." (Battagliola 1984: 67).*

When confronted with their discriminatory personnel management practices, the top level executives refer to male and female roles in the domestic sphere to explain why women's promotion prospects are so much worse than men's. They point out that some of the women are only working part-time or that they have taken extensive parental leave in the past and that their present positions are a just reflection of their investment in the professional sphere, which they obviously see as of secondary importance to their family and domestic lives. Management uses the classical "the family is a handicap for women's career chances" argument to justify their own promotion policies. However, a closer examination of the personnel records of the Social Security offices serves to call this conventional wisdom into question. Firstly, the number of women who had taken a period of parental leave beyond the statutory maternity leave were few and far between. On average, their absence from work had amounted to no more than 12 months spread over 10 years, a length of time equivalent to the absence of the male employees who had completed their military service during that time. The most interesting results of this research, however, concern the few women who had taken an extended period of parental leave and / or who had asked to work part-time.

These women had been in Social Security office employment for a considerably long time. During the first few years there, they had invested a lot of time and energy in their jobs, staying late to deal with unfinished tasks, taking training courses, etc. After a while, they had started applying either for promotion or for a job they saw as being more interesting or having more scope for innovation. Over the years, none of their

applications had been successful and they continued to be expected to provide on-the-job training for the younger generations of male recruits who subsequently had no difficulty in climbing the career ladder. As Francoise Battagliola explains:

*"It is often the case that women from households which are reasonably well-off and whose efforts to gain promotion never meet with success choose to take extended unpaid parental leave or to work part-time in an effort to distance themselves from unrewarding and monotonous jobs" (Battagliola 1984: 68).*

The dominant classical sociological analysis of women's work is questioned by this research. **The family situation of these women can not explain their subordinate positions in the labour market, rather it serves as an alibi for their limited professional career prospects.** In much the same way, expectations about the "breadwinner" role of men serve to justify their promotion opportunities.

*"The effectiveness of such a pattern is essentially due to its obvious nature: the institution uses its formal and informal rules to confirm and reinforce the gender norms and expectations that its employees have already learnt elsewhere. By differentiating between the male and female careers opportunities they offer, institutions produce effects on the domestic division of labour. The men who benefit from promotion tend to increase their investment in the employment sphere and to mobilise an increasingly large share of the household's domestic resources, thereby generating the delegation of more and more of the domestic labour to their wives." (Battagliola 1984: 68).*

This example serves to illustrate the complex processes at stake in the reproduction / transformation of gender relations and of the sexual division of labour in both the economic and the domestic spheres. It is clear that the Social Security employees and management are caught up in a **"self fulfilling prophecy"**. To begin with, we have the differentiation between two categories of human beings according to their biological sex. This duality serves as a basis for the construction of a **"separate spheres"** ideology

whereby men are expected to invest primarily in the economic sphere and women are largely confined to unpaid domestic labour and "caring" work. While it may be possible in certain social or historical circumstances for a man or a woman to make incursions into the other domain on an individual basis, he or she will still be expected to give priority to the domain which is socially ascribed as being most *appropriate*.

Employment practices will thus tend to reflect the gender system or gender contract of the wider society. If this contract is based on the idea that women's priorities remain in the home, employers they will privilege members of the gender group who are considered as most likely to respond to their expectations. By operating a gender differentiated system of staff management, employers contribute in turn to the reinforcement of gender norms. Women who have been socialised into these norms and who experience objective discrimination in the labour market will tend to transfer their personal aspirations to the one domain which is likely to satisfy them, the family. By adopting employment patterns that help them to cope with the domestic burden, i.e. career breaks, part-time work, etc., they will soon find themselves to be dependant on the professional success of their spouse. In order for the spouse to maximise his promotion prospects, the woman is likely to take on an even greater share of the domestic tasks and family responsibilities which they shared, more or less equally, when she was working full-time. Employers will thus have the living proof that they were right to privilege the promotion, career and salary prospects of men, since, as experience has shown once again, male employees are definitely more reliable and conscientious than their female counterparts, whose main *"life interests"* lie elsewhere.

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