

performs which tasks or how much time they spend doing them.

While useful, this tells us nothing about who takes responsibility for ensuring that the tasks are done. As we saw earlier, Boulton (1983) points out that although fathers may help by performing specific childcare tasks, it is usually the mother who takes responsibility for the child's security and well-being.

Boulton's view is supported by a number of studies:

- **Ferri and Smith** (1996) found that fathers took responsibility for childcare in fewer than 4% of families.
- **Dex and Ward** (2007) found that, although fathers had quite high levels of involvement with their three-year-olds (for example, 78% played with their children), when it came to caring for a sick child, only 1% of fathers took the main responsibility.
- **Braun, Vincent and Ball** (2011) found that in only three families out of 70 studied was the father the main carer. Most were 'background fathers'; helping with childcare was more about their relationship with their partner than their responsibility towards their children. Most fathers held a 'provider ideology' that their role was as breadwinners, while the mothers saw themselves as the primary carers. This was underpinned by ideas about 'intensive mothering' in the media telling women how to be good mothers.

These findings are in some ways very similar to those of Oakley four decades earlier.

emotion work and the triple shift

Another aspect of taking responsibility for other family members is what Arlie Russell Hochschild (2013) calls 'emotion work'. Feminists have noted that women are often required to perform emotion work, where they are responsible for managing the emotions and feelings of family members, such as handling jealousies and squabbles between siblings, ensuring everyone is kept happy and so on, while at the same time exercising control over their own emotions. Jean Duncombe and Dennis Marsden (1995) argue that women have to perform a 'triple shift' of housework, paid work and emotion work.

Taking responsibility for 'quality time'

Another responsibility is that of coordinating, scheduling and managing the family's 'quality time' together – a responsibility that usually falls to mothers, according to Dale Southerton (2011).

This has become more difficult in today's late modern society with recent social changes such as the emergence



▲ Literally, 'ready to eat'. Does the availability of fast food reduce the burden of housework for women?

of the 24/7 society and flexible working patterns. These changes have led to people's time being more fragmented and 'de-routinised'. As Southerton argues:

'Achieving quality time is becoming more and more difficult as working mothers find themselves increasingly juggling the demands of work and career, personal leisure time and family, while at the same time managing and coordinating their own and their families' social activities.'

Being 'pushed for time' in this way does not show up in the quantitative measures that time studies such as Gershuny's use.

Southerton also notes that, although some studies now show that men and women have more or less equal amounts of leisure time, they have different experiences of it. For example, men are more likely to experience consolidated 'blocks' of uninterrupted leisure time, whereas women's leisure is often punctuated by child care. Women are also more likely to multi-task than men. This indicates that women are carrying a dual burden in which they face an increased volume of activities to be managed.

summary

The evidence we have considered above suggests there may have been some movement towards an equal division of labour, but perhaps not very much. There is conflicting evidence on how much time men and women spend on domestic tasks – some findings, such as Gershuny's, suggesting a move towards greater equality, whereas other evidence (for example, from the British Social Attitudes survey) indicates continuing inequality. When it comes to responsibility for housework and especially for childcare, however, equality appears to be some way off.

Analysis and Evaluation

Why might men and women not answer questions about their domestic responsibilities honestly?

Explaining the gender division of labour

Rosemary Crompton and Claire Lyonette (2008) identify two different explanations for the unequal division of labour.

The cultural or ideological explanation of inequality

In this view, the division of labour is determined by patriarchal norms and values that shape the gender roles in our culture. Women perform more domestic labour simply because that is what society expects them to do and has socialised them to do.

The material or economic explanation of inequality

In this view, the fact that women generally earn less than men means it is economically rational for women to do more of the housework and childcare while men spend more of their time earning money.

What evidence is there for these explanations and therefore what is the likelihood of the division of labour becoming more equal in the future?

Evidence for the cultural explanation

From this perspective, equality will be achieved only when norms about gender roles change. This would involve changes in men and women's attitudes, values and expectations, role models and socialisation. There is some evidence for this explanation:

- **Gershuny** (1994) found that couples whose parents had a more equal relationship are more likely to share housework equally themselves. This suggests parental role models are important. He argues that social values are gradually adapting to the fact that women are now

Box 29 Same-sex couples and gender scripts

Dunne's study of 37 lesbian couples with dependent children found that they were more likely than heterosexual women to:

- Describe their relationship as equal, share housework and childcare equally, and view childcare positively.
- Give equal importance to both partners' careers.

Dunne argues that this is because heterosexuals are under pressure to conform to deeply ingrained masculine or feminine 'gender scripts' by performing different kinds of domestic tasks that confirm their gender identities. By contrast, in lesbian relationships household tasks are not linked to particular gender scripts. This allows lesbian couples to create a more equal relationship.

working full-time, establishing a new norm that men should do more domestic work.

- **Man Yee Kan** (2001) found that younger men do more domestic work. Similarly, according to the Future Foundation (2000), most men claimed to do more housework than their father and most women claimed to do less than their mother. This suggests a generational shift in behaviour is occurring.
- **The British Social Attitudes survey** (2013) found that less than 10% of under-35s agreed with a traditional division of labour, as against 30% of the over-65s. This indicates a long-term change in norms, values and attitudes, reflecting changes in the gender role socialisation of younger age groups in favour of more equal relationships.
- **Gillian Dunne** (1999) found that lesbian couples had more symmetrical relationships because of the absence of traditional heterosexual 'gender scripts', that is, norms that set out the different gender roles men and women are expected to play (see **Box 29**).

Evidence for the material explanation

From this perspective, if women join the labour force and earn as much as their partners, we should expect to see men and women doing more equal amounts of domestic work. There is some evidence for this explanation:

- **Kan** found that for every £10,000 a year more a woman earns, she does two hours less housework per week.
- **Sara Arber and Jay Ginn** (1995) found that better-paid, middle-class women were more able to buy in commercially produced products and services, such as labour-saving devices, ready meals, domestic help and childcare, rather than having to spend time carrying out labour-intensive domestic tasks themselves.
- **Xavier Ramos** (2003) found that where the woman is the full-time breadwinner and the man is unemployed, he does as much domestic labour as she does.
- **Sullivan** shows that working full-time rather than part-time makes the biggest difference in terms of how much domestic work each partner does (see **Table 4A**).

This supports the radical feminist view that relationships between men and women are inevitably patriarchal and that women can only achieve equality in a same-sex relationship.

Similarly, Jeffrey Weeks (1999) and Carol Smart (2007) argue that same-sex relationships offer greater possibilities of equality because the division of labour is open to negotiation and agreement, and not based on patriarchal tradition.

However, Dunne also found that where one partner did much more paid work than the other, the time that each partner spent on domestic work was likely to be unequal. This suggests that paid work still affects the division of labour even in same-sex relationships.