

**Gender, work and family: balancing central dimensions in
individuals' lives**

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Abstract

This article analyses the ways in which Portuguese women and men manage to balance different dimensions of their lives, namely participating in the labour market in relation to conjugalidade, domestic chores and parenthood. Our analysis is based on 83 in depth interviews applied to Portuguese couples living in conjugalidade, with at least one child and taking into account different social backgrounds as well relationships with different time spans. We argue that work has strong implications in people's lives, playing a positive role in personal identity, but also conditioning family time. An analysis on conjugalidade reveals that relationships aim to balance togetherness as a space of love and passion while preserving individuality and identity. Parenthood is a critical moment in these couples' lives, increasing men's and women's sense of identity but also restructuring their lives, albeit in different ways. For women parenthood often implies being pulled inside the household and postponing their work while men, on the contrary, tend to be pushed outside.

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Introduction

In recent years changes directly or indirectly related to family life have been occurring in various European countries. Such is the case with the decline of birth and marriage rates, and the increase in divorce, births outside marriage, cohabitation and female activity rates (Torres et al., 2006). We have been witnessing a growing sentimentalization, privatization, secularization and individualization of families that transformed people's family lives into more plural and diverse combinations, particularly when compared with much more homogeneous models from the past. Nowadays, in family context, there's a greater importance given to gender equality but also to the sentimental aspect of relationships, in so far it carries the sense of greater accomplishment and personal well-being. Overall, family is understood as a central issue in the lives of individuals and across Europe it is the main sphere of personal investment. Men and women agree that family life is the most important dimension of their lives (ibid).

Following these changes, the process of women's assertion in public space around European countries since the 60s of the twentieth (century), allowed the massive entrance of women in the labour market. However, their involvement was not accompanied by a greater contribution of men towards unpaid work.

In Portugal, unlike many other European countries where part-time work is the choice for mothers with young children, women work mainly full-time. But even though women work outside the house, they still take full responsibility for the housework and for children care, together with the elderly and/or those ill-stricken members of the family. In this sense, Torres and Moura (2004) consider the existence of tasks that are "predominantly female" and "non-negotiable", like cleaning, housekeeping and doing the laundry, and other more "negotiable", which are related to food and child care, where men's participation can be a little more significant. This asymmetric division of domestic labour might be partially explained by women activating "dispositions which they have been inculcated with" or by a response to the "traditionalist expectations for the performance of roles in our society" (Torres et al.,

2004: 132). Overall, the responsibility for balancing work and family falls in women's shoulders.

However, professional work for women does not respond solely to financial needs for it also represents a source of sociability and social identity, playing an important role in improving family's living conditions, but also by increasing women's bargaining power within conjugal relationships (Torres et al., 2004; Torres et al. 2006; Torres et al., 2008; Torres, 2004; 2006; 2009).

In this article we seek to analyse the practices and representations of Portuguese men and women in relation to paid work and how this is linked to family and personal life. We wonder how individuals today feel about their conjugal and parenting relationships; what's the importance they attribute to their professional work; how they articulate family responsibilities with their participation in the labour market; and how these different dimensions of social life interact with each other. We conclude by creating a typology that describes the combination couples do relating to work and family.

Methods

Our data is based on results from the research "Work, Family, Gender equality and Social Policies: European transformations in a comparative perspective", coordinated by Professor Anália Torres. This research is part of a major program developed since 1997 in relation to other international programs, namely "Social Quality and Changing Relationships between Work, Care and Welfare in Europe (Workcare) – FP6 (2008); "First European Quality of Life Survey: Time use and work-life options over the life course" (2007); "Men and Women between Family and Work in Portugal" (2000; 2004); and "Marital Life and Work" (2004).

Our research aimed to analyse the various dimensions of conjugal life by accessing internal and external ways of organising the division of labour between the spouses as well as representations about professional and domestic work and childcare. Besides marital interaction we also analysed feelings towards parenting, gender roles and

conflict, adding a cross analysis of all these dimensions in different moments of the life cycle.

Among other issues we sought to understand why the increasing participation of women in the labour market was not accompanied by a greater participation of men in unpaid work. How to explain the heavy workload of women when egalitarian statements on the division of labour are predominant. How the contexts of conjugal life attenuate or enhance individuals' asymmetrical relationship with paid and unpaid work. Lastly, how do couples, women in particular, adapt to the situations of asymmetry often experienced in their conjugal relationships.

Considering the definition, selection and operationalization of methodological strategies, we focused on the combination of several techniques in order to allow that quantitative and qualitative as well as extensive and intensive approaches might complement each other. Consequently, we considered that to conduct both in-depth interviews along with analysis of existing databases was advantageous, namely using the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) and the European Social Survey (ESS). However, this paper is solely focused on results obtained from in-depth interviews. These were conducted to 83 heterosexual couples, with at least one child, comprising a total of 166 individuals.

The design and selection of observation spaces and recollection of information meant to take into account the country's diversity, namely in terms of wealth, culture, religion, equipment, etc. For that matter, interviews were carried out in Oporto (northern Portugal, 54 individuals), Leiria (central Portugal, 40 individuals) and Lisbon (Portugal's capital, 72 individuals), along with an exercise of comparison of results, since these three areas have some relevant contrasts both in demographic indicators, religiosity as well as significant differences in the practices and representations of marriage and family life.

As for the length of conjugal relationship, we divided the respondents into three groups: up to 10 years of conjugal relationship, from 11 to 20 years of conjugal relationship and more than 20 years. This division is based on the idea that different time-spans of conjugal relationship reflect different conjugal conditions. Having

children with different ages or being in different stages of ones career are, among others, different situations that shape individuals actions, being furthermore interrelated with other constraints of conjugal life. Taking into account the different moments of the life cycle allowed us to capture the dynamic aspects of couples, but also some generation effects. In Portuguese context, it is clearly different to have lived an important part of conjugal life before April 1974 (i.e., throughout the dictatorship) from living the same period of conjugal life today. It is clear a gap between these two phases of Portuguese life in relation to matters such as the definition of women's rights or the values given to marriage, family and occupation in the labour market. What is considered to be suitable in each period of time has a strong influence in the ways people live their conjugal relationship and balance work and family.

Regarding different social classes we followed the criteria proposed by Costa et al. (Costa et al., 2000). The couples interviewed were part of professional groups comprised of entrepreneurs, managers and liberal professionals, technical and professionals, Employees performing, and industrial workers.

The selection strategy took into account not only the criteria previously defined, but it also went through the method of snow-ball sampling. Other important technical and methodological aspects had to do with the decision to interview both, men and women, simultaneously albeit individually, often in different areas of the house. On the other hand there was a deliberate choice of matching interviewers of the same sex of respondents in order to avoid embarrassment or retractions resulting from gender differences. As a result, the unit of analysis was the individual in the context of the couple, enabling to capture separately the perspective of men and women regarding the various dimensions of personal and family life. In this context we sought to register the agreements and discrepancies in the narratives while encouraging respondents to tell their story in the first person, and being reflective about themselves and their partners, both within and outside the context of their relationship.

In this article we will focus our attention on dimensions like conjugality, parenthood, work and domestic chores, trying to understand how those individuals interviewed manage their need to combine work and family. Later we present three

types of combinations which have been named the traditional, the intermediate and the egalitarian model.

Conjugality

Conjugal relationships suffer social, historical, economic and moral influences within a certain time and space (Aboim, 2005b, 2005c; Torres, 2000a, 2000b, 2002a, 2002b). In this sense, conjugality is influenced by social and cultural changes, representations and practices, according to a permanent but maybe also dynamic process of construction and reconstruction. This reflects a trend in contemporary society towards deinstitutionalization of conjugal relationships, which can be understood as a specific product of modernity (Aboim, 2005a, 2005c; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Beck, Giddens and Lash, 2000; Kauffman, 1993, 2002; Singly, 1993, 1996, 2000; Torres, 2000a, 2000b, 2002a, 2002b).

Conjugality is no longer based on heritage or legacy for posterity, but is oriented towards a sense of belonging, of intimacy, mutual unveiling and desire to be together (Aboim, 2005c; Beck, Giddens and Lash, 2000; Singly, 1996, 2000; Torres, 2002a, 2002b). With economic development and market relationships in contemporary society characterized by impersonality, the need for personal and emotionally significant relationships has intensified (Torres, 2000b). There is thus a greater appreciation of love in the choice of spouse and in decisions to initiate, maintain or break a relationship (Beck, Giddens and Lash, 2000; Singly, 1996, 2000; Torres, 2002a, 2002b). This focus on love leads to a search for total and mutual understanding and also feeds higher expectations for sharing, understanding and perfect symbiosis between the two conjugal partners, which shows the difficult agreement between expectations and reality and consequently leading to greater relational instability (Torres, 2000b).

The interconnection between the individuals in marital relationship, and their need for building personal and individual identity, acquires different contours throughout marriage. Conjugality is itself an important identity builder for the individual, while the

partner is someone to whom the individual attaches importance and significance and with whom the individuals shares a life, or part of it (Kauffman 1993, 2002; Singly, 1996, 2000; Torres, 2002b).

In this way each individual influences the other in the construction of its 'I' and in the construction of their perception of the world and others (Singly, 1996, 2000; Torres, 2002b). However, the process of identity construction, for the individual and in relation to its partner, has yet to present equal gender contours (Singly, 1996, 2000; Torres, 2000a, 2000b, 2002a, 2002b). As Kauffman highlighted (1993: p.3) 'si les hommes et les femmes ne parlent pas de manière la même, c'est parce qu'ils n'occupent pas la même position dans le couple'. Accordingly, it continues to be more difficult for women to build, in marital context, her identity with the help of her partner, instead of being coerced or weakened by conjugality and its social and cultural meanings (Singly, 1987, 1996, 2000; Torres, 2000a, 2000b, 2002a, 2002b).

We based our analysis on the relationship between feelings about conjugal relationship and identity construction, given the importance of a significant other in the process of individual identity (Singly, 1996, 2000; Torres, 2002b). In other words, we want to know in what ways these feelings and representations about conjugality influence the construction process of individual identity. We also want to know the consequences of that influence in daily marriage life, in the couples practices and strategies to deal with conflicts and desires, complaints and anxieties.

At this point, however, it's important to highlight how in reality, perceptions, feelings and assessments aren't something rigid and tight, but rather fluid and temporally marked by social, economic and emotional situations, moving up and reconfiguring itself throughout conjugal relationship (Kauffman, 1993, 2002; Lalanda, 2005; Torres, 2000a, 2000b, 2002a, 2002b).

There seem to be two opposing ways to live conjugality: feeling love or feeling suffocated. Both ways are not mutually exclusive; they represent two extreme poles of a continuum which are limited in time and in continuous reconfiguration. In such range, many interviewees are in a grey area, moving closer to one or another end of the spectrum.

Firstly, 'feeling love' is characterized by perceiving conjugal life as a rewarding conquest, an endeavour that enables personal fulfilment and happiness, with a consequent positive construction and/or reconstruction of personal identity, despite difficulties (not necessarily marital in nature, but possibly professional, financial and/or parental) that are overcome by the couple and not only individually, and thus strengthening the relationship. Sharing, support, love and companionship play a strong role in this modality which seems to be experienced to a larger extent by young couples. It's also more commonly mentioned by women rather than men, mainly those related to intellectual and scientific professions. We highlight the case of Jorge Madeira, 42 years old, Lisbon, university professor, married for 16 years, who says:

"The benefits of marriage are that of a life more complete. (...) There's a change in values, because there will be another person who is very important and whose happiness becomes an important factor in our life. Therefore, a person wants no more his own happiness, but also to do and see the other happy. When you have children the situation changes again, because now there are more people who are perhaps even more important than us, which reorder our scale of values."

At the other end of the continuum there is the feeling of suffocation or saturation within conjugality, mainly being carried by all the responsibilities and work overload it entails. However, it should be noted that there is a visible gender differentiation in this extreme pole. Men express the feeling of having lost the opportunity to enjoy their night out with friends or even by themselves and also of being able to make decisions individually. Such feelings are expressed with reasonable ease and do not convey a sense of suffocation. They consider it an inevitability of maturity and marriage, a step they had been prepared for and whose development was gradual. It also comes as a consequence of family and parental responsibilities, which they value strongly. This feeling towards conjugal relationships is common in all marriages despite their length. It's also present in all regions where interviews took place, but with emphasis on Oporto, perhaps due to a more traditionalist and institutionalized perception of gender roles, since the north region of the country is prone to greater

religiosity and ideological conservatism. Depending on the conjugal cycle in question it's more frequent on one or another of the social classes.

"Of course, there were major changes, because when we got married there must be changes. Therefore, we will no longer have that freedom we had when we were single. You can't say you're in prison, but you have a freedom, shall we say, constrained. When we're single we have a total and absolute freedom, so there are always differences." (Victor Freire, 59 years old, Leiria, banking, married for 35 years)

Regarding the suffocation feeling - a sensation shared by a large number of women - different causes come forward. For some it's due to the overlap of roles: that of mother and wife with that of a professional. For others it's exclusively due to a confrontational and problematic conjugal relationship.

The first scenario is common in Leiria and Lisbon, in intellectual and scientific professional women, married for less than ten years or more than twenty. Here we see probably the interplay between expectations and reality, where expectations were higher than the reality has brought up. This is clearly a feeling limited in time, linked to a specific marriage cycle in which they are/were. Typically it's in the first years of conjugal and parental life, at the adjustment of one to the other, to parenting and professional requirements (Torres, 2000a, 2002a, 2002b). Since this feeling is, for the most cases, limited in time and balanced by the joy and importance of parenting and conjugality itself, the individual feels that it's worthy, 'a struggle' nonetheless rewarding and gratifying.

"At the beginning, everything was new. So when we got married, the first couple of months we were not well [adjusted]. Then we begun to adjust, and then came the children. In that period (...) everything was new, because we were used to live one for the other, and suddenly there is the child and only the child. We forget about us, and we forget a little about our husband. (...) Maybe he also feels a bit left on the side. Well, it comes the child and then comes the other. (...) There are times, and I speak for myself, that I am a bit suffocated, isn't it? That routine of work and home, and then kids and the whole thing means a lot of work ..." Carolina Arroiteia, 33 years old, Leiria, accounting, married for ten years.

The second female scenario, a minority, is more common in Leiria and Oporto and in blue-collar workers married over twenty years and who find themselves in a position of conflict. However, due to their perception of marriage, these women do not even consider divorce. Given a more institutionalized conception of a conjugal relationship, there's a greater detachment between the spouses and a crystallization of the conflict, with a sense of resignation and conformation, but not collapse.

"... [My husband] doesn't drink or smoke or anything now, but he has mental problems. There was a very bad time, when he tried to drown me; I slept with knives under the pillow. He put knives at my neck and at my children's necks (...) well he never beat or hit me, but did these things that aren't any better." Armanda Serra, 46 years old, Leiria, housekeeper, married for 27 years.

These three distinct ways of looking at conjugality as a constraint on one's individuality, whether by a restrictive freedom, whether by an overload of family, maternal and professional's responsibilities or due to conjugal mistreatment and conflict, reveal an important difference. Men are much less critical of their conjugal life. They seem to know that marriage brings responsibility and therefore expect to give up some personal time and space. However, it should be stressed that this slighter criticism can be explained by the fact that although some restrictions are endured, conjugal life allows men to maintain a fair degree of their time and space. On the other hand, there is a positive perception of their effort in conjugal life as producing personal achievement, making them grown men. Women express a more complaining and critical attitude, which can have cultural and social explanations. Social and culturally, women are expected to do the vast majority of unpaid work, depriving them from much time that could be devoted to themselves and for their own enjoyment. They are burdened with everything that relates to the maintenance of a house and family. For most women, such views and perceptions come only sporadically, feeling then tired and saturated but nevertheless happy and accomplished, without negative consequences for their identity construction. The last scenario, however, such negative consequences do take place. Those women

become sad, nervous and even depressed due to violence, conflict and physical, verbal and emotional attacks.

Parenthood

Parenting is another aspect with a significant weight in the construction of identity of individuals. However, in order to fully realize its significance it is necessary to take into account the changes that have occurred in parenting during the last decades.

Nowadays we seem to be witnessing an increasing gap between the project of conjugality and the project of parenthood (Almeida et al., 2002, 2004; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Cunha, 2007). Becoming a parent is increasingly perceived as a personal choice that no longer needs a stable conjugal union. In other words, having a child is no longer a biological destiny to fulfil, but rather one among other possible choices available to individual will (Almeida et al., 2002).

In this context, a “new filiation pact” (Théry, 1998) appears, bearing a new form of personalization and sentimentalization that constitute the bonds which link parents to children. Parental love is considered selfless, voluntary and unconditional (Singly, 1996) and parents are supposed to love, nurture and protect their children in all circumstances (Théry, 1998). Having children is seen as a source of great joy, bringing new meaning to life and goals for parents (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: p. 127).

Our findings also reinforce the centrality of parenthood. Children seem to be of extreme importance for our interviewees. Having children is considered something wonderful, the best thing in life and a source of happiness, something that eludes explanation. For many it is perceived as the strongest bond that can exist within families, implying a change in individuals’ identities, translated into a greater sense of achievement and a reason to improve as a person: *“it’s love, right? An absolutely unconditional love, which cannot be explained. The greater love that we feel is the one we feel for our children. It is the strongest”* (Renato Barbosa, 36 years old, business manager, Leiria).

However, parenting has become a task that requires more and more responsibility, which makes the decision of having children into something increasingly difficult (Beck and

Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). Expectations are high, and consequently there is great pressure in the daily routine of those who take care of children, most frequently, the mother. The majority of our interviewees, the birth of children leads to changes in their personal and/or conjugal life, implying a change of routines and a lack of freedom of action. There is less time for friends, for going out or for those activities they enjoy doing: *"Of course it changes our lives. Both at the level of responsibilities, obligations... prison, it represents all that. The biggest change in our life is the birth of a child."* (Joaquim Machado, 38 years old, insurance worker, Lisbon). Consequently, the existence of a child entails greater responsibilities, more worries, more work and fatigue, and a greater need to think ahead: *"We had to deal with responsibilities and concerns that never ended and that we never thought of."* (Alberto Correia, 41 years old, manager of a small enterprise, Oporto). The pressure on both parents due to increased responsibilities tends to modify the conjugal relationship (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995), and people can feel that there is a kind of "theft" in the relationship insofar the child becomes the centre of attention while the partner is left in the background. The relationship between the spouses suffers from a certain gap, and tensions might increase due to a lack of time to resolve them (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995).

"We do not have that intimacy, that space for just the two of us. We have to share it with the children, and then, at night, in the early years, we have to get up many times. Of course, the relationship between husband and wife will be away a bit..." (Olga Amaro, 34 years old, housewife, Leiria)

In terms of work, women may have to temporarily put their careers on hold or "stand-by" (Torres, 2004; Torres and Moura, 2004), with the prospect of being able to return later on and once again invest in their career: *"I had to give up doing many things I liked to do. I had to do my degree later whereas Alfredo did his"* (Lourdes Abreu, 52 years old, kindergarten teacher, Oporto).

Even if interviewees underline the positive aspects of parenting, they also refer its most negative aspects. Being a mother or a father is not always considered a bed of roses and their accounts express difficulties in the exercise of parenting, especially with increasing

financial burdens, responsibilities, work, concerns, and difficulties of monitoring the growth of children in a changing world that imposes more and more stimuli to youngsters.

"It's wonderful, it's great, great, I think is the best thing that can happen, although it's a lot of work, it's a lot of responsibility, and there are days when we come to the end of the day and can't stand it anymore."(Mónica Amaral, 26 years old, sociologist, unemployed, Lisbon)

With regard to childcare, several studies suggested the existence, since the early '80s, of a strong change in paternity, translated into higher expectations added to greater involvement of fathers in childcare (Wall and Arnold, 2007). Ideally, the "new parents" are loving men; they develop a close emotional relationship with their children, spend more time with them and share the care of children with mothers (ibid.). Our data supports the idea that men are taking more care of their children, and some men even say they can raise their children as well as mothers: *"I try to do the same thing that my wife does. I have no problem, I've always changed the diapers, given them baths..."*(Manuel Carvalho, 35 years old, factory worker, Leiria). However, the "hyper-responsibility" (Torres, 2004) of women for their children seems to prevail. Motherhood appears as a central issue for women's lives, implying a close link between women and household. Similarly, both in men and women's narratives, the scarce availability of men is very clear, which may result in a certain sense of loss when men express the desire to be more present in family life: *"I wish I could get home sooner, to be with the kids, still go to the coffee-shop ... not getting so tired ..."* (Diniz Gouveia, 42 years old, blue colour worker, Oporto). Hence, even when a greater involvement of men in child care is desired, the maintenance of educational backgrounds and different cultural norms for men and women "pushes" men out of the household, "trapping" women inside (Castelain-Meunier, 2002).

It is also worth noting that in Portugal there is less family support than is expected. According to Torres e Silva (1998), across the country, childcare solutions from external sources other than family, like kindergartens or nurseries, are the main solutions for the care of children, followed by the support of grandparents and other relatives. Notwithstanding, the importance of grandparents in childcare is mentioned by some

interviewees. When the support of grandparents exists, it is recognised as an important factor for successfully combining work and family.

Work

Throughout the 20th century, most Portuguese married women kept some kind of professional activity, even when their activity meant being in the fields, factories, in the retail sector with their husbands or in domestic services, a fact which bore important consequences at economic level. However, their work remained “invisible or underestimated” (Torres, 2004:143), a fact that can be understood by ideological reasons, namely the ideal domestic model of being housewife and loving mother (a situation that only some bourgeois women were actually able to put into practice).

In the last decades of the 20th century, the rapid economical growth (significant industry modernization, better qualifications, increase in consumption, the development of welfare state and most significantly the Portuguese entrance in the UE in 1986) endowed women’s massive entrance into the labour market (André e Feio, 2000).

Changes in Portuguese work structure and the rise of women’s participation in the labour market can be explained by several factors (Torres, 2004; 2006; 2009; Torres et al., 2004; 2006). In the beginning of the 60’s, both the colonial war¹ (1961-1974) and migrations, mainly from rural areas, led to a shortage in manpower and consequently led to the recruitment of women (André e Feio, 2000; Torres et al., 2004, 2006; Torres, 2004, 2006; 2009).

Women from less privileged sectors had an opportunity to seek work available in factories or as paid servants in the big cities (Torres et al., 2004, 2006; Torres, 2004, 2006; 2009). For women with higher qualifications there were professional opportunities in civil service, in teaching professions and in business firms, but these women often had domestic paid help (idem). In rural areas, women acquired a more

¹ Colonial war generated a strong need in labour force. Between 1961 and 1974, young men were forced to do four years of military service, two of which had to be served in Africa (Torres, 2004; 2006; Torres et al., 2006).

active role in agricultural activities (André e Feio, 2000). These opportunities enabled women not only to enter the labour market, but also to stay in it.

The 1974 Revolution put an end to colonial war, opening space for large transformations in Portuguese society, bringing equal opportunities for men and women which became translated into law (Torres et al., 2004, 2006; Torres, 2004, 2006, 2009).

Nowadays in Portugal, men and women labour rates are very similar². In the last few years, Portugal has acquired one of the highest female full-time employment rates in the EU³. Portuguese women, between 25 and 49 years old (the maternity phase), are also amongst those that work less in part-time in the UE (Casaca, 2005). Part-time jobs in Portugal, like in other southern countries, are not frequently available (Torres, 2006; Torres, 2009). In fact, this kind of paid work is generally associated with less qualifications and low income wages (Casaca, 2005; Torres, 2006). Portuguese mothers have a continuous connection with the labour market, even when their children are very young (Casaca, 2005; Torres, 2004, 2006, 2009; Torres et al., 2004, 2006).

Several studies demonstrate how paid work is a central aspect of human life (Carvalho da Silva, 2007; Casaca, 2005; Crompton, 2006; Kovacs, 2002, Torres and Moura, 2004, Torres, 2004; 2006; 2009; Torres et al, 2004, 2006). Having a professional activity is a source of personal development and satisfaction, providing income, social integration, fulfilment, status, power and personal identity (Kovacs, 2002). For our interviewees, both men and women of different generations, regions and social backgrounds, having a professional occupation is clearly valued: *"It's what I like to do, it's very important even for my own personal well being, I feel good about myself"* (Clarisse, 29 years old, psychologist, Porto).

The work of the spouse is generally accepted, whether by men or by women. However, a minority of our interviewees, (especially men, with more than 10 years of conjugality, from Oporto and Leiria, blue colour workers, owners of small companies and white colour workers), defend a more traditional division of labour with the man

² In 2008, the female's activity rate was of 48%, whereas men's activity rate was of 58,2% (INE, 2009).

³ The average number of hours that women work per week is 37, whereas men tend to work 40,8 hours average a week (INE, 2009).

as breadwinner and the woman as housewife. Such opinion may come with the recognition that these values may not be shared by their wives: *"If I could, she would be at home and not working, but she wouldn't want that, because she likes working"* (Victor Freire, 59 years old, bank employee, Leiria).

Among our interviewees there were women who were housewives; they lived in Oporto and Leiria and had more than ten years of conjugal relationship. These women showed ambivalent feelings regarding their situation as housewives. If, in one hand, they appreciate being at home, on the other hand, they talked about the negative implications brought to their lives by being a housewife: solitude, lack of patience, devaluation and lack of social recognition.

"It influences because outsiders do not give us the due value; because they say: "Oh, you're at home you don't do anything". For them I seem to lack that commitment to leave in the morning and return in the evening. But sometimes I think that there are jobs that make less than I do. But it's what I said, it's not recognized, our work is not recognized." (Olga Amaro, 34 years old, housewife, Leiria)

In line with the results of research (André and Feio, 2000; Casaca, 2005, Crompton, 2006), respondents also showed some signs of insecurity. Situations of precariousness were felt mostly by women. In Portugal, like in many other European countries, women are more vulnerable to labour market uncertainties, both related to contractual situations and opportunities for career development and to unemployment situations (André and Feio, 2000; Casaca, 2005)⁴. But even when they are unemployed, women miss working and what they derive from it.

Women working part-time also showed their desire to have a full time job. Our findings made it clear that woman, even when they have small children, want to be in the labour market. Their reasons are related not only with poverty or men's low salaries, but also, and mainly, because a job is a source of sociability and a mean to obtain social identity (Torres, 2004, 2006; 2009). Furthermore, "their jobs act as a way

⁴ In 2008, women have a rate of unemployment of 8,8%, whereas men have an unemployment rate of 6,5% (INE, 2009).

of increasing the woman's autonomy and bargaining power within the partnership or relationship, while at the same time give them the chance to improve their buying power and break free of limiting lifestyles and routines" (Torres, 2006: p. 20).

Unemployment and part-time work had, for these women, a practical influence on family level, since it led them to assume full responsibility for the performance of domestic chores: *"I do more, but I also don't work. He works and brings money home, and I do things in the house"*(Carla Sousa, 34 years old, maid, unemployed, Lisbon).

Housework

The massive entrance of women in the labour market has had important consequences in conjugal and family life; it marks the end of the ideology that separates spheres while paid work triggers several effects in the construction of a positive social and personal identity for women. These transformations imply new values concerning gender equality. In the domestic sphere, the equal share of domestic chores is now supported. These new norms are widely accepted for the majority of individuals, especially in the younger generation. Nevertheless, when it comes to practice, these new values aren't always accomplished.

Results from much research clearly show a profound asymmetry in the division of paid and unpaid work between men and women (Amâncio, 2007; Cardoso et al., 2008; Crompton, 2006; Crompton and Lyonette, 2007; Perista, 2002; Singly, 2007; Torres and Moura, 2004; Torres et al. 2004, 2006, 2008; Torres, 2006; 2009). As already stated in Portugal women are in charge of almost all domestic chores and childcare, even when working approximately the same hours as men in the labour market.

Our data also points to an asymmetrical division of domestic chores. There seems to be a feminine overload as women are typically in charged of most of the household chores: laundry, house cleaning, cooking, in addition to working outside the home. Men tend to give a hand here and there and do more outside the home. The household tasks men generally do relate to washing dishes, cooking (particularly grilling), laundering, help with the cleaning, along with chores that lie outside the

house, like gardening, car maintenance or tending animals. Interviewed men often refer helping take care of children: bathing them, dressing up, getting them in and out of school, putting them to sleep or helping them with homework.

"This is the most dramatic part, in the kitchen I don't do anything, I don't do any clothing or ironing. I set the table and do the bed. But with my daughter we divide the tasks: I give her the meals, I give her bath, I put her to sleep, and so forth. She performs all the others tasks with the help of a housemaid." (Francisco Abrantes, 36 years old, university professor and consultant, Lisbon)

From what has been said it is clear that despite some increase in men's participation in childcare, household chores are mainly performed sporadically or occasionally, while the routine and regular tasks are normally the women's responsibility (Torres e Silva, 1998). The maintenance of a strong integration of traditional roles is clear particularly among older women and among manual workers: "it is a women's duty"; they prefer to do it; they do it "naturally" better and faster.

"It's beautiful when he arrives home and everything is tidy. I do everything ... he comes tired from work; he's not going to do things in the house. That's my duty. In my way of thinking, it's the woman who should do these things." (Amélia Costa, 51 years old, factory worker, Lisbon)

The achievement of the housekeeping role often works as something that is constructive of women's identity, something that values them as "good" women (Singly, 2007; Torres, 2004; Torres and Moura, 2004). Similarly, some men may refuse to perform certain household tasks partly to avoid a certain feminization of their identity (Singly, 2007).

In couples with higher levels of education, men's slighter involvement in domestic chores does not always translates into greater equality between men and women, but often in the delegation of such activities to extra help, either non paid (mother, daughter and mother-in-law) or paid (domestic servants) (Amâncio, 2007; Crompton e Lyonette, 2007; Perista, 2002; Singly, 2007; Torres, 2004, 2006, 2009; Torres e Moura, 2004; Torres et al., 2004, 2006). Female gender thus remains a determining variable, even when women delegate these tasks. Consequently, resorting to the help of a

housemaid, despite removing some burden from women's backs, may not lead to a men's greater participation in the remaining tasks, justifying instead their lower participation among some couples.

Having a professional activity is a factor that influences the division of household chores. The lack of employment leads women to perform the domestic chores as a contribution to the household: *"Since I'm not working I do the chores. At the weekends he does most of the chores and I can rest a little more. When I'm working, we always share tasks"*(Madalena, 27 years, takes care of children, Lisbon). But even when both partners work outside the household, it is commonly assumed that men work more and women assume the performance of the household chores: *"It has to do with the fact that I have a parallel activity. If I had only my work and she only hers, with absolute certainty we would share more the house organisation"*(Fernando Arroiteia, 35 years old, journalist and theologian, Leiria). However, when women work outside the home, men tend to give them some assistance (bigger or smaller), especially with the children: *"We split in half. I don't know if this is what is fair but ... it must be, since we both work ... and arrive tired at home"*(João Martins, 33 years old, air conditioning technician, Oporto).

From traditional to egalitarian, passing through an intermediate stage: three types of combinations between work and family

In-depth analysis built from the interviews led us to create a typology that comprehends the combination between work and family, allowing us to accommodate the representations and practices of conjugal relationships relating to parenthood, work and household chores expressed by our interviewees. As a result, we've arrived at three modes/types of combinations: the traditional, the intermediate and the egalitarian.

The couples and individuals more incline to tradition are a minority amongst the interviewees. Almost all of them have more than 10 years length of marriage, are mainly blue colour workers, employees performing, managers or owners of small

companies, living mainly in Oporto, but also in Leiria. These couples live more in a “suffocating” state-of-affairs and tend to have a more problematic experience with their conjugal relationship. Parenthood is experienced in a more authoritarian way, insofar fathers, through the imposition of rules, are considered to have a greater influence on children's education than mothers. These couples tend to have a more asymmetric division of housework; women assume the responsibility for almost/all the domestic chores and childcare, a situation that both elements of the couple tend to consider as fair and proper. Most of the women have a paid job, which tends to be important to their personal identity and independence, but there were some couples who had a traditional division of labour, with men working outside the home and woman working as housewives.

Not surprisingly, the intermediate form encompasses the vast majority of individuals and couples interviewed. They belong to various social classes, ages and regions. These individuals value their conjugal relationship, although they recognize some stifling periods, with more or less love (standing, usually, in the middle of this continuum). Mothers are the ones who, in most cases, are responsible for children's education and for most of the housework, which leads them to bear the greater burden of (house) work when compared to fathers. Usually both elements of the couple have a paid job, although often women were unemployed or working part-time. When such situations occur, women express the desire to work full-time, even when their children are very young. Men tend to give “a little help” in domestic chores and in childcare, especially when women are employed.

Finally, the egalitarian model comprises a minority group which is nevertheless bigger than the traditional one. It consists primarily of most qualified, younger people, and residents in Lisbon, but also of Leiria. These couples tend to share the household chores, although they usually have a maid to carry out certain tasks for them, as house cleaning or ironing. They also tend to share childcare and both try to participate in children's education. Work is an important aspect for men and women, both trying to engage on successful professional careers. However, women are inclined to postpone their career development – putting it on stand-by when children are born. Also the

commitment and time dedicated to work, the fatigue and concerns that are taken home may interfere in the relationship between work and family, even if some of the interviewees considered to have achieved a balance between both spheres of their lives. Egalitarian couples are the ones who say they live more in love. That does not exclude feeling the weight of family responsibilities, a feeling that seems to affect women the most.

Moreover, for most couples and especially women, combining work and family is not always easy and it may cause tensions and conflict for the latter (Dema-Moreno and Días-Martínez, 2010).

Concluding remarks

Throughout this study it became clear that in the context of the couple, women feel more overburden than men, having a greater sense of 'suffocation' within the conjugal relationship, greater responsibility in childcare and assuming more often than men the household chores, while in most cases, they are also committed to a professional activity.

In Portugal, women tend to stay in the labour market and to work full-time even when they marry and have young children. They want to articulate work and family. Paid work gives them a sense of personal and social identity, more autonomy and more power in the conjugal relationship, besides providing better financial conditions to the family and an opportunity to develop a social life. Managing to balance both spheres is not always easy. Although they work almost the same hours as men, they are responsible for unpaid work and childcare. They are the ones who have to harmonize work and family, something which tends to be a tough achievement.

Regarding conjugality, men are inclined to have less identity constructions attached to marriage, perhaps because their identity process is more independent from the family and more dependent on the professional field (Giddens, 1993), while in the case of women their identity construction and personal path is markedly defined by their family trajectory (Giddens, 1993; Singly, 1987, 1993, 1996, 2000).

Parenthood is also an important dimension in the lives of individuals, with strong implications for their personal and social identity, their conjugal relationship and professional work and other dimensions of life, such as leisure. Children are central to personal fulfilment for both men and women (Almeida, 2003; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Cunha, 2007; Théry, 1998). In fact, both want to be parents and when the children come to their lives they tend to mention the enormous satisfaction felt on such happening. However, individuals still refer the difficulties that parenthood entails. The birth of a child generally demands the reorganization of the conjugal life. It's no wonder that men and women often express a sense of ambiguity regarding parenting: on one hand, they believe parenthood is something wonderful, while on the other hand, they say it's a very complex task.

Interestingly, there seems to be a connection between representations and practices in the various dimensions analysed. This is the case, for example, for those individuals and/or couples that are more involved in their parental role and which are also those who feel more accomplished with their conjugal relationship. Similarly, more authoritarian couples/individuals tend to live in a conjugal relationship with more problems. However there is often a gap between what is said and what is practiced. Commonly one finds that an egalitarian discourse, proclaiming a greater involvement of men in housework and childcare, often corresponds to more traditional practices.

It should be noted, however, that only a minority of individuals defends and/or lives a traditional division of labour, with the man assuming the role as provider and breadwinner and the woman that of the housewife. Such arrangement between work and family tends to correspond to a more traditional but also problematic experience of conjugality and parenthood.

Finally, we underline the importance that a professional life holds in the structuring of individual and collective identities. Work is a means of access to a source of income, but also of integration and social cohesion, satisfaction, personal fulfilment and a sense of individual autonomy. The loss of a job for women implies the loss of material and subjective autonomy and possibly the asymmetry of gendered power relations

and consequent strengthening of traditional roles (Casaca, 2005). Thus, men and women are motivated by their professional life. Even for married women with small children "work is a value in itself, one which goes beyond the economic necessity of having two incomes, tending towards being part of a strong female identity model" (Torres et al., 2006). This is why it's understandable that women "invest or want to invest in both fronts [work and family]" (ibid.: p. 140).

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