
The Division of Labour Among European Couples: The Effects of Life Course and Welfare Policy on Value–Practice Configurations

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Even though egalitarian gender values are increasingly spreading among younger Europeans, division of labour does not always comply with this trend. Traditional theories of familial behaviour struggle to explain the resulting paradoxical simultaneity of egalitarian values and inegalitarian practices. In this article, we propose an approach based on the ideas that (i) practices are the translation of values moderated by specific social structures and (ii) incoherencies between values and practices are biographically unstable. Therefore, the biographical stage and welfare policies support or hinder couples in realizing their values in the form of specific divisions of work. On the basis of the multi-level regression analyses of data from the European Social Survey 2004, we show that while most of the European heterosexual couples live in coherent egalitarian configurations of values and practices in their pre-parental phase, they shift to a situation of tension between egalitarian values and gendered practices following the births of their first children. In addition, the magnitude of this shift is strongly moderated by welfare policies. In liberal regimes, the tension between values and practices is transformed into an enduring accommodation to inequality, whereas in socio-democratic regimes, change to unequal practices is rarer and reversible.

The Paradox Between Egalitarian Values and Inegalitarian Practices

The 1950s are considered to be the heyday of the bourgeois family model, assigning men almost exclusively to the occupational sphere and women to the domestic domain. This unequal division of labour within the couples was backed by correspondingly gendered values. Since then, both of these aspects of the ‘breadwinner-homemaker’ family model have arguably declined in Europe: scholars speak of a

generalization of egalitarian gender values and a massive, normative devaluation of the so-called housewife model. In a recent article, Jansen and Liefbroer write, ‘attitudes and values concerning family life show a long-term trend toward greater gender equality, more individual autonomy, and increasing acceptance of labour force participation of wives and mothers, both in the United States and Europe’ (Jansen and Liefbroer, 2006, p. 1487). Parallel to these shifts in values, in most Western countries, the practices of men and women have become more egalitarian. On average, women approach or even overtake male educational attainment (European Commission, 2008,

p. 35); the female share of the paid work force (including married women and mothers) has increased¹ (European Commission, 2008, p. 54); the division of domestic work is organized in a slightly more egalitarian manner (Rexroat and Shehan, 1987); and diverse family forms have emerged alongside the traditional bourgeois model, such as non-married couples, single parents, or 'patchwork families' (De Singly, 1993).

However, a closer look at these seemingly parallel, historical trends indicates that the dynamics of values and practices are neither exactly parallel nor linear (Brewster and Padavic, 2000). Their coupling is temporally loose. On one hand, structurally fuelled changes in practices are followed and seemingly 'confirmed' by value changes.² And on the other hand, structural opportunities are often only 'realized' as practices when they are backed by values.³ This loose relationship creates systematic 'gaps', 'discrepancies', or even 'paradoxes' between gender values and gender practices.

The 'paradox' that seems to be prevalent among younger couples in most contemporary Western societies is a discrepancy between egalitarian values and actual employment patterns that do not reach these egalitarian standards, at least not in every situation and biographical period (Krüger and Levy, 2001, p. 154). In order to understand this, theoretical efforts must go beyond the hitherto dominant approaches toward the division of work within couples, which usually omit the question of 'values'. Consequently, we opt for a biographical and comparative approach to the division of work among co-residential couples. In the first section, we discuss three theories dealing with conjugal division of labour and explain why biographical sequences and institutional contexts must be taken into account. Following this, we present the data and analytical methods. On the basis of the European Social Survey 2004, we examine the configurations of gender-oriented values and the actual division of work in several phases of the family cycle. We then investigate how these sequences of configurations typically differ with respect to welfare state regimes and develop a typology that crosses the standardization with the reversibility of trajectories according to regimes.

Theories of Division of Labour Within the Couple

Questions of marital power and division of work within the couple gained social and political relevance

in tandem with the erosion of the 'naturalness' of the bourgeois male breadwinner family model that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s. It is, therefore, no wonder that the issue of the division of labour within the couple enjoys a long tradition in social science and that it is covered by a remarkable number of disparate theoretical explanations (Blossfeld and Drobnič, 2001). Let us open the discussion by presenting three pre-eminent theories of the balance of occupational and household labour within the couple: micro-economic family theories, resource-bargain theories, and theories of role trade-offs.

Micro-economic theories of the family emphasize the interdependence of family and occupation and systematically embrace the whole amount of productive and reproductive work. Its proponents conceive of the unequal division of labour between men and women as a rational result of the optimization of family utility in light of differential specialization and earning potential of the sexes (Becker, 1981). These differences suggest that, for both partners, the optimal solution is to marry and divide the work according to an arrangement in which women exclusively look after the children and family-related tasks while men win the bread for the family on the labour market. According to the logic of reinforcement and cumulative advantages, 'spouses will [then] tend to further increase their specialization with increasing marriage duration because that is the most efficient productive strategy for the family' (Blossfeld and Drobnič, 2001, p. 19).

Scholars of *resource and bargain theories* (Blood and Wolfe, 1960) focus on how 'extra-familial' assets and resources shape the distribution of *housework* and conceptualize its division as a result of negotiations between the spouses. The outcomes of these negotiations are considered to be influenced by the power of resources, such as educational credential, occupational status, or income. As a result of the structurally asymmetrical distribution of these resources between men and women in the labour market, men have a distinctive power advantage and are able to impose an unequal division of household labour. While the initial formulation of this theory does not include a biographical dimension, later extensions based on Blau's (1994) exchange theories conceptualize the division of labour as the result of recurrent negotiations and include several other time-related mechanisms that can either reinforce or reverse a solution once it is adopted.

Finally, Bielby and Bielby, in the framework of their *role trade-off theory*, suggest that the unequal

distribution of labour within the couple is due to asymmetric possibilities of role articulation between men and women (Bielby and Bielby, 1989). While women must trade-off between occupational and familial roles, ‘contemporary normative expectation for the ‘husband’ and ‘father’ roles still do not include fully shared responsibility and involvement in household child-care activities’ (Bielby and Bielby, 1989, p. 777). In addition, as the role of ‘provider’ is consistent with workplace expectations, these role asymmetries lead to differential processes of identity formation that place exclusive household responsibility onto women in traditional families.

How can these theories explain the ascertained paradox between egalitarian values and inegalitarian practices? First, it is conspicuous that none of them explain action as a consequence of values and meaning systems. The micro-economic theory of family considers the division of labour within the couple as the result of a relatively mechanic calculation of optimal family utility, independent of values and meanings given subjectively to activity. ‘If ideational factors are allowed in economic models’, explains Moors, ‘it is often in terms of tastes, preferences, or needs, and not in terms of values in a sociological sense of the word’ (Moors, 2001, p. 5397). Resource theory and the role theory of Bielby and Bielby (1989), on the other hand, are ultimately structural theories in which the exogenous equipment of assets or the structure of gender roles leads to certain forms of work distribution between the spouses. The values of the involved actors and their sense of work are, at best, marginally considered.

Second, it seems that, even though virtually all the approaches proclaim to theoretically articulate occupational work with household labour, the broader structures (such as the employment system or welfare policies) remain conspicuously ‘exogenous’ to the empirical explanation of the division of labour within the couple. The rational-choice theory refers vaguely to ‘sex-specific socialization and education’ or ‘decisions of employers’ (Blossfeld and Drobnič, 2001), which is included as a kind of meta-empirical constant. Similarly, resource theories or role theories mostly ascertain the asymmetry of occupational assets and roles, often without testing their assumptions by empirically examining contextual or historical variations. How specific structures of the labour market or welfare policies contribute to the postulated asymmetries and how transformations and variations of these structures moderate the degree and nature of the resource- and role hierarchies is rarely shown.

Third, the temporal evolution of configurations of division of labour is underdeveloped. In the initial resource model of Blood and Wolfe (1960), for example, the division of labour within the couple is presented as the result of a decision of or negotiation between the couple that, once accomplished, does not change across the life course. These approaches that do include a temporal dimension posit in most cases a linear reinforcement of an inegalitarian division of labour, which they struggle to substantiate empirically. Yet, the simple and steady reinforcement of existing phenomena according to the age or the duration of a certain social state (e.g. marriage) contradicts the simplest outcomes of life-course research, which has shown that such practices vary along precise life events and transitions (i.e. marriage, labour market entry, the birth of the first child, or divorce).

An approach that counters several of these weaknesses is the so-called master status approach developed by Krüger and Levy (2000, 2001). They posit that, in spite of a generalization of egalitarian values, women and men are provided with a specific ‘master status’, which, when triggered by certain biographical events, leads to the preferential assignation of women to the familial domain and of men to the occupational domain. The dominance of the master status does not necessarily exclude participation in secondary domains, but these are subordinate to requirements posed by insertion into the main domain. Two aspects of this theory seem particularly promising for understanding the paradox of egalitarian values and inegalitarian practices. First, it conceptualizes biography as a succession of configurations of roles and statuses in a series of social domains, such as the political, economic, or familial. Second, it posits that the repercussions of these configurations vary according to biographical stage and depend on certain biographical events (Krüger and Levy, 2001). It is, for instance, only with the arrival of the first child that an inegalitarian division of work within the couple is established, possibly by the reactivation of gendered identities that reflect past exposure to parental models. If, however, this approach tries to account for the historical changes in the division of labour by integrating biography, it does not take into account the values of the involved actors, which are considered to be at the very centre of these historical changes. In addition, similar to other approaches, contextual factors such as the labour market or welfare policies are not actually included in the empirical examination of the theoretical model.

The Effects of Life Course and Welfare Policy on Value–Practice Configurations

In this article, we postulate that the division of labour depends on what people think and want: in particular, on their values regarding the gender relationship within the couple. These values, defined in a traditional Parsonian sense as ‘a conception [...] of the desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means and action’ (Kluckhohn, 1951, p. 395), are interiorized and appropriated during childhood and may be transformed during secondary socialization. In addition, as is indicated by the definition of Kluckhohn, these values orient the behaviour of the individuals. The translation of these values into behaviour and practices is moderated and shaped by structures of opportunities and constraints, which vary along biographical stages and different regimes of welfare policies. In this perspective, we consider gender values, and in particular egalitarian gender values, *to be differentially realizable according to social structures.*

Biographical Stages

In his classic work on the family cycle, Glick (1947) postulates that families went through a series of typical stages at normative, narrowly circumscribed ages. He distinguishes between ‘marriage’, ‘child bearing’, ‘children leaving home’, and ‘dissolution of the family’ (Glick, 1947). Later, his sequential typology was refined by adding categories that differentiate among the age and the institutional insertion of the children, such as ‘family with preschoolers’, ‘families with school children’, ‘family with teenagers’, and ‘empty nest families’ (see, for example, Nock, 1979). Even though this concept has been broadly criticized for its potentially normalizing character, it can still be useful heuristically, especially when examining the life course of heterosexual couples. In particular, the different phases still seem to be characterized by certain dominating functions, varying intensity and amount of (household) labour, and typical patterns of division of work within the couple.

In a study in Switzerland on work intensity based on biographical stage, Levy and Ernst (2002) show that, while men’s labour market participation is not affected by the family cycle, women’s occupational activities are drastically reduced after the birth of the first child. With the schooling of the children, the labour market participation of women increases again; however, it does not achieve its initial level (Levy and Ernst, 2002,

p. 18). This pattern suggests that, with the birth of the first child, a strong asymmetry between the spouses’ labour market participation is established. The Swiss data show that the number of hours devoted to housework and childcare steeply increase among women with the birth of the first child. Men’s investment in household labour increases as well, but to a lesser degree. This means that, proportionally, women spend more hours on household labour until the last child leaves the parental nest (Levy and Ernst, 2002, p. 19).⁴ These outcomes suggest that the paradox between values and practices features a biographical dimension that, so far, has been under-explored.

Welfare Policies

The structural possibility of an egalitarian share of work within the couple is increasingly shaped by welfare policies that either hinder or facilitate the integration of housework and occupational work. Policies such as parental leave or public childcare services may corroborate or weaken the asymmetric division of labour between the sexes. To capture the effects of such institutional policies on individual behaviour, several typologies of welfare state regimes have been developed during the last two decades (for an overview, see Arts and Jelissen, 2002) based on the initial typology of Esping-Anderson (1990). Following critics of the gender blindness of early typologies (Ostner, 1995), more recent revisions explicitly integrate family and gender relationships (Korpi, 2000). Korpi’s typology is based on (i) policies supporting the egalitarian articulation of parenthood and occupational work, (ii) policies explicitly promoting the return of women to occupational work, and (iii) policies supporting families in general. The resulting typology distinguishes between liberal regimes (providing only minimal support for families), social-democratic regimes (supporting double earners by promoting the [re-]insertion of women into the labour market), and conservative regimes (supporting families without explicitly promoting the occupational insertion of women) (Korpi, 2000).

Hypotheses

To translate the potential influences of institutional and biographical factors on the couple into operational research hypotheses, we propose a distinction between four prototypical configurations of values and practices (Figure 1). The (egalitarian) actions can be in perfect congruence with egalitarian values, the egalitarian values can be in tension with gendered practices,

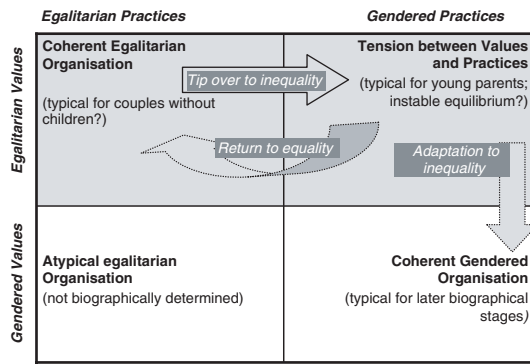


Figure 1 Value–practice configurations

or the inegalitarian values can correspond to inegalitarian practices. Furthermore, we can imagine a fourth combination, namely that of egalitarian practices and inegalitarian values. The historical paradox between egalitarian values and inegalitarian practices, serving as the impetus to this work, corresponds to only one of four possible configurations. According to theories of the family life cycle, it is likely to emerge more easily in certain biographical stages and to ‘disappear’ in others.

Specifically, we posit that egalitarian values can easily be put into practice in the pre-child phase, when the time and energy burden is the least (Figure 1). This stage is, thus, characterized by a coherent egalitarian configuration between values and practices. The birth of the first child potentially leads to a fairly abrupt change from egalitarian to inegalitarian practices, while the values, because of their inertia, remain unchanged for a certain time. This leads to a situation that may be characterized by tension or dissonance between egalitarian values and inegalitarian practices. We postulate that such a situation potentially creates a psychological arousal (Festinger, 1957), that it is, thus, difficult to maintain, and that, to reduce tension, the couples either return to a coherent egalitarian configuration or adapt their values to the inegalitarian practices, resulting in a coherent-gendered configuration (depending on structural opportunities and constraints).

We further presume that welfare policies moderate or reinforce the structural impact of the biographical stages on the couples. First, they may mitigate the shift to inegalitarian practices immediately following the birth of the first child. Second, they may facilitate a rapid return of mothers to the labour market and contribute therefore to inverse the gendered division of work as soon as children are enrolled.

We assume that during the first 2 years subsequent to the birth of the first child, childcare services allow the couples to adopt a more egalitarian occupational and domestic division of labour. Also, the availability of childcare services makes it possible both for women to remain in the occupational world as well as for the couple to return to egalitarian occupational practices after the enrolment of their children. The expected impact of parental leaves is controversial: while certain studies find that mothers return quicker and more frequently to the same jobs in the labour market when they are supported by maternity leaves (Hofferth and Curtin, 2003), others suggest that long and well-paid maternal leaves prevent women from returning (Pylkkänen and Smith, 2003). We presume in general that the adoption of inegalitarian, gendered practice is less frequent in social-democratic regimes than in conservative or liberal regimes. Furthermore, we presume that the ratio of reversed gendered practices at the moment of enrolment in school is higher in social-democratic regimes compared to conservative and liberal regimes.

Data, Indicators, and Research Strategy

Data

The European Social Survey (ESS) is a standardized, cross-sectional, repeated survey dealing with the life conditions and the political attitudes of Europeans. It has been carried out in 2-year intervals since 2002. Within each partaking country, a representative sample of the population older than 15 years is surveyed with standardized face-to-face interviews. The analyses presented here are based on the second wave of ESS (Jowell *et al.*, 2005), which was carried out between September 2004 and December 2005 and included a module on ‘Family, Work, and Welfare in Europe’. For the present analysis, 20 countries that participate in ESS have been selected. Besides Italy, for which data have not yet been included in the data set, five countries have been excluded due to a lack of national data on social policies: Estonia, Iceland, Slovenia, Turkey, and Ukraine. Consequently, the sample includes 14 members of the European Union (before 2004), four countries that joined the Union in May 2004 (Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia), as well as Switzerland and Norway. Within each of the 20 countries, all the respondents between 18 and 45 years old in 2004 and living in the same household with a partner of the opposite sex have been

included in the sample: 10,306 individuals, representing as many heterosexual couples.

Indicators on Couples

Biographical stage

According to parental status, the couples have been coded according to five biographical stages. The first category includes couples that have never had a child and, at the moment of the survey, did not plan to have one in the next 3 years ('no child, no child plan'). The subsequent categories correspond to four chronological stages of the parental cycle: (i) couples in which one of the spouses indicated that it was likely or certain that they would have their first child in the next 3 years. This includes, in particular, the couples in which the woman is pregnant at the moment of the survey ('expecting child'); (ii) couples that have a first child who is less than 2 years old in 2004 ('first child 0–2'); (iii) couples that have a first child who is between 2 and 5 years old ('children 2–5'); and (iv) couples that have only children of five years or more living in their household ('last child 5+').

Typology of occupational values and practices

The couples are coded into five mutually exclusive categories based on the time spent on occupational activities by both partners and the values of the partner participating in the survey.⁵ The typology is based on three survey items regarding the legitimacy of a gendered organization of the couple: 'A woman should be prepared to cut down on her paid work for the sake of her family'; 'Men should take as much responsibility as women for the home and the children' (reversed); and 'When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women'. The respondents have been divided in two groups, according to whether their average score on the three items is above or below the general median of the pan-contextual sample.⁶ Taking into account the number of hours devoted by each partner weekly to occupational activities, each couple has been placed into one of the following five categories: (i) the man devotes less than 30 h in all and/or 15 h less than his partner weekly to his occupational activity (atypical occupational activity); (ii) both partners dedicate the same time (plus/minus 15 h) to occupational activities, and the gendered values are below the median (egalitarian values and practices); (iii) the man dedicates more than 15 h more than his partner to occupational activities, and the gendered values are below the

median (gendered practices, egalitarian values); (iv) the man devotes more than 15 h more than his partner on occupational activities, and the gendered values are above the median (gendered practices and values); and (e) both partners devote the same time (plus/minus 15 h) to occupational activities, and the gendered values are above the median (egalitarian practices, gendered values).⁷

Typology of domestic values and practices

A similar typology has been developed by crossing gendered values with the time dedicated to household tasks (minus the time devoted to child care). The number of weekly hours devoted by both partners to housework has been estimated based on the total number of hours and the proportion of tasks accomplished by each partner, as reported by the spouse participating in the survey.

From this perspective, the original answers on an ordinal scale have been replaced by a coefficient representing the mean of the interval margins. For example, 'more than a quarter, until half of the time' has been translated to a coefficient of 0.38. Each couple has been coded according to the following scheme: (i) the man dedicates more than 3 h more than his partner to housework (atypical domestic practices); (ii) both partners dedicate the same time (plus/minus 3 h) to housework, and the gendered values are below the median (egalitarian practices and values); (iii) the woman devotes weekly more than 3 h more than her partner to housework, and the gendered values are below the median (gendered practices, egalitarian values); (iv) the woman devotes weekly more than 3 h more than her partner to housework, and the gendered values are above the median (gendered practices and values); and (v) both partners dedicate the same time (plus/minus 3 h) to housework, and the gendered values are above the median (egalitarian practices, gendered values).

Socio-occupational status of the household

In the ESS data set, occupations have been coded according to the ISCO-88 classification (Elias and Birch, 1991). It distinguishes nine groups of occupational categories, mainly ordered according to educational qualifications. We have defined the socio-occupational status of the household as the highest occupational category attained by one of the two partners on a scale ranging from one (worker or non-qualified employee) to nine (upper management).

Residential context

The respondents living in a large city, in the suburbs of a large city, or in a medium or small city have been coded as ‘urban residents’, as opposed to the couples living in the countryside.

Cohort

The year of birth of the partner participating in the survey has been used as cohort indicator. To facilitate the interpretation of the regression coefficient, the years of birth have been centred on the median year of birth of the total sample (1968).

Indicators on the Country Level

Generalization of childcare services

Corresponds to the standardized value of the percentage of children aged 0–2 taken care of by public childcare services, according to the OECD Family Database, PF11.

Scope of parental leaves

Designates the standardized value of the sum of parental leave days determined by law (maternity leave, paternity leave, and cumulated parental leave), according to the OECD Family Database, PF7. We will use an indicator that corresponds to the sum of maternal and paternal leaves and leave it open to empirical investigation whether the effect of parental leaves supports egalitarian or inegalitarian divisions of work in the couple.

Typology of welfare state regimes

Korpi’s typology is based on four indicators, stemming from several comparative statistical sources.⁸ The first indicator estimates the gender distance, the second evaluates a series of general family policies. Third, it measures the policies favouring double earners, and the fourth section consists of an evaluation of political tendencies. We were able to code half of the examined 20 countries directly according to this typology: Germany, Belgium, Austria, and France as conservative; Switzerland and the United Kingdom as liberal; and Norway, Denmark, Finland, and Sweden as social-democratic. Several countries not appearing in Korpi’s typology could be classified as conservative, following Merrien’s (1997) argument that, in these countries, social security is mainly based on participation in the labour market. Besides Luxemburg, this includes the southern countries, namely Portugal, Spain, and Greece. For fear of losing comparative power by developing too detailed typologies, we

renounced the introduction of a separate category for southern European countries (as suggested, for example, by Ferrera, 1996).

Two countries, to which Korpi attributed an ambiguous status, have been reclassified: Ireland and the Netherlands. This decision is based on the fact that they are characterized, like liberal countries, by a ‘basic security’ welfare state-type. By recoding these two countries, situated between conservative and liberal regimes, as genuinely liberal, we are able to enhance the smallest group (rather than the largest) and, thus, to base the analysis on more balanced scores.⁹ The Central-European countries (Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia) have been pooled into a supplementary category, which takes into account their shared historical transition from socialist to capitalist regimes in the beginning of the 1990s.

Overview

We summarized up the focal variables at the country level in the following Table 1. In addition to a descriptive overview, this provides the occasion to discuss briefly the legitimacy of using an approach based on types of welfare regimes.

We present the welfare policies, the distribution of biographical stages, the distribution of practices and values, and certain demographic variables for all 20 countries, grouped according to the four welfare regimes. Only welfare policies have been used for the construction of the typology, while the other descriptive variables allow us to evaluate the validity of the typology as well as ascertain its relevance. Even though the values on each of the two dimensions of welfare policies can be rather heterogeneous within one type, an examination of their combination supports and clarifies the position of the two assumed ‘extreme’ types: all ‘liberal’ countries have shorter or equal periods of *parental leave* than any other country of the sample, whereas all ‘socio-democratic’ countries have higher rates of *enrolment in public childcare facilities* than all other countries, with the exception of Finland, which is slightly below Belgium and the Netherlands. Conversely, liberal countries tend to have relatively low rates of children enrolled in public facilities, and socio-democratic countries relatively long periods of parental leave. Post-communist countries characteristically combine very long parental leaves with a small proportion of children taken care of by childcare. Finally, conservative regimes, certainly the most heterogeneous group, are situated in a middle position (with varying combinations) on both dimensions.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics by Country

	Welfare Policies			Biographical Stage			Practices and Values			Demographics				
N	Children at Childcare 0–2 (%)	Weeks of Parental leave	No child, no child plan (%)	Expect. child (%)	First child 0–2 (%)	First child 2–5 (%)	Last child 5+ (%)	Gendered occup. practices (%)	Gendered housework practices (%)	Gendered values (%)	Mean occup. status	Urban residence (%)	Married (%)	
Liberal														
Switzerland	572	7	16	11	14	7	27	41	63	53	64	6.3	34	84
United Kingdom	477	26	13	10	14	7	27	42	54	46	49	6.5	76	73
Ireland	509	15	15	8	6	6	37	43	62	63	48	6.3	50	89
Netherlands	478	39	16	10	14	7	31	38	62	49	41	7.1	58	75
Conservative														
Austria	606	4	38	9	7	4	18	61	46	56	53	6.1	49	82
Belgium	488	39	16	12	13	7	26	42	45	47	40	6.3	46	72
Germany	676	9	25	12	9	5	26	48	55	55	52	6.3	68	80
Spain	428	21	16	6	18	9	29	38	44	54	47	5.8	60	90
France	482	26	58	4	13	7	27	49	33	40	39	6.5	65	68
Greece	604	7	17	3	11	9	25	52	56	80	62	5.1	71	97
Luxembourg	460	14	33	9	12	9	32	39	52	52	56	6.0	51	76
Portugal	519	24	18	5	13	8	21	53	40	76	73	5.3	57	92
Soc-democratic														
Denmark	420	62	49	10	14	8	28	40	26	27	16	6.6	73	68
Finland	548	35	30	12	14	9	30	35	35	29	26	6.5	61	65
Norway	535	44	52	9	12	9	32	38	39	32	26	6.6	61	64
Sweden	536	40	62	11	16	9	26	38	29	20	12	6.4	69	49
Post-communist														
Czech Republic	673	3	35	5	8	5	21	60	42	58	60	6.0	72	83
Hungary	381	7	74	3	14	9	26	48	38	61	67	6.3	94	86
Poland	517	2	41	3	9	7	26	55	45	59	66	5.5	58	95
Slovakia	397	18	53	1	4	4	27	64	38	55	59	5.6	51	94

Sources: European Social Survey, 2004; OECD Family Database PF 7; OECD Family Database PF 11

Although the descriptive statistics of the biographical stage reveal no major irregularities, the couples of the post-communist countries seem more likely to be in the fifth stage ('last child 5+') than couples in the other regimes. The variables of the practices and values show, on a general level, that socio-democratic countries are characterized by both less gendered practices and less gendered values. The demographic variables, finally, reveal nothing noteworthy, except that the Scandinavian countries have particularly low marriage rates compared to the other regimes.

Research Strategy

As longitudinal data is not available for our analysis, we must settle for a cross-sectional examination of couples that find themselves at different biographical stages. To infer typical trajectories at an aggregate level and to control for variables that are potentially confounded with biographical effects in cross-sectional designs, such as cohort effects (i.e. respondents date of birth here) or selection effects (i.e. duration of co-residence here) are both limitations, but, as things stand at the moment, this is the only means for overcoming the lack of comparative longitudinal data at the European level. Thus, the results must be interpreted carefully. We must always keep in mind that we are not able to observe changes in values and practices directly; rather, we can only approximate these changes on the individual level by an aggregate model.

Our strategy consists, first, of descriptively showing systematic associations between biographical stages and configurations of values and practices. We analyse these patterns *for the occupational and the domestic work* with the aim of inferring typical trajectories of couples according to welfare regime. In the second step, based on key insights of this descriptive examination, we narrow our scope to the *division of paid work* within the couple and have a closer look at the impact of *specific welfare policies*, instead of analysing welfare regimes.¹⁰ We test simultaneous effects of multiple factors on relevant configurations of values and occupational practices by way of two multinomial multi-level regression models. This will allow us to cross-assess the influence of the biographical stages and relevant aspects of welfare regimes, such as the development of child services and parental leave, with 'traditional' variables, such as the cohort, age, and socio-occupational status or residential context.

Sequences of Value–Practice Configurations

First, we descriptively show how certain configurations between values and practices are related to biographical stages and how this biographical structuring varies across national welfare contexts. Table 2 shows the relative frequencies of the five types of associations between *occupational* practices and values, according to the biographical stage and the type of welfare state regime. Overall, gendered practices are clearly more frequent among parents, as compared to couples without children. Tensions between gendered occupational practices and egalitarian values are generally more frequent among recent parents than among couples planning to have or expecting a child.

In addition, important differences according to the welfare state regime are revealed. Within liberal regimes, a dramatic trend towards inequality can be observed; this trend develops and eventually stabilises over the stages of the familial cycle. While childless couples share work equally, a coherent gendered organization dominates the couples having one or several children older than 2 years. Situated between these two stages, those couples that had their child in the last 2 years seem to be in a transition phase, characterized by the predicted confrontation between egalitarian values and gendered practices. Gender equality is, thus, upset by the birth of the first child and then followed by an *adaptation to inequality*. Couples in conservative regimes display a similar, though less pronounced, evolution. The variability is greater in this type, specifically among couples with children of school age. At this biographical stage, the cumulated frequency of couples with egalitarian occupational practices is 44 per cent in conservative countries, as opposed to 25 per cent in liberal ones.

In social-democratic countries, an egalitarian organization of the couple is the modal type across all biographical stages. Some of the couples that recently had their first child shifted to gendered practices, while maintaining egalitarian values. The division of work among couples with children of school age, however, is again equivalent to that among couples without children, with a large majority of couples reporting egalitarian values and practices. This means that a short passage through inequality, experienced by a substantial number of couples immediately after the period of the birth of the first child, is followed by an overwhelming *return to equality*.

The couples in former communist countries display higher frequencies of gendered values, in particular,

Table 2 Frequency of four configurations between occupational practices and values according to the welfare state regime

Welfare state regime	Biographical stage	Atypical practice (%)	Egalitarian practices and values (%)	Gendered practices, egalitarian values (%)	Gendered practices and values (%)	Egalitarian practices, gendered values (%)	<i>n</i>
Liberal	No child, no child plan	10	42	10	14	24	192
	Expecting child	9	38	15	11	27	239
	First child 0–2	1	20	33	33	12	137
	Children 2–5	4	16	31	40	9	594
	Last child 5+	4	13	29	41	12	675
Conservative	No child, no child plan	13	38	13	11	25	288
	Expecting child	10	42	12	11	25	446
	First child 0–2	5	26	22	24	23	278
	Children 2–5	6	19	21	37	18	989
	Last child 5+	6	23	19	32	21	1,683
Socio-democratic	No child, no child plan	9	58	21	4	8	202
	Expecting child	11	54	20	3	12	275
	First child 0–2	4	43	32	15	6	165
	Children 2–5	5	47	25	13	10	563
	Last child 5+	6	52	23	8	12	734
Post-communist	No child, no child plan	3	29	9	28	31	61
	Expecting child	6	30	9	12	43	153
	First child 0–2	2	5	31	48	15	95
	Children 2–5	5	8	19	50	18	439
	Last child 5+	11	26	10	19	34	926

Source: *European Social Survey, 2004*.

when having children. Non-parents can be found in the two groups with egalitarian practices, whereas the couples with egalitarian practices and gendered values are more frequent among those planning to have children. The arrival of the first child is signalled by a notable change towards a gendered organization, which continues to be dominant for the couples that have children of pre-school age. By the time children are enrolled in school, this again changes dramatically. The egalitarian occupational practices again become dominant, and the division of work within the couples approaches that observed among couples without children. This trajectory-type, thus, corresponds to a massive passage through inequality followed by a return to equality.

Similar analyses have been carried out concerning configurations of housework distribution and values. Most of the obtained results do not substantially differ from those related to the division of occupational work. There are, however, two exceptions. In the post-communist countries, we do not observe a return to equality concerning housework at the moment of enrolment of children in school. In addition, the tension between gendered practices and egalitarian values (typically observed in all countries for occupational work in the 2 years following the birth of the first child) is much weaker concerning housework. It seems as if the couples were able to avoid this kind of tension in the domestic domain, in particular, by maintaining relatively egalitarian practices during this period.

Accommodation and Reversibility

Overall, these results suggest that the configuration of tension between egalitarian values and gendered practices is biographically rather unstable, seems to irritate the young parents, and, ultimately, triggers a reaction to reduce it (i.e. towards return to a configuration of coherence). This coherence can be found either in a return to an *egalitarian coherence* or in a definitive farewell to egalitarianism and a turn to a *coherent gendered* configuration. In order to solidify these results with multivariate analyses, we concentrate in the following section on paid work and use indicators of specific welfare policies, instead of welfare regimes. Two relationships (technically, ratios) and two biographical transitions are of particular interest to us: first, the ratio between couples with a coherent egalitarian organization and couples with gendered occupational practices in tension with

egalitarian values (Table 3); and second, the ratio between couples with a coherent gendered organization and couples with gendered occupational practices in tension with egalitarian values (Table 4). The first relationship allows us to examine the variables affecting the probability of upsetting and/or returning to equality. The second focuses on the probability of adaptation to inequality (Figure 1). Therefore, the biographical variables have been entered into a multiple regression model. This allows us to separate biographical effects from cohort effects, potential age effects (mediated by factors other than the stage in the familial trajectory), and other relevant socio-demographic variables. Two successive multinomial multi-level regression models have been tested concerning the above-mentioned relationships, with value-practice configurations as the dependent variable.

A glance at the first model (Table 3) demonstrates that socio-demographic variables have a major influence on the occupational practices of couples with egalitarian values. The probability of egalitarian practices increases with the socio-occupational status of the household, and egalitarian practices are more frequent among non-married couples as well as among urban couples.

The most important effects, however, originate in the biographical stages. Those couples who recently had a baby widely report more gendered practices than the couples without children or, to a lesser extent, the couples that have children of school age. This confirms the descriptive results obtained earlier, demonstrating a massive shift to inequality with the birth of the first child and a partial return to equality when children reach school age. Do the probabilities of these two changes now vary according to the country, and can they be explained by specific institutional policies related to welfare regimes? The second and third models reveal that there are strong random effects of the variable 'expecting child' and, even more compellingly, 'last child 5+' when compared with the reference category ('first child 0–2 years'). This means that the increase of gendered practices subsequent to the birth of the first child as well as the return to egalitarian practices vary considerably across countries. In addition, more than one-third of the variance of the former effect can be explained by the generalization of childcare services (Model 2). The probability of a change towards inequality with the birth of the first child is the smallest in the countries with the most-developed childcare services. Similarly, the return to egalitarian practices is more likely in countries with the *longest* parental leaves, as a third of the variance of this

Table 3 Effects of socio-demographic, biographical, and institutional variables on the ratio between egalitarian and gendered occupational practices (among couples with egalitarian values)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	<i>B</i>	SE	<i>B</i>	SE	<i>B</i>	SE
Intercept	-0.81**	0.22	-0.82**	0.22	-0.89**	0.22
Respondent: woman	0.17 (<i>P</i> <0.02)	0.07	0.17**	0.07	0.18**	0.07
Socio-occupational status	0.09***	0.02	0.09***	0.02	0.09***	0.02
Married couple	-0.23**	0.08	-0.26**	0.09	-0.22 (<i>P</i> <0.02)	0.09
Urban residence	0.18**	0.07	0.19**	0.07	0.19**	0.07
Recent cohort	-0.02**	0.01	-0.02**	0.01	-0.02**	0.01
Biographical stage of the couple						
No child, no child plan	1.15***	0.16	1.17***	0.16	1.10***	0.16
Expecting child	1.15***	0.15	1.21***	0.18	1.14***	0.15
First child 0–2 (reference)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Children 2–5	-0.04 ns	0.13	-0.03 ns	0.13	-0.04 ns	0.13
Last child 5+	0.27 (<i>P</i> <0.05)	0.14	0.29 (<i>P</i> <0.09)	0.14	0.32 (<i>P</i> <0.09)	0.18
Institutional variables and interactions between levels						
Childcare services	–	–	0.22 (<i>P</i> <0.06)	0.11	–	–
Childcare services × Expectation of child	–	–	-0.36 (<i>P</i> <0.02)	0.14	–	–
Parental leave	–	–	–	–	0.06 ns	0.10
Parental leave × Last child 5+	–	–	–	–	0.39 (<i>P</i> <0.02)	0.14
Initial variance of biographical effect among countries						
Expecting child			$\sigma^2 = 0.27^{**}$	–		
Last child 5+			–		$\sigma^2 = 0.37^{***}$	
Part of the variance of the biographical effect explained by the institutional variable			37.8%		33.6%	

Source: European Social Survey, 2004. SE = standard error.

P*<0.01, *P*<0.001.

Table 4 Effects of the socio-demographic, biographical, and institutional variables on the ratio between gendered and egalitarian values (among couples with gendered occupational practices)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Intercept	0.76**	0.25	0.77**	0.22	0.76**	0.25
Respondent: woman	-0.07 ns	0.07	-0.07 ns	0.07	-0.07 ns	0.07
Socio-occupational status	-0.16***	0.02	-0.16***	0.02	-0.15***	0.02
Married couple	0.49***	0.10	0.47***	0.10	0.48***	0.10
Urban residence	-0.26***	0.07	-0.26***	0.07	-0.27***	0.07
Recent cohort	0.01 ns	0.01	0.01 ns	0.01	0.01 ns	0.01
Biographical stage of the couple						
No child, no child plan	-0.12 ns	0.20	-0.12 ns	0.20	-0.12 ns	0.20
Expecting child	-0.23 ns	0.17	-0.16 ns	0.19	-0.25 ns	0.17
First child 0–2 (reference)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Children 2–5	0.28 (<i>P</i> < 0.03)	0.13	0.29 (<i>P</i> < 0.03)	0.13	0.27 (<i>P</i> < 0.04)	0.13
Last child 5+	0.12 ns	0.14	0.13 ns	0.14	0.14 ns	0.16
Institutional variables and interactions between levels						
Childcare services	–	–	-0.51***	0.09	–	–
Childcare services × Expectation of child	–	–	-0.22 ns	0.16	–	–
Parental leave	–	–	–	–	-0.17 ns	0.15
Parental leave × Last child 5+	–	–	–	–	-0.02 ns	0.11
Initial variance of biographical effect among countries						
Expecting child			$\sigma^2 = 0.07$ ns	–		
Last child 5+			–	–	$\sigma^2 = 0.09$ ns	

Source: European Social Survey, 2004. *SE* = standard error.

P* < 0.01, *P* < 0.001.

biographical effect can be explained by that indicator (see Model 3).

Table 4 reports the impact of the same explanatory variables on the ratio between couples with gendered values and couples with egalitarian values, which, at the same time, have both gendered occupational practices. It demonstrates (in similar ways as for practices) that the probability of egalitarian values rises with higher socio-occupational status. Also, egalitarian values are more frequent among non-married couples and urban couples. More importantly, the only systematic biographical effect indicates that couples with gendered practices with children aged 2–5 have gendered values more often than those with children aged 0–2. This seems to confirm that couples go through a biographical adjustment of values to practices when the gendered practices exceed a mere transition phase (Figure 1). This effect does not vary significantly across countries; its probability, thus, does not depend on differential family policies (see Models 2 and 3).

Towards a Biographical and Comparative Escape from the Paradox?

We have noted that the bourgeois family model has been declining since the 1950s and 1960s. At the same time, although values and practices have been moving in the general direction of egalitarianism, they are not always congruent with one another, respectively characterized by gaps and temporal paradoxes. The most important contemporary paradox seems to be a co-presence of egalitarian values and inegalitarian practices. Most of the ‘traditional’ theories of the division of work within the couple are not adequate to tackle this paradox. Specifically, they are not suited to examine the issue in biographical terms; they fail to take into account the values of the couple; and finally, they underestimate the link between social structures and inter-personal action. We therefore proposed an alternative analytical framework based on the translation of values into actions and the presumed instability of incoherent value–practice configurations. We assumed that practices are translations of values that are contingent on specific social structures of opportunities and constraints. On this basis, we postulated that (i) the passage to parenthood will potentially lead to a situation of incoherence between inegalitarian practices and egalitarian values, and that (ii) welfare policies moderate the impact of

biographical stages on couples’ value–practice configurations. In the following section, we discuss first the impact of biography and then the role of welfare policies. In conclusion, we point to some limitations of the approach and prospects for future research.

Biographical Stage vs. Generational Paradox

The construction of gender inequalities in heterosexual couples can be conceptualized as a strongly structured process that reflects underlying life-course dynamics. In all 20 European countries, the biographical stage of a couple is a forceful factor affecting the distribution of occupational work between spouses. It is more important than socio-occupational status, residential context, marital status, or cohort. Theories that continue to downplay this dimension are, therefore, not well suited to contribute to the understanding of the division of work within the couple. Attempts should be made to integrate it more systematically into traditional theories of marital power, such as rational choice theory or resource-bargain theories. Furthermore, our analyses emphasize the importance of the arrival of the first child as a turning point. Systematically, the couples in which the woman devotes as much time as the man to occupational work are significantly rarer among those having recently had their first child. Typically, this abrupt reorganization of occupational work takes place in spite of the egalitarian values frequently manifested by couples planning to have children. In this way, they change from a situation of congruence to a situation of tension between their values and their practices.

The configuration of tension is, however, a typical biographical situation through which many young couples now pass following the birth of their first child. In this respect, the younger generations distinguish themselves from their parents’ trajectories, which might have never known such a phase of tension. Assuming that egalitarian values with respect to the couple organization were restricted to a fairly small ‘elite’ in the 1960s and 1970s, the majority of the couples may have consistently displayed a stable coherent inegalitarian configuration. The situation of tension between egalitarian values and gendered practices, at least in its ubiquity, is a singular characteristic of current generations of parents. At the same time, it seems to be a psychologically delicate phase that is rather unstable and from which people seek to escape in a direction of more coherent and stable configurations. To understand these biographical differences between the experiences of generations,

it is indispensable to take into account historical transformations of values and normative prescriptions regarding the ways couples should live together and share work. Ultimately, interest- or resource-based explanations alone are not able to explain these changes.

Return and Accommodation as Reflections of Welfare Policies

Our results clearly highlight that the magnitude of the sexuation by the arrival of the first child and, all the more, the probability that a couple returns to an egalitarian organization vary considerably among countries. In particular, we observe that the shift to gendered practices following the birth of the first child can be mitigated by policies that aim to develop child-care services. In addition, a woman's return to occupational activities once children enrol in school is facilitated by long parental leaves. To summarize these mechanisms, we can identify four trajectory types differing with respect to two dimensions: the *reversibility* of the passage to a gendered organization of work and the more or less strong *standardization* along a dominant trajectory type.

A strong standardization means that the configuration of values and practices is more easily predictable when the biographical stage is known. This applies to the socio-democratic regimes (Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden) and the liberal regimes (UK, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Switzerland). The first is characterized by policies facilitating the implementation of dual earner families—notably an extended offer of public childcare facilities—the second by the absence of both family-focused and dual-earner enhancing welfare policies as well as particularly restrictive opportunities for parental leave. While the passage through a phase of tension between egalitarian values and inegalitarian practices is relatively shallow, temporary, and, ultimately, reversible in the socio-democratic regimes, the shift towards a gendered organization of the couple is irreversible in the liberal countries. In both cases, the couples find a coherent configuration between values and practices—egalitarian in the socio-democratic regimes and gendered in the liberal regimes. We can, therefore, speak of a typical *biographical return to equality* in the first case and of an *accommodation to inequality* in the second. We conclude that the invisible hand of the market does not automatically create a balance between the sexes; on the contrary, it corroborates the inequalities. The post-communist and conservative regimes produce a greater heterogeneity of biographical trajectories

along configurations of values and practices. The West and South-European countries with a conservative regime tend to favour an accommodation to inequality while the Post-communist regimes facilitate a return to egalitarian occupational practices.

Limits and Prospects

The argument developed so far has certain limits that must not be neglected. Above all, we must keep in mind that the results presented in this work stem from cross-sectional data and are therefore not based on *individual* trajectories. We do not know which couples adapt their practices to their long-held values and which ones adapt their values to their practices changed by the arrival of the first child. Therefore, the suggested pathways through values–practices configurations have to be interpreted as typical trajectories that are inferred from prevalent patterns among couples finding themselves in different stages of the family cycle in different welfare regimes. These ‘trajectory types’ are an approximate, exploratory modelling of biographical processes, which is at the moment the best approximation given the data available. In the future, however, we hope that these dynamics can be confirmed and possibly clarified by the use of longitudinal data.

Based on this type of data, individual trajectories could be constructed, and the effects of cohort, biography and period could be disentangled. Furthermore, we like to specify the rates and characteristics of couples who move along configurations of value and practices that are assumed to either ‘typical’ or ‘atypical,’ according to the exploratory results based on cross-sectional data. In addition, we think that our model of value–practice dissonances could also be applied to a broader set of phenomena. We already showed in the descriptive part that, in principle, the trajectories along value–practice configurations follow rather similar paths when it comes to domestic work. Therefore, it would in a first step be obvious to extend this analysis, by using multivariate analyses, to domestic work; unfortunately, we could not engage such an analysis here due to lack of space. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to compare the division of domestic work with occupational work, as domestic work is less subject to institutional pressure and its division of work may be potentially less influenced by material or structural factors (Bielby and Bielby, 1989).

If we admit that configurations of congruence between values and practices are more stable than situations of divergence and tension, we can postulate

that the strategies that individuals pursue to escape the latter, psychologically difficult, situations are likely to trigger further dynamics of change, for example, in the political or religious realm. As these situations of inconsistency are particularly likely to occur in periods of rapid societal change, such as the present time, this type of analysis is particularly promising to understand contemporary social dynamics. Broader reflexions relating the development of theory with empirical analysis would certainly contribute to a more thorough understanding of the dynamic interplay between values and practices and their significance for social change.

Notes

1. However, accompanied by strong differences with respect to part-time work (respectively number of hours of paid work). In the EU as a whole only about 6 per cent of men work less than 35 h, whereas 9 per cent of the women work 30–34 h, 20 per cent 15–29 h, and 6 per cent less than 15 h (European Commission, 2008).
2. Brewster and Padavic mention the example of a sudden reduction of male labour market opportunities that results in a decrease of the ‘ideological’ support of female labour market participation. Conversely, structurally rising rates of mother’s labour market participation are followed by an increase of egalitarian values (Brewster and Padavic, 2000, pp. 478–479).
3. In a historical example, Irwin suggests that in the late-19th century Britain, the female homemaker ideal was widespread among the working class, but hardly put into practice for material reasons. Yet only when the men’s wages increased, these values could be realized (Irwin, 2003, pp. 575–576).
4. For similar evidence from other countries, see Rexroat and Shehan (1987), Kluwer (2002), and Sanchez and Thomson (1997).
5. Inferring the values of the couple as a whole from the indication of one partner is the only pragmatic solution. We are, however, conscious of the fact that, in contemporary Western societies, differences within the couple in terms of values are rather common (Jansen and Liefbroer, 2006) and that, consequently, the results must be treated carefully.
6. The Cronbach’s alpha for the three items is 0.53 over the whole sample.
7. To measure the gendered character of a certain arrangement of division of work within the couple with the number of work hours is only one possible, partially simplifying method. Even with an equal distribution of hours, it is possible that each of the two spouses works in strongly gendered occupations (he as an engineer, she as a primary-school teacher, to take a caricatured example from the middle class) and back therefore a gendered structuration of society. In this study, the gendered or egalitarian nature of profession could not be taken into account.
8. See the methodological annexe in Korpi (2000, pp. 177–178).
9. Even though the so-defined four liberal countries are relatively heterogeneous with respect to social policy indicators, an investigation of their ranks concerning parental leave supports the classification: while Switzerland and the United Kingdom occupy the 17th and 20th place in the sample, the Netherlands and Ireland position themselves as 16th and 19th, respectively.
10. As we have shown, the welfare regimes according to Korpi (2000) are varyingly homogenous. Especially the conservative regime and the post-communist regime are considerably heterogeneous with respect to welfare policies. To overcome these shortcomings, we propose to use the indicators of specific policies—child care and parental leaves—at the country level.

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