

## **Week 5: March 24<sup>th</sup> 2004 - The formation of gendered divisions of labor – paid-work (public sphere) and housework (private sphere)**

### *Questions:*

- Do women take responsibility for bread winning in the same way men traditionally take?
- How do couples negotiate decisions regarding employment and responsibility for bread winning?
- How does employment/unemployment affect marital quality?
- How do working couples divide housework and childcare?
- How do couples negotiate a “fair” domestic division of labor?
- How do couples make decisions regarding relocating for jobs?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of the traditional division of labor for a family?

*What is work in fact?* If we have a look in the Sociological Dictionary, we find the following definition: “it is an activity which we produce goods and services socially recognized and which represent an income source for those who make them”.

This definition is based on the duality public/private, natural considered, but not cultural and problematic. This definition presents the common tendency to consider work only the work from the public sphere, which assumes remuneration in money. There are other types of work such as housework (in the same household or other households) which are not paid or remunerated, but represent a very important part of our daily life. More than that, many times these unpaid works are exhausting and hard.

If we want to present a definition valid for both spheres, public and private, we can take Giddens’ definition. He defines work as being “the activities which implies mental and/or physical effort and which have as aim to produce goods and services in order to satisfy the human needs”.

### *Types of services provided by homemakers to their families:*

1. **Reproducing labor power:** consists of things that homemakers do that allow to wage earner to re-energize in order to work the following day. Homemakers fill these needs by providing emotional support, companionship, and sexual satisfaction, planning social activities, mediating the demands that children make of their fathers and performing other services that make the wage earner’s time off of work more pleasant and less stressful.
2. **Childcare:** in addition to taking care of the day-to-day needs of children, this category includes less routine tasks such as choosing schools, planning birthday parties, meeting with teachers, treating illnesses and medical emergencies etc.
3. **Housework:** things that come up immediately to mind when we think of the work homemakers do: cleaning, laundry, cooking etc. Here we can talk about two times: “process time” (the amount of time it takes for a task to be completed) and the “labor time” (the amount of time the homemaker must spend actively attending to a task).
4. **Converting wages to goods and services:** shopping (including time budgeting, going to stores, and researching products to be purchased).
5. **Doing a spouse’s wage work:** work which improves their husbands’ performances in their paid work (hosting and attending work-related social events, typing reports, filing, editing and proofreading)

### *The housework dimensions*

Ann Oakley conducted the first study on housework or domestic work in 1974 in Great Britain. She intended to study the housework chores trying to identify the time spent and the frequency attached, working conditions, standards, socialization degree, work satisfaction, etc.

Studies conducted since 1974 in USA and other countries showed the following dimensions of domestic work:

- The lack of value attached to the domestic work, because it is not paid work. Valorization would bring an increase in visibility and value at social level.
- The better is done the more invisible is, because the work is done behind close doors and the results are somewhere locked in wardrobes, refrigerators etc. This work is considered natural, rather than a significant

personal contribution that requires effort and energy. We have the tendency rather to see when something is missing than when is done.

- ❑ The accomplishment of domestic work allows flexibility in scheduling or work's schedule, which in a way gives satisfaction to those who do it.
- ❑ Sometimes, it offers also socialization possibilities.
- ❑ Great part of housework chores has to be done immediately. They cannot be postponed.
- ❑ Domestic work means routine and standardized activities (a certain quality).
- ❑ It has a certain degree of dirtiness.

*The explanations of gendered division of housework:*

1. Based on economic considerations – pragmatic – efficiency rules (Emile Durkheim - sexual division of work is the source of social solidarity. Parsons and Bales – 1955 – functionalist sociology – men specialized in instrumental activities, women specialized in expressive activities. Blood and Wolfe – 1960 – housework is closely correlated to each contribution to household resources – the one with a greater access will involve less in domestic activities)
2. Based on cultural considerations – patriarchal dynamic (pays a greater attention to the social construction of gender. F. Engels stated in his book "The origin of family, private property and state" that *husband is the bourgeoisie in the family and the wife is the working class.* )

*How can we calculate the value of domestic work/housework?*

The economists are trying to estimate the value or the cost of domestic work/housework using two classical economic methods.

**a. The method of opportunity cost** = estimates the working hours in the household and evaluates them based on the salary a woman can get in the labor market for the same amount of worked hours.

This method was developed by the neoclassical school and measures the gain of loosing the best of the sacrificed variants.

Example: Let's assume that a woman earns **X Kč** monthly in the labor market. She has to choose between doing all the housework and to work in order to pay somebody else to do everything in the household. If she pays more than her salary for somebody to do it, than she will be tempted to stay home and do everything. If she pays less than her salary, she might be interested in the labor market and paid work.

*What are the problems or negative sides of this method?*

- It doesn't take in consideration the satisfaction brought to women by one or other type of work, satisfaction which can influence the options, for example to take care of children or to have a paid job;
- The difficulty in estimating an opportunity cost, which means the salary for which a housewife would be tempted to get a job, the salary of an active women not being representative. The researchers estimate that in order to be stimulated to enter the labor market the salary should be quite high.

It is considered that the result based on this method is to underestimate the value of housework/domestic work. The neoclassical school considers that the problem in fact is to choose between two bosses: "the husband or the employer". A woman will choose to get married and stay home if the advantages of this new status balance the inconveniences. Some authors think that the opportunity cost is in fact "*the marriage opportunity cost*".

**b. The method of replacement cost** = determines the work value in a household if the work would be replaced with goods/services from the market; the price which should be paid if we would buy them all from the free market.

This method assumes a list of all domestic chores, the evaluation based on the free market prices, considering that a man should hire baby-sitter, housekeeper etc. The obtained value is quite high; for example, in 1980 women household production was estimated to half of the GDP in France.

*What are the problems or negative sides of this method?*

- It doesn't allow the evaluation of those tasks which don't have substitute in the free market (the emotional services) or which have imperfect substitutes (the education of young children).
- The market prices we use include also other costs related to administrative, social and trade union costs,
- The free market price is the results of supply and demand, so if women wouldn't take great part of these responsibilities then the demand for these services will increase and the prices as well.

The result using this method is to overestimate the value of domestic work and domestic production.

No matter the method we use to calculate the value of domestic work, the society should value in a greater extent the housework done by women.