

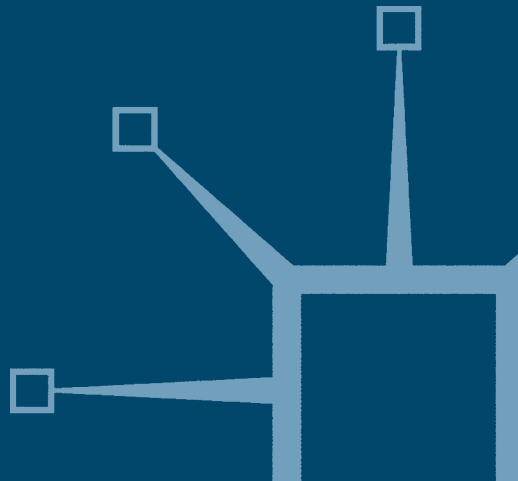
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# Women, Men, Work and Family in Europe

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Edited by

Rosemary Crompton, Suzan Lewis and  
Clare Lyonette



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# 1

## Introduction: The Unravelling of the 'Male Breadwinner' Model – and Some of its Consequences

*Rosemary Crompton, Suzan Lewis and Clare Lyonette*

### **Introduction**

The trends underlying the issues that are the major focus of this book are well known. These include rising employment amongst women, particularly mothers, and thus an increase in dual-earner households, increasing instability in interpersonal relationships, and declining fertility together with a growing recognition of the problems of work–life 'balance'. They have been gathering pace since the second half of the twentieth century, and indeed a further increase in the level of women's employment is now enshrined as a European policy objective. The most usual template against which these changes are evaluated is the male breadwinner/female caregiver model of the articulation of employment and family life. This work–family arrangement reached its peak in the mid twentieth century, and indeed, an earlier generation of sociologists assumed this model not only to be 'natural', but also to represent a positive functional adaptation to the requirements of 'industrial society' (Parsons, 1949) However, it may be argued that it has not been fully appreciated, either in the recent past or in the present, that this 'golden age' of the (nuclear) family covered in fact only a very short period in human history (Secombe, 1993).

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in less well-off households in newly industrialising countries such as Britain, during the early stages of capitalism all members of the family – even children – were expected to make an economic contribution. In the coalfields and in the cotton mills, whole families were engaged, via the male household head, to carry out a diverse range of productive tasks. Working and living conditions were hard and dangerous, and social reformers campaigned for, and achieved, protective legislation for women and children in particular (Humphries,

1984). Further reforms, including the introduction of compulsory education during the nineteenth century, moved children from being an economic benefit to an economic cost (Irwin, 2003), and increasingly, working age men came to predominate in the labour force. Seccombe argues that these changes in labour use were in large part a consequence of economic and technological developments as capitalism developed from the 'extensive' exploitation of labour, using relatively simple techniques and considerable labour inputs, to 'intensive' exploitation, requiring more complex technologies and a greater level of work intensity from a labour force that was increasingly (although never completely) masculine.

The 'breadwinner wage' – that is, an income sufficient to support a working man and his family – became a major objective of the trade union movement (Humphries, 1982). In relation to women, there were also accompanying changes in gender ideology. Women had always been regarded as the 'natural' inferiors of men, but during the nineteenth century, the notion that women (particularly wives and mothers) were, 'naturally', *morally* superior increasingly took root. Women became 'the angels of the house' and its nurturing and moral centre. The 'ideology of domesticity' (Williams, 1991) assigned caring and domestic work uniquely to women and indeed, the contribution of women to household management and domestic production was often essential to family prosperity.

However between the two world wars:

The advent of mass production for consumption . . . redrew the boundary [*i.e., between the household and the wider economy*] and resulted in a transformation of the relation between the two spheres. The shift to production for consumption pulled the household economy much more fully into the orbit of the market economy . . . leading to . . . less insulation and a greater integration between them. At the same time, the possibility of domestic tasks being undertaken on the basis of purchased commodities . . . and on a less labour-intensive basis . . . resulted in a long-term shift of labour out of the household economy and into the wage economy. (Glucksmann, 1995: 71)

These changes had their major impact on younger women, as married women were still not expected to go 'out to work' – unless enforced to do so by economic necessity. Indeed, in Britain, in many occupations and industries, a marriage bar was in operation between the two world wars, persisting, in some cases, until after the Second World War. There

has in fact been considerable variation both in the timing and extent of the shift of (women's) labour out of the household economy. Later industrialisation, as in some of the Scandinavian countries, led to a later historical shift of labour out of the household economy. In some countries, most notably in Eastern Europe, after the Second World War, women were drafted into paid labour as a national duty (Einhorn, 1993) and much of the labour of care provided by the state. Moreover, Pfau-Effinger (2004) has argued that the emergence of the housewife model of the male breadwinner family was crucially dependent not on industrialisation, but on the extent of the development and influence of the urban bourgeoisie (see also Davidoff & Hall, 1987). In some societies, therefore, such as the Netherlands, the housewife model was established even before industrialisation, whilst in others, including Finland, it was never the norm. Thus as Esping-Andersen and others have argued, national 'path dependency' is likely to have had a discernible impact on the characteristic manner of articulation between employment and family life.

Nevertheless, in Western Europe, the male breadwinner gender/welfare arrangement came to underpin the 'mid [20th] century social compromise' (Crouch, 1999: 53). Men in full-time employment received a 'family wage' and related benefits, women gained benefits, often indirectly, as wives and mothers (Pateman, 1989). These arrangements were in a broad sense a class 'compromise'. Governments of left and right supported social protections and increasing welfare, and left parties and their representatives did not seek to radically destabilise existing social arrangements. The 'breadwinner' model was buttressed by the institutional separation of women from both the political, and much of the economic, spheres of human activity. During the course of the twentieth century, the consolidation of the 'male breadwinner' model was accompanied by institutional developments and arrangements that reflected its basic assumptions, from school hours to pensions and the delivery of health and welfare services (Esping-Andersen, 1990, 2002; Sainsbury (ed.), 1994).

In the later decades of the twentieth century, the 'male breadwinner' model of the articulation of employment and family life began to unravel. In the 1960s and 1970s, some kind of paid employment for married women without small children became the norm, and women increasingly returned to work once their youngest child had reached school age. By the 1980s and 1990s, even mothers of small children were staying in the labour market (although there is considerable cross-national variation in this respect). However, the gendered ideology of domesticity, that holds

women responsible for the domestic sphere, together with its accompanying (implicit or explicit) gender essentialism, has proved to have deeper roots. Nevertheless, the major shift in gender relations and associated norms and attitudes that is currently in process raises a series of important issues that will be explored in the chapters in this book. How is the work of caring to be accomplished, given that it can no longer be automatically assumed that it will be undertaken (unpaid) within the family? How may sets of institutions, moulded to the contours of the 'male breadwinner' arrangement, be reconstructed in order to accommodate to new realities? How do families adjust to these changing circumstances and what is to be done about the growing conflict between paid employment and the demands of family life? Will social and economic inequalities, between women and men, as well as between different social classes, be ameliorated or intensified by these recent changes?

### **Explaining change in gender and employment relations**

The complex nature of the changes that are under way means that single factor explanations are not likely to take our understandings very far. Very schematically, the elements contributing to work–family articulation may be divided into two broad categories: 'structural' and 'relational'. Structural elements include national 'welfare regimes', and the kinds of supports they offer to employed mothers and dual-earner families, together with wider national economic and social policies such as labour market regulation (particularly in respect of working hours). Other structural elements include employer policies, not only in respect of the work–life entitlements they offer to their employees (employer policies and state policies are closely linked; see Evans, 2001), but also employee management strategies, such as 'high commitment' management, that have been demonstrated to have an impact on work to family 'spillover' (White et al., 2003; Crompton, 2003). At the level of individual families, the extent and level of social and material resources available to the household will obviously have an impact. Thus we might expect there to be more or less systematic class differences in the strategies whereby individual families combine employment and family life.

Relational elements will include, above all, those between men and women. The precise nature of every heterosexual (and same-sex) partnership is of course unique, but will be, nevertheless, shaped by the normative context in which it is embedded. Attitudes to gender relations, and gender roles, have been changing in parallel with the erosion of the breadwinner model, but nevertheless, women are still held to be largely

responsible for caring and domestic work. That is, despite the fact that it is increasingly accepted (indeed, expected) that women should be in paid employment, they are also likely to shoulder the major responsibility for 'work' within the domestic sphere. The extent to which partners share responsibility for domestic and caring work will have an important impact on the extent to which a positive articulation of employment and family life is achieved by individual families. Individual attitudes will vary, and a range of evidence suggests that educational level, the extent of the woman's employment, age and social class are all factors that contribute to both more 'liberal' gender role attitudes and a greater extent of the sharing of domestic work between the sexes (Crompton, 2006). However, there are also national variations, in both attitudes to gender roles, and the advisability of mother's employment, (particularly when children are young), as well as on wider normative questions such as what constitutes 'good mothering'.

Pfau-Effinger (2004), for example, has argued that whereas in Germany, 'good mothering' is seen as requiring sole and direct maternal input, in Finland, mothering is seen as a societal responsibility in which the state should play an active role. Ideals of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' also vary, both nationally as well as between different classes and ethnic groups (Connell, 1995). As market and domestic work have become so closely associated with men and women respectively, the nature of the domestic division of labour will be influenced by dominant masculine and feminine identities, and some men (and women) consider it inappropriate for men to carry out domestic work (West & Zimmerman, 1987). In a similar vein, organisational cultures may express particular kinds of masculinities and femininities, (McDowell, 1997), as well as shaping a more or less sympathetic environment for men and women with caring responsibilities (Lewis & Lewis, 1996).

One way of understanding work-life articulation outcomes at the relational level might be to view them as deriving from structural elements – the economic context, state, labour market and employer policies – but crucially filtered by varying norms and values at the national, group and individual levels. This is not to imply that beliefs, norms and values are 'determined' by structural factors, as institutions are themselves shaped by beliefs, norms and values. For example, structures of labour market regulation will vary according to the extent that governments are influenced by neo-liberal or neo-Keynesian economic policies. Policies in relation to working mothers will be similarly affected. In Britain, for example, a network of state funded nurseries was created during the Second World War in order that mothers might contribute to wartime

production. This network was wound up during the post-war period, an era which also happened to coincide with the zenith of the male breadwinner model in theory and practice. Thus there is a reciprocal relationship between norms, values and institutions, but for the purposes of analysis, it is useful to begin at a particular point on this loop. Our discussion below, therefore, will begin by examining a major structural factor shaping capacities for work–life articulation – that is, the role of the state.

### **National variations**

The increase in women’s employment has been under way in all ‘late modern’ societies – that is, it is a notable area of cross-national continuity. In this book, our major focus is on the consequences of this increase, rather than its cause. Economic and technological change, including the decline of heavy industry and the growth of service sector employment, together with the development of efficient contraception and, not least, the rising aspirations of women themselves (as expressed through ‘second-wave’ feminism), have all contributed to the growth of women’s employment, but we will not be dealing with these topics here. Other areas of cross-national continuity include a range of factors that impact on the nature of gender relations and the domestic division of labour – class, level of education, and ethnic differences. Despite these continuities, however, there are also systematic cross-national variations in both structural and relational elements impacting on work–life articulation.

### **State policies**

One of the most significant structural sources of variation is in national welfare regimes. As is well established (Esping-Anderson, 1990; Korpi, 2000; Lewis, 1992), there are considerable differences in the extent to which states support employed mothers and dual-earner families. Supports may be direct – as in, for example, state provided and/or subsidised child and elder care, or cash allowances for family caring. Other supports include statutory parental (maternity and paternity) and carers’ leaves, and tax allowances for childcare costs. In general, it is the social democratic (Scandinavian or Nordic) welfare regimes that provide the highest levels of these supports. These countries are also characterised by relatively low levels of class and gender inequality (Korpi, 2000), and the level of women’s employment is generally high. In these countries, the principle of universalism means that all citizens qualify for welfare benefits. At the other extreme are the liberal welfare regimes that

characteristically provide only a 'safety net' for those in direst need. Neo-liberal policies dictate only a low level of public spending, thus few state resources are assigned to support the caregiving that has been traditionally provided by families. However, other aspects of neo-liberal policies (for example, little or minimal wage or employment protections) will operate so as to pull women into the labour market because of economic need, and levels of women's employment are relatively high. 'Corporatist' (or conservative) welfare regimes have historically evolved along Bismarckian principles, and welfare benefits have been closely tied to the 'breadwinner' wage. Generous supports for those in employment have carried with them the assumption that care will be provided within the family, to which welfare resources are directed. Standard 'male breadwinner' jobs have been protected, and the provision of non-family state care rather limited. Thus women's employment levels tend to be relatively low. A further regime category that has been identified is the 'familialist', in which it is assumed that care will be the responsibility of private households, and alternative state supports are minimal or even non-existent.

In this book, the countries under discussion include examples of all the regime types discussed above. Finland and Norway would both be considered to be examples of Scandinavian or social democratic welfare regimes, and Britain as an example of a liberal regime. France and the Netherlands are examples of conservative regimes, although as we shall see, France is relatively unusual amongst corporatist welfare states in having relatively high levels of historic support for working mothers. Portugal might be described as a mixed corporatist/familialist welfare regime. Finally, we also include discussion of eastern European ex-state socialist countries, once characterised by universal state provision but, since the late 1980s and early 1990s, now making the (often uncomfortable) transition to market capitalism.

Another major source of structural variation that impacts on capacities for work-life articulation are different patterns of labour market regulation. As we have already noted, conservative regimes have often sought to protect full-time 'breadwinner' jobs, resulting, it has been argued, in rather inflexible labour markets. At the other extreme, neo-liberal policies place a high premium on labour market flexibility, controls are few and both 'long' and 'short' hours jobs are common. It is also a feature of neo-liberal policies that there are few restrictions on working hours. In fact, average hours of work show considerable national variation. Amongst the countries discussed in this book, for example, Britain has a partial 'opt-out' from European legislation that restricts working hours



to 48 a week (and incidentally, has the second longest average working hours in Europe for full-time men), whereas France has introduced a statutory 35-hour working week.

### **Employer policies**

Employing organisations can affect capacities for work–life articulation in respect of both the demands they make on their employees, as well as in the concrete work–life entitlements they offer (enhanced maternity leaves, opportunities for flexible working, etc.). Hours of work are crucial here (although working hours are also very sensitive to national regulation). In countries in which state provision for dual-earner families is not particularly generous, one government strategy has often been to give enthusiastic support and encouragement to employers to develop ‘family friendly’ policies (e.g. Department of Trade and Industry, 2003). However, the evidence suggests that such ‘voluntary’ employer provision falls far behind that of the more generous (i.e. social democratic) welfare states (Evans, 2001). The level of employer provision is generally higher in ‘corporatist’ welfare states than in neo-liberal countries, but the level of state provision in the Scandinavian countries means that employers provide little by way of ‘extra’ policies.

In the management of their workforces, employers may make demands that mean that employees find it necessary to work beyond their contracted hours (for example, by setting targets for sales or completed transactions). More particularly, it is often expected that an employee who wishes to be promoted has to demonstrate ‘commitment’ (and thus promotability) by working longer hours than contracted. Although flexible working is often advocated as a major measure whereby work–life ‘balance’ may be achieved, employer-led flexible working may often result in work intensification. For example, an employee may be required to carry out weekend or ‘non-standard’ hours work without an overtime premium, and to take hours off during the ‘standard’ working week. Such measures decrease the ‘porosity’ of the working day (Rubery et al., 2003) and, as far as the employer is concerned, increase the profitable use of labour time.

Thus ‘positive’ work–life and/or family-friendly policies offered by the employer may co-exist uneasily with other organisational values (Lewis, 1997). Managers may place a greater value on employees who do not allow family commitments to intrude in their working lives, and long hours in the workplace may be seen as an indication of organisational commitment. Lewis identifies two major barriers to a culture change in a family-friendly direction: subjective senses of entitlement, and

organisational discourses of time. In her research (in a manufacturing company, a public sector organisation, and an accountancy firm), family-friendly provisions were often seen as being 'perks' rather than a basic right (women were more likely than men to feel 'entitled' to these provisions but less likely to feel 'entitled' to a career), and long hours working was seen as a measure of commitment to the organisation. Individual managerial and supervisory discretion (both *de jure* and *de facto*) is often central to the implementation of policies such as short-term leave, or the ability to change or reduce working hours (Yeandle et al., 2003, Valcour & Batt, 2003). Thus, even if an organisation has policies available, supervisory discretion means that they may not be equally available to all employees.

Lewis (1996; see also Bailyn, 1993) argues, therefore, that the most significant change necessary to achieve a positive work-life 'balance' is to change organisational 'cultures'. This will involve efforts to 'challenge and modify all organisational practices based on assumed separation between work and family lives so as to empower men and women to make optimum contributions in both spheres . . . to adapt organisational policies and structures to enable people to manage multiple demands in work and family with maximum satisfaction and minimum stress' (Lewis, 1996: 9). However, the question may be raised as to whether the kinds of workplace pressures that inhibit individual empowerment and create pressures for family life are best described as 'cultural' (and therefore, in theory, amenable to normative transformation). It is true that the normative assignment of caring work to women, and thus their felt 'entitlement' to family-friendly provisions, may be described as 'cultural', as is the sense that men should have career preference – both of these may be seen as deriving from the normative assumptions that underpin the 'breadwinner' model. However, other aspects of organisational demands, including the consequences of work intensification and pressures to work long hours, derive from managerial practices that have a very clear material basis.

Recent changes in the way in which employees are managed, it is argued, have 'forced' individuals to develop 'enterprising selves' in which they engage in a constant process of identity construction and reconstruction (Rose, 1989; Du Gay, 1996; McDowell, 1997). In particular, 'high commitment' managerial techniques, together with focused attempts to build positive organisational 'cultures of excellence', have become increasingly influential. We do not need 'hands' in today's organisations, it is argued, but 'hearts and minds' instead (Thompson & Warhurst, 1998). Organisations seek to develop 'cultures of excellence'

that work to establish 'that ensemble of norms and techniques of conduct that enables the self-actualising capacities of individuals to become aligned with the goals and objectives of the organisation for which they work' (Du Gay & Pryke, 2002: 1). As Du Gay (1996: 72) has argued, such projects of 'excellence' mesh positively with neo-liberal ideas as they seek to establish a connection between the self-fulfilling desires of individuals and the achievement of organisational objectives. The person becomes a neo-liberal 'entrepreneur of the self', autonomous, responsible, free, choice-making, and through these individual actions, organisational goals are achieved.

However, the setting of individual targets for even lower-level employees, as well as the kinds of changes to the working day described above, suggests that a culture of entrepreneurship is not just a matter of changing hearts and minds, but has material consequences for the nature of workers' jobs. What may be described as 'top-down' entrepreneurship may be in direct conflict with other company policies that ostensibly attempt to enable employees to better accommodate their family lives. Taking a carer's day may mean that targets are not met, for example, and pay may be affected. More particularly, replacement staff are rarely made available for absent colleagues, whose work has to be covered by others – often first-line supervisors as well as immediate workmates (Crompton, 2006) – leading to further work pressures. Thus, it may be argued, a positive change of organisational cultures in a more 'family-friendly' direction will also have to involve a change in managerial practices of employee control.

Management strategies and policies tend to be developed and offered as universal nostrums, although they do vary cross-nationally (Edwards et al., 1996). However, the pressures of competitive capitalism (and the individual career development that is its inevitable accompaniment) may cut across national institutions. For example, Hojgaard's (1997) case studies of three Danish organisations found that men felt constrained to 'put in the hours' if they wished to develop their careers, and Crompton and Birkelund's (2000) comparative study of banking in Norway and Britain found that career-minded men (and women) in Norway tended not to take full advantage of the policies available for fear of affecting their career development.

There are, therefore, convergent, as well as nationally divergent, tendencies as far as work–family articulation is concerned. National variations in welfare regimes as well as in the institutions of labour market regulation have a demonstrable impact on capacities for positive work–life 'balance' as far as families are concerned. For example, Gornick

and Meyers (2003) have demonstrated that in those countries that have good dual-earner family supports, family and child poverty is relatively low, as is the impact of children on mother's employment. However, the pressures of competitive capitalism and modern managerial techniques can have a negative impact on individuals with caring responsibilities, whatever the national institutional context. Abstractly, it is the case that capitalism undermines the family form via its indifference to the 'private' lives of the labour power it purchases (Secombe, 1993: 19), and as Beck has remarked, 'The market subject is ultimately the single individual, "unhindered" by a relationship, marriage, or family' (1992: 116). Historically, the 'male breadwinner' model emerged as part of a range of measures designed to ameliorate the worst excesses of capitalist development. Our brief review has suggested that, with the entry of women into the labour force, it will be necessary to re-regulate the employment relationship if a positive work-life 'balance' (to say nothing of women's equality) is to be achieved.

### **Relational factors**

It has been emphasised that institutions are shaped by prevailing norms and values, as well as vice versa. As Korpi (2000) has demonstrated, cultural and religious factors (particularly the influence of the Catholic church) have been significant in shaping family policies in Europe. Although in all 'western' countries, gender role attitudes are becoming more 'liberal' over time, there are still considerable cross-national variations. For example, amongst the countries discussed in this volume, the percentages of respondents to similar national surveys<sup>1</sup> 'agreeing' that 'a man's job is to earn money, a woman's job is to look after the home and family' were only 10 per cent in Norway, and 12 per cent in Finland, but 18 per cent in Britain, 22 per cent in France and 34 per cent in Portugal (Crompton, 2006: 145). It is, of course, not only institutions that are shaped by norms and values at the national and local levels, but also interpersonal relations between men and women, and within families and households.

Norms and values do not necessarily have a direct impact on individual behaviour. For example, in aggregate, Portugal is one of the more gender conservative countries discussed in this volume, and attitudes to mother's employment, particularly when children are young, are rather negative (Lyonette et al., forthcoming 2007). Nevertheless, the level of mother's employment in Portugal, particularly full-time employment, is relatively high (largely because of economic need; see OECD, 2004).

However, changing attitudes to gender roles have not only had an impact on whether or not women 'go out to work', but also on the division of labour between men and women within the household.

As noted above, despite the widespread entry of women into employment, women are still held largely responsible for, and carry out the majority of, caring and domestic work, although the situation has changed since the mid twentieth century. Cross-national data, as well as detailed information for the US (Bianchi et al., 2000; Sullivan & Gershuny, 2001), indicates that women's hours of household work declined considerably from the 1960s to the 1980s. In the US: 'women spent about 30 hours doing unpaid household work in 1965, over six times the 4.9 hours men spent in housework. Women's housework hours dropped to 23.7 hours per week in 1975, 19.7 hours per week in 1985, and reached a low of 17.5 hours per week by 1995. Men's hours increased to 7.2 hours in 1975, 9.8 hours in 1985, and levelled off at 10.0 hours in 1995' (Bianchi et al., 2000: 206). Thus, there has been a considerable convergence between men and women in the hours spent on housework, but this has been largely as a consequence of women reducing their domestic work hours. Data from a range of other countries shows a similar trend, that is, a considerable reduction in the hours devoted to housework by women, together with a (smaller) increase in housework hours amongst men (Sullivan & Gershuny, 2001; Baxter et al., 2004; Gershuny et al., 1994).

To a considerable extent, the extent to which men participate in domestic work is a consequence of both the earning power, and number of hours worked, by their partners. That is, as women generate more material resources and thus enhance their economic power, so men carry out more of the tasks by tradition allocated to women (Blood & Wolfe, 1960) – although a completely gender egalitarian division of domestic work is still relatively rare. However, feminists have argued that the allocation of the primary responsibility for housework to women itself constitutes a symbolic re-enactment of gender relations, as the roles of wife and mother are intimately tied to expectations for doing housework (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Thus, order and cleanliness within the home are reflections on women's competence as a 'wife and mother' – but not on men's competence as a 'husband and father' (Bianchi et al., 2000: 195). According to these arguments, given that the construction and reconstruction of gendered identities is the major factor in the determination of who does domestic work, its allocation is not necessarily rational and women will almost invariably do more of it, even when in full-time employment.