

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI TRENTO

Changing the Gender Structure of Family Organization

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QUADERNI DEL DIPARTIMENTO DI POLITICA SOCIALE

1984

CHANGING THE GENDER STRUCTURE OF FAMILY ORGANIZATION (*)

Gender is the basis on which families have historically been built and transformed. And the social organization of the family is the main means of constructing gender as a social and historical experience⁽¹⁾. What happens then when a couple tries to build a relationship and a family without relying on gender as an organizational principle?

First of all such an effort makes more visible the multiple dimensions of the gender structure of the family, in so far it must touch upon the division of labor and of responsibilities, but also deep rooted expectations and perceptions. It must touch upon not only the organization of everyday life, but also the overall pattern of an individual's, a couple's, a family's life course. As a matter of fact, the use of time seems to be a crucial underlying dimension not only of gender relationships, but also of gender egalitarian ones: ⁽²⁾ time is allocated and evaluated both on the basis of what is performed and of whose time it is. It is a scarce resource, but it is also the dimension in which relationships develop and change, responsibilities come about, needs arise or decline, the different career lines and time schedules⁽³⁾ of an individual and of a couple are developed, cross each other and/or diverge.

The experience of ten U.S. couples who have been striving for many years to build a gender egalitarian relationship shows the difficulties which exist in tackling all these dimensions, as well as their changes over time, the societal constraints as well as the cultural and psychological ones. But it shows also the degree and depth of transformation and innovation such an effort can create, even in presence of such constraints.

The sample

The ten couples, all living in Greater Boston, were found using an informal referral system, or a « snow ball » method: they were referred to me either by a common friend or, more often, by another couple in the sample. Each couple, therefore was nominated as gender

egalitarian at least by another person and each spouse agreed on such a self definition. The precise meaning of « gender egalitarian » is quite difficult to define. At a very abstract level, it can be defined as a relationship in which each partner's goals are given equal importance and work is divided on the basis of interest, ability and fairness, rather than gender. But what exactly that means at the practical level, how fairness as well as interests are assessed, and how eventual conflicts are solved is unclear. The factors vary with each individual couple and also over time. In any case the ten couples were selected on the basis of their agreement on that very broad definition (*).

In order to have in my sample fairly stable relationships and to test their gender egalitarianism in the face of the normal risks and events of family life, I included only couples who had been living together for at least five years and had at least one child under twelve.

The persons I ended up with were between 30 and 43 years old, the average age being 35. With one exception (the oldest), they all belong to the generation which became adult and completed its education in the second half of the sixties. They were exposed to, even when they had not been actively involved in, the civil rights movement, the student movement and the anti-war protests, and later the women's movement. Eight of the men had been active in the student and anti-war movements; two were also very active in political groups also for some time after college. Though none of them would now define himself as politically active, they do maintain some kind of political interest in the « left » and support specific causes. Of the two other men, one (Ben S.) was in Vietnam right after completing high school, and is still bitter about it (both towards the American government which sent him to war and towards the « middle-class-college-left wing students » of the antiwar movement, « who didn't fight in the war and didn't pay for it »). The other, the oldest in the sample (Don P.) was already out of college when the movement began. He considers himself a liberal and is active in local politics.

As for the women, the majority didn't participate in the political movements of the sixties to the same degree as the men. Often they were exposed to politics through their husbands. Only three of them were active in the student and anti-war movement; these same women also participated in the women's movement and two of them still belong to some kind of feminist and political group. All the others but one, however, explicitly acknowledge the impact that the existence of the women's movement has had on their outlook and expectations, for themselves and for their couple relationship. Moreover, all stress the importance which women's friendship and women's groups (even if not explicitly fe-

minist groups) have acquired for them in recent years. They try to maintain a space for meeting their women's friends and for going to their women's groups on a regular basis.

In general we may say that at least the more general mainstream ideas of the woman's movement, such as a woman's right to work and to equal pay for equal work, shared responsibilities for the household and for household work between men and women, are part of the cultural framework of all these couples.

They were all married, but for Nancy P. and William S. She had been married previously and had a daughter. At the time of the first interview both declared they didn't care for the institution of marriage; but they eventually got married a year afterwards. In another case (Jenny E. and Victor K.), both spouses were in their second marriage (in addition to their two children, she has a daughter from a previous marriage, who lives with them). But for these two cases, in which the couples had been living together for 5-6 years, in all other instances they had been living together for 10-15 years. In two instances, (Wendy C. and Jeremy E., Masha. R. and Michael R.) the actual marriage took place after a few years of living together. The two women in this case have maintained their own last name. Jenny C. has done the same.

They all have some college education, although Jenny and Nancy did not complete it.

Their income varies greatly and in one instance (Nancy P. and William S.) the family was quite poor at the time of the interview. On average, however, the family income is between thirty and forty thousand dollars a year.

To summarize, the sample at the time of the first interview consisted of:

— Laura and John D.: married for twelve years, they had a daughter, 9, and a son, 5. Laura, a former nursery school teacher, at the time of the first interview was completing her second M.A. in social work. Eventually she found a job as a social worker. John, a former college teacher, owns and manages a small publishing house with a friend. They were both 38 years old.

— Jenny E. and Victor K.: both in their second marriage, they had been living together for six years and married for four. She has a teen-age daughter from her first marriage. Together they had a daughter, then 4, and a son, then 2. Jenny, who was 39, at the time of the first interview did some catering part time and weaved, selling her fabrics. Eventually her weaving became a success, and she gave up her catering job. At the time of the first interview, Victor, 39 years old and a former college teacher, was working as an editor for a small publishing house. About a

year afterwards he had changed his job and was moving to another state with his family, to work with computers.

— Mary and Hal M.: married for fifteen years, they had two sons, 12 and nine. An MBA, she was an executive in a state agency. She eventually changed her job and field of work, becoming a manager in a small company. He is a university professor. They were both 36.

— Judith and Ralph C.: married for 17 years, they had a son, 12, and a daughter, 7. He was a counselor for problem youth in a state agency; she worked part time in the public relations office of an important university. They were both 38.

— Linda and George F.: married for 8 years. At the time of the first interview they had only a daughter, 3. A year later they had another baby girl. He was a blue collar worker. She was completing her Ph. D., which she eventually obtained a few months later. They were both 31.

— Nancy P. and William S.: 32 years old, she had been married once and had a daughter, 7, who lives with them. She and William had been living together for five years and had recently moved to the Boston area from the Midwest. She worked as a waitress to earn a living and as a musician, as a vocation. 33 years old, he was an artist (a painter). Shortly after I interviewed them, she moved to New York to study and work in the field of music technology and he moved back to the Mid-west with her daughter. They eventually married and were planning to move together to New York when I last had news about them.

— Sue and Don P.: married for 14 years, they had a daughter, 10, and a son, 7. 44 years old, he was an administrator in a state agency. 39 years old, she was a part time free lancer in the publishing industry.

— Ruth and Ben S.: married for 13 years, at the time of the first interview they had two daughters, 12 and 3, and two sons, 5 and 4. A year later they had an unplanned but welcome new baby daughter (they have made sure that this will be the last one). She, a 34 years old certified nurse, hadn't been working regularly since the birth of their second child, although in the past three years she had always worked as a summer camp nurse and occasionally took some private nursing job. 34 years old, he was a high school teacher and also had a second job as a referee in sport events.

— Wendy C. and Jeremy E.: married for eight years, they had two daughters, 7 and 4. Forty years old, she was a former actress and a teacher in a private school she had helped to organize. At the time of the first interview she was unemployed because the school had closed. She was doing some free lancing for the radio and other theater performances, working with children. Eventually these activities increased and

she free lanced on a more extended basis. He was a movie script writer at the beginning of his career, which appeared successful.

— Masha R. and Michael R.: married for nine years, they had a daughter, 4. She is a university teacher; he was working part time as a psychologist and was going to graduate school to obtain a Ph. D. They were both 35.

Of different cultural heritages, they were all white, but for Ruth, who is black. And except for Nancy P., who was born and had lived most of her life in the Middle West, they were all born and had grown up in New England.

Research method

I was interested in using a collaborative style of research⁽⁵⁾, and a longitudinal approach. To ask for and to allow an active cooperation and interaction on the part of the interviewees was not only a crucial means of eliciting information. It was also an important way of learning how they felt about the very question of gender equality and how they defined the issues at stake. In order to obtain this, I did multiple interviewing, had the interviewees read a first report and then interviewed them again. The whole process took about a year and a half.

More precisely, in the Spring 1982 I interviewed, using a very flexible outline, first each partner and then the couple together. All these interviews were taped (for a total of about 4 hours of taped material for each couple). The interviews focused on the education and work history of the individual and on his/her family background, on the couple and family history, on the division and organization of housework and child care, on the social life of the family, the couple, the individual, on the reciprocal expectations concerning family and couple performances, on areas of conflict, and on negotiation styles. The aim was not only to obtain informations on what is going on now, but on the history of the relationship, in order to obtain longitudinal data, albeit only in retrospect.

Beside being interviewed, each person filled out a background information sheet, a general housekeeping and child care checklist, and a time budget for for seven consecutive days. These checklists and forms were filled out during the period between the individual interviews (which happened either the same day or a few days apart) and the couple's joint interview (which happened at least a week and usually two weeks after the individual ones). Usually we started the couple's joint interview commenting on these forms, comparing the partners' answers to the checklist and the way they kept track of and organized

their time. All the interviewees found the filling of time budget forms most complicated and idiosyncrasic (although the women usually did it in a more detailed way than the men, and people with a well defined out-of-the house job perceived their time as more organized in specific time blocks than people who didn't have this kind of job). They all, however, declared it useful for themselves. In two cases the men said it motivated them to reorganize their time and its distribution between family and work; in another case the woman said that she became aware of an excessive fragmentation in her time organization. Although the material collected through these time budget forms appears to be most interesting, given the difficulties involved in organizing and analyzing it, I will not use it here (6).

A year after the joint interview, in the Spring 1983, I sent to these couples, as I had promised, a first report of my findings, asking them to read it and to comment. In the Summer 1983 I went back to the States and interviewed all these couple again (except for Nancy and William, who had moved out of state, to two different places and for whom I did not have a phone number. I do not have their reactions and comments to the report, although I have updated my informations about what they have been doing during the year, through another couple in the sample). During the most recent interview they commented not only on the report, on how I had interpreted the material they had offered me, but also on the stage of life they had been in when I first interviewed them, and on what had changed in the meantime, both in their practical situation and in their outlook. This last interview was therefore not only a means of checking my perceptions and eventual misinterpretations, but also an opportunity for the interviewees to reflect on their own experience, in comparison with that of other couples in a similar situation. Once again the time dimension of the individual life course and of couple relationships appeared to be crucial for understanding and testing choices and constraints.

The material I am presenting here has therefore been discussed and checked with the persons involved, although the interpretation is, of course, totally my responsibility. I must say, however, that all the interviewees were not only pleased with the fact that I had maintained my promise to have them read my report; in general they were also pleased with the report, although both they and I are fully aware that there are many dimensions of their relationship I have not explored, as well as much material I have only partially used.

All interviews, both in 1982 and in 1983 happened in the interviewees' houses, in the evening or during the day (except for Hal M. and Linda F., whom I interviewed the first time in their offices). I was

therefore able to witness a small part of the family everyday interaction and organization: children were being put to bed when I arrived, or were coming home from school when I was leaving, asking for snacks or just dropping in to see the intruder; phone calls were answered, and so forth. Sometime the family was so friendly to me, that they accepted me during their family time (at dinner for instance). With some I became friends, which was a problem in terms of trying not to exploit a friendly relationship for research purposes. I hope I have succeeded. In any case, knowing all these people was an invaluable experience for me.

A final observation is necessary. As many authors have pointed out (7), studying couples is not the same as studying individuals. Couples (and families) construct an image of their relationship and their history over time, which they not only present to the outside, but which constitutes the frame itself of their behaviors and expectations. The « reality » of their relationship is made also of this culturally and symbolically constructed reality. If this is true of all couples and families, the more is it so for the couples in my sample, who belong to a generation and to a cultural milieu who invested and invests much in consciously shaping behaviors and relationships, and who holds equality and fairness in high value. For these reasons, I think, not only have the individual and joint interviews been quite consistent, but it was very hard to have the individuals and the couples talk about their conflicts. Since for the moment they were « success stories » — as many of them told me, contrasting their experience to that of their generation and friends — these couples and individuals seemed not to admit the existence of « real » conflicts in their relationships. They sometimes even felt uncomfortable with the image of negotiation. Conflicts were admitted, apparently, only in the form of simple differences in tastes (in spending money, in standards of cleanliness), or at most of different degrees of coherence in holding to common shared values, rather than as a divergence of interests or of values. For instance, Laura D. admitted to being more lenient than John, in « giving to the children », but quickly added that his stress on self restraint is a shared value. And the conflicts they have on the allocation of time, on his diminishing presence in housework and in family time, are formulated more in the « objective » terms of conflicting demands (of work and family) than of subjective choices and priorities (although in the interview in 1983, when their present pattern of allocation of time was more clearly defined than a year before, both Laura and John were more explicit about the existence of a conflict, while less confident that it would be solved. They would have to live with it). Only in two cases has the existence of « real conflicts » been explicitly mentioned and acknowledged. Michael and Masha R. admitted they have power conflicts

over who decides what. They said they have long discussions and negotiations every time they have to make a decision, since no area of decision making is delegated to either of them. Ben and Ruth S. who came from two very different cultural backgrounds (he was an Irish Catholic, she was a black Baptist), explicitly admitted they have often clashing views concerning sociability, friendship and the quality of their standard of living (he feels hard pressed for money, she feels they are doing well). They even held different views of the reasons which prompted the conjugal crisis they had experienced two years before I interviewed them. It is my opinion that in this case the wide differences in cultural background have contributed to the shaping of an image of their relationship and their history as a couple where conflict has an acknowledged and accepted place; although Ruth would like her marriage to be nearer to the ideal of « togetherness » which belongs to the cultural background of the other couples. Among these, in fact, conflict has no legitimate status in the couple's definition of itself, at least in this stage of life. Therefore it appears only indirectly, in the conscious effort at maintaining a dialogue that these couples indicate as a main feature of their relationship: not so much in order to share everything, but to keep in touch and to communicate each other one's own changes and feelings, in order to prevent conflicts from erupting. It is moreover true what all the couples have pointed out after reading the report and after I questioned them directly on the issue of an apparently low degree of conflict: since they all have fairly long standing relationships, the conflicts which might be typical of the first years of reciprocal adaptations, of little babies, of getting to know each other and their new responsibilities, are over for most of them; and they are just now entering the stage linked to having teenage children, career changes and problems, and more generally to that reorienting of one's own priorities which is typical of middle age in western developed societies⁽⁸⁾. They are in a kind of plateau stage, although some of them can foresee approaching changes and possible new sources of conflicts.

The work/family system

Division of labor on the basis of gender is a basic feature of the work/family system in contemporary industrialized societies⁽⁹⁾. The allocation of time and responsibilities in the two spheres is therefore crucial to the gender structure of the family. All the couples in the sample have somehow tried to alter or break this structure. But the way they have worked it out and even the degree of consciousness in tackling this issue is not the same for all. The gender issue wasn't explicit from the

beginning in all relationships. Nor was it always explicitly focused on in the process of evolving a pattern of division of labor. It is even more interesting that for different couples different aspects of the work/family system appear crucial in their more or less explicit attempts at working out a gender egalitarian relationship⁽¹⁰⁾. What is felt as important and the specific choices and arrangements vary considerably among the couples. They vary also for the same couple over the years: that is, the specific pattern of division of labor, of time spent in paid work and in family work, and so forth, may vary greatly.

But let's examine these in detail.

As it has been observed in other projects⁽¹¹⁾, many couples who start out with an explicit plan of gender egalitarian behavior may end somewhat far from that ideal, because of the influence and constraints of external circumstances (e.g. labor market opportunities). But the reverse may be true as well. There are couples who evolve over time a pattern of gender equality which wasn't a conscious aim at the beginning of the relationship, but which has come out of the interplay between external circumstances and personal development and change.

The couples in my sample fall somewhat between these two extremes. We can take as two indicators of gender egalitarianism first, the woman having a job and earning an income equal if not superior to her husband's and second, the man's involvement in housework and child care. From this point of view, the two extremes might be represented on one end by Mary and Hal M., who started out as a fairly traditional couple, when he was a graduate student and she stayed at home with her child, while they are now a dual career couple and he has substantially increased his participation in housework (he was always a very active child caring father). At the other end we might put Wendy C. and Jeremy E., who started out as substantially egalitarian from the point of view of income earned (actually she often earned more than he), career involvement and division of family labor, but now find themselves in a situation in which she is trying to develop a new professional identity and he has become a successful movie script writer.

But things are not that simple. Individuals do not always start with a clear idea of what they want. Moreover, the individuals and the couples themselves stress different dimensions, over time, as important in an egalitarian relationship. They even change their definition of gender equality itself. As Jenny E. says, it can become « a feeling of autonomy which does not necessarily derive from both of us having a career », but from having material and psychological space for one's own interests and relationships; or, according to Wendy, echoed by Jeremy, it is not so much

dividing everything in half, but the ability to be flexible both towards one's own and to the other's needs and changes.

What is more, important, and does not allow us to simply dismiss all this as *ex post* rationalizations, is the fact that all these couples, whatever their degree of satisfaction with the present situation, perceive it as transitory. This is of course a function of the life stage each of these couples is in: the children are still young, but are growing up, changing their needs and demands; for many persons this is also a crucial stage in the paid work experience, because it is a period of evaluation of one's own position, or of new choices, new beginnings. But the feeling of being in transition comes also from a different dimension of experience: from the consciousness that the couple's relationship keeps changing over time, that negotiations, assessments, choices are continually going on and are not done once and for ever - from who does what in the house, to how much time one devotes to one's career and even how much all this is important. In other words, the life course dimension of the relationship and also of the definition of what is fair and satisfactory within it, is an explicit feature of these persons' consciousness and outlook. They kept telling me: « Now it is like this, but a year ago, two years ago, it was different, and one year from now it will be different again ». Two men were particularly explicit about it, and it is worthwhile to quote them.

« Now things are like this and it might appear that she has the shorter end of the stick. But this doesn't mean next year things will be the same. If she finishes her degree and finds a job, I might quit mine, and work different hours, or just stay home for a while. Nothing is fixed ». (George F.).

« I can change my schedule over the day, the week, the month, the year. I can work hard in the morning in order to have more time at night, or work longer hours three days, to have more time for the family the others, or work more one month and less another. Actually I am putting in more work and more hours this year, because I want to be able to go back to the country in a year or so and work from there, coming down once a week ». (Victor K.).

The changes which happened in the family composition or in the career stage of half of these couples in a twelve month period confirms the relative provisionality of a specific life stage and a specific arrangement: two had a new child, in another three one spouse changed jobs or started a career, and as a consequence in two of them the family was relocated; in three cases one spouse had an unforeseen professional success, which asked both for a reassessment of the place given to one's own career in one's own life and for a re-evaluation of family and couple obligations. John D. was more and more involved in his publishing

enterprise, which took him increasingly away from his household chores. Masha R. became a well known expert in her field, which means she is increasingly asked as a consultant and as a speaker in different places away from home, while her husband Michael is more involved and interested in his work. She is now wondering not only how they can re-organize their life to accomodate the increasing demands of their career commitments, but to accomodate their need for togetherness and their desire for a new child. Jenny E. is facing the decisions the unforeseen success of her weaving make now necessary: should she devote more time to it, should she hire someone to help her, and so forth. On the other side Linda F., although she has completed her degree, does not feel pressed to find a job, since she has a new baby to care for.

Of course, all are well aware of the external constraints implicit in this kind of flexibility. They may judge themselves privileged because of the kind of work they have and the economic resources they can eventually draw upon, given their family background. Or they may see clearly the restrictions in career opportunities caused by specific choices. Judith C. for instance fears she will not be able to have a more meaningful job when she will want to, since for a long time she has preferred a part time solution. Or they may see and suffer the constraints imposed on their choices by the economic and labor market situation. In 1983 Linda F. declares she is happy to be home with her new child, but adds that given the labor market situation in the academy, she really didn't have any choice between going to work and staying home with the children. And she is afraid that she will never be able to work. As for Nancy P. and Williams S., who were under great economic and psychological stress when I first interviewed them, their artistic choice was a conscious risk against which their mutual solidarity was the only buffer they had. All of them however, were and are willing to run some risk in order to maintain flexibility in their own and in their family's life, in order to be able to give time and opportunities to themselves, to their partner, to their children.

Moreover, for both men and women of this particular sample, work and family appear as linked. There is an evident and conscious effort to keep the two together. Of course couples and individuals vary in the balance they achieve; but the fact that such a balance — of commitments, time, energy — exists and is desirable is apparent for all of them. It is particularly apparent in the focus that all these couples have on children and also on their relationship as a couple: in the way they organize their time — and have organized their work experience over time — to make space for the relationship with their children, as we shall see.

On the other hand, the need for such a balance is apparent also

in the importance each person attributes to the fact of having a professional identity, of earning one's own money, of having also a specific, identifiable non-family dimension (it is true also for Ruth, who has no job and earns only occasionally, but is conscious of her market value as a nurse, besides taking time for the various activities and committees in which she participates). The need for such a balance expresses both a consciousness of possible conflicts « the world of work is organized against the family » — says George F.) and vice versa, of a positive linkage. That is, apparently having a professional identification not only offers protection from an over identification with the family; it also allows a person to feel more responsible towards it, to take one's own share of family work, as well as of work for pay.

Typically, this second aspect appears more clearly in the experience of men. In two cases especially, the connection was explicit. Ralph C. assumed spontaneously his share of family work and child care when he obtained his first job, while he didn't do anything in the house when he was out of work and out of school, and was going through a deep personal and political crisis, notwithstanding the fact that Judith was working full time and being *de facto* the bread winner. William S. admitted that he was doing less around the house than he used to when he was more successful as a painter and when his economic contribution was greater: « because I am just too depressed now; I must understand where I am going to with my art first. I just do not have my mind at it ».

In other, more « normal » cases, the men felt that their work responsibilities and schedules negatively affected their involvement in family work and child care, which they would like to share more: not only out of a sense of duty and fairness to their wives, but out of a sense of pleasure and self need (especially in the case of child care, of course, but also in certain areas of housework, like cooking).

This does not imply that housework is shared evenly and taken up cheerfully and without conflicts, as we shall see. It means only that there is a perceived need of some kind of a balance between presence and involvement in the sphere of work and presence and involvement in the sphere of family.

Being part of a family, and responsible towards it, for these men, is not only made up of earning money for one's own family and of having a family to go back to, to relax in, even to worry for. It is something to work in and with. It is made of relationships which require a kind of work and time which cannot be substituted for either by other people's (even the wife's) time or by paid work time. Actually, what Judith C., who works part time, has described as an optimal balance of having a job, having time for the family and having time for herself, is

not very different from what most of these men consider an ideal they are striving for. It is however often made impossible by the economic constraints (two part-time jobs do not support a family), or by the demands of the structure of careers. Actually only those who have an academic job or are professional people have that flexibility — on a daily basis, but also over the course of one's life — which to others appears only as an unattainable ideal. Therefore many men feel trapped in a rigid schedule over which they have but little power.

It cannot go unnoticed, however, the fact that it is easier, for both men and women, in my sample, to accept and legitimate the women's need to have a more flexible time structure. That is, it appears more difficult to acknowledge the same need for men. During their individual interviews, for example, both Judith and Ralph C. had expressed their preference for a part-time working schedule, which however only Judith had realized. When I raised the question during the joint interview, Ralph once again said that he would have liked a part time job, but he couldn't afford it, in terms of income and career opportunities, while Judith seemed not to acknowledge that his desire was as strong as hers. Only after I directly questioned her, she said that only in a situation in which he really couldn't stand working full time anymore, would she have gone back to working full time.

As a matter of fact, eight out of ten among these men had quite a remarkable pattern of discontinuity in work and career patterns, having gone through many changes and new beginnings. But it seems that, even in this kind of sample, while it is an accepted behavior for men to risk staying out of work for a while in order to study and/or to try a new career, or even to travel, it is not as obviously acceptable for them to take up the « typically feminine » discontinuous pattern of work behavior and attachment⁽¹²⁾: to stay out of work or to work part time only because of family roles and priorities. Only one man in the sample — Michael R. — made such a choice, when his daughter was born, in a conscious and explicit effort to overturning gender roles (while Masha started her academic career).

All this appears very traditional at first glance; but where does traditionalism actually lie? In women's accomodating their work lives to family demands and pleasures (even the career women in the sample took some kind of leave when their children were born, or started their career after their children were born and past infancy), or in men's inability to go all the way in doing so, even when they would like to? The answers are not clear, specially when one listens to these very articulate women speaking of choices they have made and do not regret, even when they have paid for it in terms of delaying their career or in

having less satisfying jobs. Certainly the risk of exchanging security and flexibility for economic as well as psychological dependency are great⁽¹³⁾. And behind the men's willingness to « sacrifice » themselves in order to « free » their wives from the rigidity of work demands there may be the fear of an over involvement in family demands and work. I suspect however that these couples are struggling with multiple, not single, issues, which are typical of this epoch and of this generation, and which all touch the family/work system, its balances, gender structure, symbolic meanings: gender, the place of work in one's own life, personal identity, family ideology and the needs of nurturance and of caring, etc. Their couple and individual solutions therefore necessarily appear (and probably are) always partial and lopsided.

It must also be added that, however materially unbalanced the work/family system may appear from the point of view of the single individual, for all these couples, as I said, flexibility is highly valued. Which means that there is no area which belongs exclusively to one spouse. Moreover, each one is both aware of the possibility of change and open to negotiating and/or initiating such change, if the chance arises. This is true also for the couple whose work/family system appears more rooted in the traditional gender structure: Ruth and Ben S. He is deeply involved in child care and is responsible for many chores around the house (a fact in itself which had been a recent change, at the time of the first interview, and had been initiated by a quite dramatic show down by Ruth). And they are both prepared to shift responsibilities if the need arises. As a matter of fact, when I interviewed them in 1982 he had just been laid off by the school department for which he was working and had no job in view. As she told me a year later, since this situation lasted well into the new school year, Ruth had found herself a job as a nurse even though she was already pregnant. He was hired by another school department just the day before she was to start working. She was glad not to have to work in her situation, but also happy to have proved she could, if she wanted or needed to. As a matter of fact she is planning to start working as soon as her new baby goes to nursery school, in three years.

The division of family work

I use here the concept of family work and not just housework because it is more comprehensive of all that is needed to keep a family going (a part from earning money for it)⁽¹⁴⁾: housework, but also childcare, financial and administrative work, yard and house-repair work, and also

what Masha R. defined « acting as a social secretary » for the family and the couple.

This work changes greatly in its composition and total amount of time required during a family's life course, as the couples in my sample pointed out over and over again. « We kept making lists and changing them, and finally gave up having a list altogether » — Linda and George F. told me.

Reciprocal expectations change, but so also do family needs and labor market demands, and there is not always congruence among all these changes. Actually one of the greatest hazards of a relationship in general, and in particular of one committed to avoiding stereotypical patterns and roles, is the synchronization of changes. As over and over again these couple who live in the so called « divorce era » pointed out to me, so far they are « success stories ». They have changed together and have been able together to meet the changes in family structure (children are born and then grow up) as in the external circumstances. In the meantime they have been striving to maintain open, flexible, if not altogether overturning, the gender role structures historically and culturally developed to cope with them.

For a few couples this ability to meet these challenges appears, in their words and perceptions, almost effortless: a spontaneous development of the relationship. For others it is the conscious object of an explicit negotiation, of a kind of « relational work »: « we have to work it out », « we are working on it » is for instance the *refrain* in Laura D.'s interview. And Michael R. speaks of having made a « contract » with Masha, concerning his assuming principal responsibility for the care of their daughter the first four years.

In any case, also external circumstances, explicitly or not, play an important role in these processes of development/negotiation: I am thinking here not only of income levels and work schedules, but also of life experiences preceding the relationship and of changes in the cultural climate of the reference groups for these couples/individuals: It is important to keep this in mind, even if I cannot develop it fully here. Certainly the majority of the women in the sample explicitly mentioned the important role played by the existence of the women's movement in their expectations and outlook.

Let's see now in some detail how these couples organize the different areas of family work.

a) Housework

First of all, since all these couples have very busy lives, they keep

housework to a minimum. Aside from the family of Ruth and Ben S., where shopping and cooking are an important part of the family economy and where the sheer numbers make it, together with cleaning and doing the laundry, a major project, all the other families seem to devote very little time to housework. Actually in the case of Linda and George F. for some time housework had been reduced to such a minimum (because she was writing her thesis, while he worked the afternoon shift as usual and took care of their daughter in the morning), that they did not feel like entertaining. They said that the house was « too dusty and disorderly », and the added work involved in preparing a special meal was just something they felt they could not afford.

In any case, houses are cleaned at best once a week; shopping is done in bulk; cooking is simplified (and this is one thing everybody seems to regret, since at least one of the partners and often both like to cook); ironing virtually does not exist; windows are rarely, if ever, washed. Only the laundry is an omnipresent chore.

But there are many other chores which vary greatly among these families, and they are mostly traditionally « male » jobs. One limitation of my housework checklist, pointed out to me by at least three men, was that, while it was fairly detailed as regard traditionally feminine housework chores, it was much less so in the area of traditionally masculine ones: household maintenance and repairs, yard work, car maintenance. It was certainly a feminine bias on my part, which did not allow me to completely appreciate the extent of time men spend in this important kind of work, which can be as varied as traditional housework (though after this was pointed out to me, I tried to inquire in a more detailed way)⁽¹⁵⁾ But it was also a cultural bias, being myself a city person totally lacking the suburban house culture and experience, and coming from a culture where living in a house (as against living in an apartment), is not a widespread and ideally sought after experience.

In any case, as I said before, while the bulk of traditional housework is not greatly dissimilar from one family to another although they have very different life styles, houses and resources, the area of house maintenance-yard work-car work can vary a lot. The first difference is between those who live in a house or half house — and usually (with the exception of Sue and Don P.), own it — and those who live in an apartment they usually rent (two families live in the same three story three family house, which is owned by a third family). Those who live in houses or half houses usually (with the exception of Mary and Hal M., for whom this does not appear to be a major area of work) put in much more maintenance work than those who don't. Also the size of the yard makes a big difference. Some families have just a symbolic yard, mostly paved;

others have larger ones, which must be taken care of and where they may have also a flower and vegetable garden. But maintenance work is also highly differentiated in itself. In some families it means just the essential repair work of household appliances and/or some minor work on the house structure. In others it involves repairing roofs, plastering and painting walls, and also building some furniture. And, as for some aspects of housework — such as cooking or making clothes — there is a dimension to this kind of work which is of clear economic value; but there is also a dimension of pleasure, of working with one's own hands, of working on a project of one's own, which is not always easily distinguishable from the mere need for the job to be done, and which is often overlooked when studying middle class men, who hold intellectual jobs. Therefore, as there are persons (male and female) who say they would like to have more time to cook, there are persons (mostly male), who would like to have more time to do this kind of work in the house, to work on some kind of project, for the pleasure of it.

As for the actual division of housework, I would say that in no instance at this point in the life of the couples of the sample is it perfectly equal and only in one case there is almost a role reversal (I say almost, because in this case not only does Michael R. do most of the housework and shopping, sharing the cooking with the wife; but he also does all the maintenance work and the yard work in their quite large yard, acting also as the family financial manager). However, the division of labor does not follow a clear pattern: not only because each couple's pattern has changed over time, but because the clearly feminine or clearly masculine areas are very few. Moreover, while in certain areas the pattern of a husband's presence is clearly that of a helper or of an obedient executioner, in others the division of labor has more the traits of his sharing or of totally assuming the responsibility.

In greater in detail: doing the laundry and folding it appears to be strongly feminine. Among men, only Michael R. is totally responsible for it, while Williams S. takes his own laundry to the pay launderette. Viceversa, repair and maintenance work and also working on the car appear definitely masculine (while yard work appears to be more evenly divided or shared). It is clear that in the case of laundry the chore is much more routine, continuous and also more universally present than maintenance work on the house. It must be noted however that in one case only the man — Hal M. — never does the laundry, because « I am not able to operate the machine. My son is »⁽¹⁶⁾. All the other men do a laundry load at least once a week. Moreover, most men take care of their own dress shirts, either taking them to the cleaner's or washing and hanging them themselves.

I've the impression that the men in this sample have reached the point where they no longer take it for granted that somebody will clean after them. It seems more difficult for them to feel responsible for the family cleaning: at least as far as personal clothes are involved and specific attention is required in checking the soiled clothes' pile, sorting it, putting the clean clothes away, in a routine way. I do not know exactly why, since the personal contact with soiled things is less than, for instance, that implied in washing the dishes. May be it has to do more with the fact that it requires more continuous attention (the laundry has to be put in the mashine and taken out, hung, folded, etc.). But it also has to do with the functioning of the body; and hanging one's own wife's and children's underwear is perhaps psychologically more difficult than washing their dishes.

As for cleaning the house, in general there appears to be a good amount of sharing, both of the work and of the thinking about it. Though, again, while there is often a clear allocation of responsibilities in once a week chores (e.g. « I clean the kitchen and he does the living room and the bathroom »), the day to day picking up is allocated more one-sidedly to women. As Nancy P. pointed out, « you know how it is: men wet the toilet seat and women clean it ». It is not always clear if it is only a question of a different kind of attention, for which women have been better trained, or also of a different set of standards. The two play a different role in different couples. But it is true that women in general appear to pay more attention to the continuity between time spans — continuity of dirt accumulating, of disorder to be straightened out, of things being consumed and in need of being replaced, of children growing out of their clothes, etc. Of course the fact that on the average the women in the sample are home more than the men, renders them more sensitive to the quality of the environment they spend more hours in. But I think that it is also a question of degree of perceived responsibility for the everyday making of the family and therefore also of degree to which one lets it intrude upon, and eventually displace, one's own attention. The case of Michael R., who has assumed the role of being the main homemaker and is therefore sensitive to the afore mentioned dimensions, seems to confirm this: both he and Masha feel he is more attentive to dirt and disorder. And Jeremy E., who works at home, feels he must learn to detach himself from the family scene now that his job has become more demanding: « I am too willing to interrupt my work to run an errand or to get involved in family discussions or in a family crisis. I must train myself not to get involved ». On the other hand, John D. says that since his job has become more interesting and he is more

involved in it, he tends to see less what needs to be done and Laura must often remind him.

It must be added that, in contrast with comparable Italian couples, only two of these have a paid housecleaner, who comes only once a week (Laura and John D., Mary and Hal M.). Another couple (Jenny and Victor) rejects the idea on political grounds; while other two are discussing it, again on ideological and political grounds: Wendy C. and Michael R. oppose the idea, while their spouses are willing to give it a try.

As for the way the couples arrive at dividing up housework, it varies. Only Laura and John D. have explicitly negotiated and spelled out the allocation of tasks and responsibilities, with lists and times, to which they try to adhere strictly, even if they are willing to change them when necessary. As a matter of fact, they are so explicit and strict about it, that their friends are sometimes amazed, or at least amused, at hearing, for instance Laura call out to John: « It is your turn to take care of Brian (their four year old son) ».

For at least two other couples this explicit negotiation and allocation of tasks was part of the couple's experience in the past, but it has given way in time to what they define a more spontaneous approach. Although, as George F. said, when one of the spouses feels he or she has more than his/her fair share, tension eventually builds up, and a somewhat more formal negotiation develops, in which tasks are reallocated. The history of Ruth and Ben S. presents a dramatic example of tension-followed by negotiation. After Ruth refused to accept any longer a division of labor and responsibilities which she felt was unfair to herself and their children and left Ben for a few months, she and Ben explicitly negotiated (also with a marriage counselor's help) new terms for their relationship. These implied not only new responsibilities for Ben as a father, but also new responsibilities for him in housework⁽¹⁷⁾. As for Masha R. and Michael R. there never was any negotiation over housework. As Michael says, « she just never did it » (Masha agrees). He adds resignedly that this was not part of their « contract », of his explicit attempt at overturning gender roles. The only negotiation they have open now in this respect concerns the eventual hiring of a paid helper once a week, since Masha doesn't feel like giving more time to housework and Michael's involvement in his graduate program is increasing.

The other couples, whatever their pattern of division of labor, stress its spontaneity, its naturalness, even when substantial changes over time are involved. « We never discussed it », says Mary M. « When I started working and then went back to school and was working full time, it was just obvious that a change was necessary: that I would be doing less and somebody else would be doing more ». « It just happened

that when he got his first job and I was pregnant, he started doing more things around the house », says Judith C., whose husband hadn't helped her when she was working full time and he was neither working nor studying. She adds: « I felt always tired then. But I knew that when he got himself together he would change ». « Each of us just does what needs to be done at that moment, without having to discuss it », say Sue and Don P. And they both point out that the fact that each of them had lived for many years by himself/herself, had prepared them to be autonomous and responsible in this respect.

Of course « natural » doesn't mean necessarily egalitarian, balanced, or fair, and the exact degree of spontaneity involved isn't clear. The balance in the division of housework in Mary and Hal's case was changed only when she started to work, and the change was eased by the fact that the children were grown enough to pick up after themselves. Moreover, a paid cleaning woman is responsible for a big cleaning up once a week. Hal himself is very explicit in saying that « being natural » for him means not only that he does certain things out of spontaneous decision, but that he will never do something « just for the sake of a principle, to be gender egalitarian ». Therefore he « never learns » to operate the washing machine, since he does not like doing the laundry. Though, to my question, he answers that if there were things his wife Mary dislikes as well, they would try to split them. Mary herself seems satisfied with things as they are now. She initiated the change by deciding to work and to go back to school and she probably feels she can renegotiate its terms again, if they became unfair.

Sue and Don P. point out a different way of letting things happen « naturally », a way I would define as masked negotiation: « a chore will be done by the person who can stand less its not being done », or the way the other person does it. For instance, since Sue doesn't like doing errands (taking clothes to the cleaner, appliances to be repaired, etc.), these will wait till Don decides to do them, without anybody talking explicitly about it. In other families, floors will be washed by the person who can stand dirt less, beds will be made by the one who has clear ideas about what a well straightened bed is, etc. Again, it is not only a question of standards. It is obvious that a person will stop making the beds or hanging the laundry if the other is always redoing it (as it happens to Victor with Sandy and to Masha with Michael). But doing things badly can be a way of avoiding responsibilities, and being rigid about one's own standards may be a way of not being able to relinquish them. Just in order to avoid this, Laura and John D. have established a clearly spelled out principle: « Once a chore is allocated, the person who is responsible for it sets his/her own standards. The other person interferes only when

she/he cannot stand these standard, and then the whole thing is re-negotiated again ». All these mechanisms and counter mechanisms are more or less explicit in the entire sample.

There are also implicit power mechanisms at work in this process. The fact that they are not made explicit, as in formal negotiation, doesn't make them less efficient. It is only a different mode of negotiating, in which conflicts, but also demands and expectations, are less explicit, or more matter of fact (« I guess I'd have never married a man who expected me to serve him », says Sue P.); but also where tensions can build up and need some channel to be communicated.

In any case, be the negotiation explicit or implicit, relationships such as those of my sample, in which expectations are continually in flux and at least great part of the role structure is not definite at all, require a good deal of communication skills and a deep trust in each other.

b) Child care

As I pointed out before, an impressive feature of these couples is their child-centeredness. Though they are all persons who put a great value on self-realization and individual autonomy, children are a central focus of their lives and of their time organization and they go to great lengths in trying to accommodate to what they perceive as their children's best interest.

Before illustrating how this happens at the level of organization of everyday life, I want to point out how children introduce a specific punctuation in their parents' lives, by their coming, growing up, being related to different social institutions and places, etc. Of course this has been always acknowledged in and for women's lives — even too much so. But what is interesting in this sample is the way this punctuation is acknowledged for also by men, though in different degrees; first of all in the recounting of their life stories, in which the work history may be punctuated by the birth of one's own children, in much the same way women often recount their work history, though in general to a lesser degree and with fewer explicit linkages between the two sets of events. But it is present also in the way some men explicitly reorganized their work in order to be able to take care of their new born children. Michael R. became the principal caregiver of his daughter, working only part time at his job. John D., when his daughter was born, looked for and found a job (teaching at college) which, while it was formally full time, had in effect a part time and flexible schedule which allowed him to share child care equally with Laura. Also the other men (except for Ben S.

whose involvement in fatherhood came later) either were in a situation which helped them to be home during part of the day to take care of the children (because they were students, teachers, or, as George F., worked the afternoon shift), or looked for jobs with a degree of flexibility in schedule, because of this reason (in striking contrast, the two divorced fathers of the children in this sample never took any responsibility for them, not even financially).

As for the mothers, only two of them, Masha R. and Laura D., had unpaid maternity leaves when their children were born. Masha was the first woman in her department to obtain such a leave, which she used before starting her first teaching appointment (the department had hired her when she was already pregnant). Laura D. obtained a year's leave from her teaching, although she took a different, part time job six months after the birth of her first daughter, eventually resuming her teaching the following year. Also Wendy C. had some kind of leave from the private school at which she was teaching. She went back to teach part time after six months (and she did the same after the birth of her second child). Nancy P. and Jenny E. were not in a situation to ask for a leave, because they were doing odd jobs (waitressing, singing, designing clothes). Therefore they just left the job, taking another one after a more or less short period, because they had to support themselves and their child. Sue P. quit her full time job in a publishing house (whose leave policy was very limited) two months before her first daughter was born. She started free lancing after about a year, during which time she had also been traveling in Europe with her husband and child. Judith C. had left her job to travel to Europe before she became pregnant. She eventually took a part time job about a year after the birth of her first child. She had to leave this job when she had her second child and took another one after about a year. Mary M. started working only after the birth of her two sons. She was out of the country with her husband for a period, and had not yet decided what she wanted to do. « I wasn't very different from others in my generation. It was a period of transition. People would travel after college, would take their time. I travelled and had my children ». Ruth stopped working after the birth of her second child.

All this clearly points to a different punctuation of women's time as a consequence of child birth⁽¹⁸⁾; a punctuation which is certainly socially determined — women are expected to stay home; in the U.S. socially acceptable group services outside the family for children under one, often under two, do not exist. But the dimension of pleasure and of a sense of responsibility that this punctuation expresses cannot be underestimated in these highly child-centered couples. As a matter of fact, a few men try to imitate it, as I have indicated. Again there is a

problem of social and labor market policies to be faced, which I will discuss later.

There is however a more radical difference in punctuation, in timing needs between men and women as regards child birth: the existence of a biological time women cannot ignore totally when they plan on having children. This time can be out of phase with that of the woman's career, but also with that of the father's; and things get even more complicated when the woman is older. Some of these women have been quite explicit about it. Wendy, older than Jeremy, says that they decided to have a child, even if it wasn't the best time for Jeremy, because she wanted it and felt that she was getting too old. They decided she would take main responsibility in child care, since she had been working for much longer than he had (although things didn't work out that way, because he was still unsuccessful in his profession and she was the main provider; therefore he was the main caretaker for the first year). Masha speaks of her conflicts between wanting to start her career and feeling that that was the right time to have a child, both biologically and for the development of their relationship. She is being faced with the same problem now: they want a second child, she is becoming « too old » and both she and Michael are being faced with crucial career stages. Jenny E. speaks repeatedly of « this damned biological time, which does not allow one to think she can have a child when she wants ».

As a matter of fact, deciding if and when to have a child has been an important and explicit area of joint decision making in this sample. All children appear to have been carefully planned, even in the timing of their births. Only in the case of Ben and Ruth this decision appears to have been onesided, at least in Ben's words, and one of the sources of their conflicts in the past. He in fact says that he didn't want so many children and was frightened especially by the arrival of the fourth one (whom he now visibly adores). He believed they could not afford all of them and that having so many children meant that he and Ruth could never have some spare energy and money for themselves.

As for the way these children have been or are cared for, when they were little, only two of them had been in a full day day care center. One is the daughter of Nancy P., who, divorced shortly after her child's birth, had nobody to help her. She worked at two jobs to support herself and her child, waitressing and singing. The other is the younger son of Mary and Hal M., who was in a program based in the local elementary school. All other children didn't and do not attend a day care center, even when both parents were working. All the parents in fact feel that, even if day care is not necessarily a bad thing, they do not want it for their children.

Actually, Linda and George F. last fall tried to put their three year old daughter in a day care center in order to offer her a different environment and playmates. They withdrew her after a month, however, because they did not approve of the rigidity of the schedule and of its discipline (« They made her try all the food, even if she didn't like it. And she got so upset that everything was spoiled »). Of course, this attitude has different and deep roots: the diffusion of a child psychology culture, which for many years stressed the importance of the family in the first years of life, the antiauthoritarian counterculture, with its stress on spontaneity and de-institutionalization, the lack of a widespread, cheap system of educational services for children under five in the United States, the social stigma often attached to day care centers, the organizational rigidity of many of them, etc.⁽¹⁹⁾. As a consequence of all this, these parents, as others, are motivated not so much to ask for a different system of services, but to develop a system of their own, often at a high price, not only economically, but also in terms of time and energy.

Almost all the children in the sample were or are in some form of family day care/baby sitter situation, for part of the day or of the week, from six months on. From one year on all children have been in some kind of play group, ranging from one morning or afternoon a week, to four half days a week. These play groups might be organized and staffed by parents, with parents taking turns (actually only one father — George F. — is involved in one of these), or there might be a hired person in charge (more often). From two years on, all children were or are in a (private) nursery school, usually starting with a half day schedule and then going on to a full day schedule (9 a.m. - 2.30 p.m.), where it is available.

Given the high value these parents place on being involved in their children's lives, it is not surprising that all the nursery schools used by the sample, now and in the past, are of the cooperative kind, which requires an active involvement by parents, and also their actual working in the school one day every 4-5 weeks. In contrast to what happens in other families using this kind of nursery school, all fathers in my sample, except Ben, have been or are greatly involved in their children's nursery school, sharing with their wives the time they have to give to it (Michael R. and Victor K. for a period did it all), and sitting on the school boards.

As for the school age children, only one of them, out of nine, goes to an after school program: his parents' (Mary and Hal M.) work schedule does not allow them to be home in time to meet him after school (he was 8 at the time of the first interview). They live in the one Greater Boston community where there exists an extended day program, controlled

by parents, in the public school system, for a monthly fee of \$ 125.00. All other school age children find either parent at home when they come back from school, although it is usually the mother (either because she works part time, or because she works at home). Sometime parents split to meet children with different schedules; sometime, as with Laura and John D., besides taking turns in meeting the children, they also rely on a well organized neighborhood network. Only Summer, the daughter of Nancy P., always finds her stepfather home, since her mother works during the day and is almost never home before 5 p.m. (and works also on week-ends).

It must be observed that not all the children live in neighborhoods where there is an after school program at the local school or at a community center. Moreover, many such programs are addressed only to children up to third grade in the elementary school. In any case, the fact that the children often take the bus to a school outside their own neighborhood or attend a private school makes it difficult for them to eventually attend a program offered by a school or a center near their home.

It is true however, that within this sample there is no high demand for such programs, as there isn't (or wasn't) for group day care or for publicly financed nursery schools.

To this, it must be added that the children who come home after school actually remain in the house very little: they go off — and often are driven — to many different activities and classes. As Nancy P. — the poorest and the one with the least time in my sample — told me, if all these classes, or at least a good number of them, were available in the school at a reasonable fee, her daughter Summer could take some of them. She and William neither have enough money to pay for fancy classes, nor have enough time to drive her to far away places such as the Y, which offers classes at reasonable fees. As a matter of fact, given the haphazard distribution of these resources, even knowing about them is not an easy job, and constitutes a part of family work and management. It is a lesson Ruth S. clearly taught me, while she explained how she managed to find a scholarship for her younger son to go to an otherwise very exclusive private school the following year, and how she found out about a totally inexpensive summer camp where her older daughter could learn sailing.

But this last phenomenon points to two issues, which affect family organization and gender roles. In the first place social policy does not only react to, but also shapes family needs and family changes, and individual and family choices. I will touch briefly on this in the conclusion. In the second place, the relationship between family organization and

needs on the one hand, and the system of public and private services on the other, is an important area of family competence, which is however still only roughly mapped and acknowledged, in its gender dimension. From my research, as from others done in other countries, it appears to be mostly a feminine area of competence and work: finding the services and connecting them to the individual's and the family's needs appears to be mostly a feminine responsibility, especially when the needs of dependent persons are at stake (children, old people, sick people)⁽²⁰⁾. Even when the father is actively involved in the services and activities attended by his children, it is usually the mother who collects the information about them and initiates the process, establishing links. As Linda F. said of the play group and different activities George F. takes their little daughter to in the morning, « I'm the one who usually finds out about them, makes the phone calls and the arrangements ».

Of course, there are variations in the degree to which fathers are involved in the decision making process about these things; but the pattern of allocating responsibilities to the mother for « finding out » and making links is quite clear in all cases. The same is true for the children's social life in general. Fathers are actively involved in the execution of tasks relating to this dimension of their children's life, to an extent quite unthinkable inside the conventional father stereotype: not only do they drive their children to and from their friends' houses and activities, but they are quite knowledgeable about their comings and goings, their friends, their engagements. Moreover, in most cases (perhaps with the exception of Ben S.), they make and receive phone calls about them without needing to consult or call their wives, as I witnessed often during my interviews. In most cases this means that they are organizing their children's activities together with other mothers, more often than with other fathers. However, to my questions both husbands and wives answered that husbands kept track of the routine, of the material organization of it, but they didn't actually initiate it (except in limited instances, such as that of a father — Don P. — who with other fathers organized a soccer activity and once also helped the neighborhood children to put up a play, which they also filmed).

In some way, it is as if fathers acknowledged the need for and existence of such a dimension in their children's lives, without however being able to make the necessary connections, establishing the necessary links (with other parents, with organizations). The case of birthday parties (very important for American children) is somewhat symbolic of this: fathers are more than willing to perform whatever chore is necessary, even to invent games and to be present at the party. But mothers are the ones who plan them with the children, make up the guest list with them,

figure out what they are going to eat, help the children to prepare the cards, etc..

Of course this is caused also by the fact that generally other children have their mothers do this for them; therefore a father finds himself relating mostly to women. These, on their part, often do not find it « easy » and « natural » relating to men in a child caring role. The fathers in the sample encounter this kind of obstacle over and over again. « When they are preparing the school fair they would call and would want to talk to Sue; they wouldn't talk to me about what we are going to do », Don P. says for instance. In the two instances in which the father had a primary care taker role (Michael R. and George F.), this difficulty emerged clearly at the everyday level. Michael told me about his experience of being the only father at the park, amidst startled and somewhat judging mothers (« what does a man do at the park in the morning? He must be queer »). And George told me about his experience of being the only father in a toddlers' play group. Other men usually are not very supportive either, especially in cases such as that of Michael, who not only has been the primary care taker of his daughter for four years, but has cut his work time and his breadwinner role to do it.

But in these same instances the opportunity of developing the kind of skills and more generally the culture of what we might call a « mothering father » opens new perspectives and new dimensions in the relationships these men have not only with their children and their companion, but with other men as well. Michael R. had a strong relationship with another father who also cared for his own child when their children were little babies. They often spent time together with the children, exchanging experiences and supporting each other. Even now they often « trade kids », as usually mothers do. Also George, when Linda was studying, often spent time with a colleague at work who was also in charge of his child in the morning. They often went to places together with the children and planned common activities. Things have changed now that Linda is home and there is a new baby. He and Linda are more able to spend time together and with the children (besides working on the house). But they are both aware that there might be the risk for him to become less involved in child care than he used to be. (It must be however added that she had a home birth and he took care of all of them totally by himself for a week).

Where the father has primary responsibility for his child, or is in charge of him/her for a substantial amount of time during the day on a regular basis, even if a great part of the « social work » is still left to (or taken over by) the mother, he appears therefore to be able to develop a new culture, a new sensibility, a new attention and even a new ability

to have relations with women, but also with men around children needs. It is not clear, and it is too soon to know, if this culture and these skills will be similar to those developed historically by women. In any case it will introduce a new dynamic in the way parents look at their children's needs, because there will be two of them attuned to those needs and neither will have the monopoly/exclusive responsibility of defining and acknowledging them. Open conflicts may be more at hand, but also a new ability to look at things from different perspectives, and also to listen to their children's voices.

4. Money and the economics of autonomy

The income of these families varies quite substantially, going from the \$ 14,000 a year of Nancy P. and William S., to the over 40,000 of Mary and Hal M.; though most of the families have an income of around 30.000 a year. This means that they are not rich, and some of them (apart from Nancy and William) feels a little pressured for money, or concerned about their children's education. Nobody, however, feels they would need much more money than they actually earn in order to feel comfortable. On the contrary, everybody suggests an amount pretty close to what they already earn: even Nancy and William after much consultation said they would feel finally at ease if they had about 1,000 dollars a year more. This has probably to do with the fact that nobody in the sample wants to work longer hours (rather less, specially the men). On the contrary, everybody feels that time is a too scarce resource to be allocated only to work.

Aside from William and Nancy, among those who are more worried about their budget is Don P., who feels he will never be able to buy a house. He quit a good job when he and Sue decided to go to Europe a few years ago. When they came back the economic recession had started and he was unable to find a job as satisfactory. He was even out of work for a few months. Only recently they started to be able to save, when Sue increased her hours as a free lancer and both their children went to the public elementary school. They feel lucky that that particular school is good: they are not confronted with the problem of having to pay the high costs of a private school. Also their vacations away from home as a family are among the shortest in the sample: about a week a year (the kids spend time with their grandparents and go to summer camp). Ben S. is concerned about money too, given his large family. « We go from paycheck to paycheck », he says. Even before the birth of their last child, he felt however that it is better for Ruth not to take a

job yet, since her presence and work in the family is not only necessary for the welfare of their children, but is an economic asset. As for Ruth, she does not agree with Ben's concern over their finances, although her management of the family budget is quite complex (she explained to me at length her system to pay their bills on a rotating system, in order not to bounce her checks).

There does not seem to be a specific pattern of allocating responsibility for the family's finances, except for the fact that usually it isn't a shared responsibility. What decides which spouse will pay the bills, balance the checkbook and eventually take care of investments, as well as fill the tax forms seems to be, together with a specific competence (such as that of Mary M.), the specific concern of one of the two over precision (in balancing the checkbook, planning, punctuality, etc.). In some case one has taken over because he/she didn't like the way the other did it. In other cases, the concern over living on a planned budget or saving has prompted an assumption of responsibility. Only in the case of Ben and Ruth S. the motto « I make the money, she manages it » seems to be the rationale. Also Michael R. jokingly says that Masha makes the money and he manages it; but he adds that this decision has come about a few years ago, because she « messed everything up ».

As for the spouse who does not manage the money, the degree of interest in the family's financial balance varies: from the extreme of Hal M., who doesn't know how much they spend for the house as well as for the food (though he maintains that they spend too much), to the more common attitude of those who know their family's expenditures, but don't bother keeping track of them on a routine basis. It must be said that keeping track of a family's and an individual's expenditures can be quite a time consuming job in a situation where the use of checks and credit cards is so widespread. As a matter of fact the simplest financial situation is that of the couples (like Judith and Ralph C.) who do not have credit cards, or use them only in specific circumstances (e.g. travel). Things get more complicated when credit cards — and different kinds of them — are used to pay for almost everything but food: from gas to clothes, theater tickets, housewares, etc.

Managing the money doesn't mean having more power over spending it for oneself or of defining priorities in spending. This power of course is more a function of the overall power relations within the couple. As it has often been pointed out, studies on power in the family are somewhat superficial and their conceptualization is poor⁽²¹⁾. I cannot contribute any substantive conceptualization myself. At the empirical level, I tried to understand if and how differences in income earned affected on the one hand the perception of an individual's right to his or

her money, on the other hand the perception of an individual's right to her own time.

From the point of view of earnings' differences the situation at the time of the first interview was the following:

In three couples the wife was not earning anything, either because she was fulfilling the homemaker role (Ruth), or because she was studying (Laura D., who was completing her second master's degree, after many years of teaching, and Linda F. who was completing her Ph. D.) A year later Laura D. had started her new job where she earned considerably less than her husband; Linda was staying home.

In four couples the wife earned considerably less than the husband, making from about half his salary to less than a third. In fact Judith C., Sue P. and Jenny E. were working part time; while Wendy C. was receiving unemployment benefits and was earning some money as a free lance professional. A year later, after a period without having worked, Sue P. was working more hours (but she is very flexible and her schedule changes over the year); Jenny E. was working and earning much more, although less than her husband in his new job (he had been out of work for a few months); Wendy was doing more free lancing, but without aiming at ever reaching the earnings of her increasingly successful husband.

In one couple, Mary and Hal M., they earned about the same (although she has more possibilities of increasing her earnings than he does).

In two couples the woman earned considerably more than the man, although for different reasons — and different amounts. Michael R. worked at a very reduced part time schedule and was going to school (the following year he also worked many hours as a part of his training for the Ph. D.). William S. was going through an artistic crisis, had moved and was not selling his paintings. Nancy was supporting them all through her job as a waitress, while he took care of her daughter Summer (and had renounced going to New York in order to be able to do that).

Generally, the women in the sample who were earning less money than their husbands appeared to be more self conscious about it than their husbands themselves. Not surprisingly, these never spontaneously mentioned it as a problem; and when I or their wives questioned them explicitly about it, they admitted it only in so far it represented a problem « for her ».

For all these women, earning some money is however absolutely important: one can delay earning it, because she feels she is doing another kind of contribution to the family — as Ruth — or because she is stu-

dying. But it is important to feel that one is able to earn some money, for herself, not only for the family. As a matter of fact, Linda is the most ill at ease in this respect, since she has never earned any money and does not know if she will ever be able to. « I must prove to myself I am able to have a job and earn some money », she said in her first interview, and a year later she admitted that the arrival of the new baby had only delayed this confrontation.

The two women — Laura D. and Wendy C. — who had a preceding history of earning as much and sometimes more than their husbands, found themselves uncomfortable in their position of non-earner or lesser-earner. « Not only I do not bring in any money, but I cost money to the family », Laura D. said during her first interview, referring to her school fees. This uneasiness was heightened by the fact that for both these women their temporary economic weakness coincided with a new development in the careers of their husbands. These were earning more and spending more time on their job, which they also liked more than before. These two women therefore found their economic power weakened just in the period in which they had to renegotiate with their husbands the allocation of time and responsibilities in their work/family system.

At a year's distance Laura was both more explicit about it and and more resigned. She does have a job now (for which she has chosen a part time schedule). But John's job keeps him more busy, and he also appears more comfortable with this, than before. It is a somewhat curious phenomenon that, in conscious reaction to this change in their balance within the couple, although they are two very different women, located at the two opposite poles in the way they work out the division of labor with their husbands (with Laura stressing explicit negotiation and planning, Wendy relying instead on spontaneity and flexibility), both these women are in the process of trying to develop new areas of interest and relationships: in order to somewhat further autonomize themselves from the couple unity. Laura, who in the past stressed the value of doing things together and of being perfectly equal, is quite explicit about it.

Things are different for those who earned less than their husbands out of a specific choice, because they decided to work part time, as Judith, Sue and Jenny did, or not to work at all for pay, as in the case of Ruth. They do not feel that they have less right to the family money because of this, since the unbalance in income with their husbands has been explicitly or implicitly negotiated and compensated through their greater share of family work and presence. Only Sue P. and Ruth S. are however totally positive about their situation. Sue in fact feels in control



both of her time and of her professional identity; her children are both in school now, and in these years she has established herself as a relatively well known and well paid free lancer in the publishing industry, able to negotiate her working schedule, which she thinks she will extend in the next years, though never on a full time basis (« I like the time for myself too much, to read, play the piano, have lunch with a friend »). She knows her income is crucial for the family and has no sense of economic dependency on Don. Actually, she feels sorry for him, because his hours are too long and he hasn't found a job he really likes. As for Ruth, on one side she stresses that a « mother of four [now five] shouldn't work. I shouldn't work », because she is working enough as it is. On the other side, she feels quite certain to be able to go back to her profession when all the children will be in school. She admits however that, while she has no trouble in spending money for others (she manages all the family money, writes all the checks, etc.), she has « a hard time » psychologically spending for herself: « somehow "my money" gets spent for something else, and I can't make myself take some more ». Ben is not exposed to this kind of psychological conflict, since he keeps a small sum to himself and his expenses when he gives her his check (he does some moonlighting as well).

The other two women, as I said, are more conflicted regarding their actual position, though not because of economic reasons or the use of money and their right to it. Judith, who stresses that she has « the best of the two worlds », is however concerned about her professional future. She, also, sometimes doesn't feel free to call on Ralph for help, or to ask him to take up more of his actual share in family responsibilities, since he works longer hours, « though he is always more than willing and does not complain at all, when I ask him ». As for Jenny, before her success, she was happy in her choice not to have a career and also to be able to earn some money in order to feel autonomous in doing what she liked (« I have learned that I need to earn some money, in order to feel at ease with myself »). Yet she pointed out that her not having a definite professional role and place of work (she did both her weaving and the cooking for her catering job at home), made her more vulnerable to the demands on her time, by her family, but also by neighbors and friends. « My time is too much in fragments », she said. Curiously Ben S. makes the same charge to his wife Ruth's time organization.

On the other side, Mary M., a career woman who earns as much as her husband, shows a total degree of autonomy and assurance in putting forth her priorities and tastes, in spending money as in spending time, even when Hal does not agree. « I earn it, and I can afford to spend it », she says. Though, as with most of the people in the sample, they do not

have separate bank accounts, and she says that the money she makes belongs to the family, it is clear that her earning is important in her implicit negotiations with Hal and in her decision-making autonomy.

As for the two men who earn less than their wives, they are, as I already pointed out, in two very different situations, both economically and psychologically, since the reasons why they earn less than their partners and are not totally self-supporting are different. Michael R. has chosen his situation (for reasons similar to those of Ruth S., Judith C., Jenny E. and Sue P.). Moreover, since it is the outcome of an explicit project of changing gender roles, his position has all the more value in his, and in Masha's, eyes. Even their friends must admire his position for his coherence and unorthodoxy. They may think that he is a little crazy or goes too far, but they cannot think he is socially inadequate, since he lives out the ideal many of them ostensibly support⁽²²⁾. Paradoxically, this gives him greater self confidence and autonomy in his couple relationship than that experienced by the women in a similar position. These felt they had somehow to justify to me, and to their « more liberated » women friends, their apparently traditional choice. For Michael there is no question of his being subordinate or dependent. The fact itself that he planned and negotiated with Masha his being the main caretaker of their daughter for a specific period of time clearly expresses the power a man has, even in his position and with his outlook: his appears to be an actual choice precisely because it is unexpected and untraditional. The negotiations were explicit and its terms as clear as possible. Perhaps this is the reason why he has been the only person in the entire sample to explicitly mention power as an essential dimension of all relationships, even of love relationships. And he acknowledges the existence of conflicts over power in his relationship with Masha (who agrees). Moreover, he has never abandoned his professional identity and is now working towards its improvement.

On the other side William S., when he was going through his artistic crisis, felt humiliated for not being able to earn enough money to be self supporting and to help Nancy and her daughter Summer (which he had always done in the past years). Though Nancy said that the money she earned was for everybody, he did not feel the right to spend anything for himself, trying even to cut down on food, while on the other hand managing the family money (since Nancy never bothered to open a bank account when they came East, her money goes into his pre-existing account, from which he pays all the bills). He did not even have health insurance. His uneasiness and feeling of humiliation for his economic weakness (which was of course made worse by his professional crisis) was only very partially compensated by the fact that both he and Nancy

knew that if he had lived alone he would need less money (« I have always spent very little and if it weren't for Nancy and Summer I would never live in a house which costs us \$ 375.00 a month »). Actually his presence at home, in the mornings, afternoons and week-ends was crucial for the girl, since Nancy went out very early in the morning and returned late in the afternoon and worked also on week-ends. But though he was acting as the caretaker and did a great share of housework as well, Michael did not feel this as a part of a conscious project with a validity of its own, strong enough to counteract his professional and economic crisis. As a matter of fact, Nancy was more conscious than he was of the crucial importance of his family role, and did not mind helping to support him, although she sometime resented his not being able to compromise, therefore keeping them always in a precarious economic situation, however small their needs were. However she understood him, because also for her her art is so important that she gave up every attempt at developing a more guaranteed profession (she started and then dropped out of nursing school). And she shared his emphasis on the value of economic independence, a value for which housework and its gratifications provide no substitute.

From these brief sketches it appears clearly that money, professional, familial and extrafamilial identity, and personal autonomy are an intricate complex.

Exchanges and negotiations follow different directions not only over time, but on the basis of the total (material as well symbolic) resources available. What is most clear is that for both men and women who are in a lower earning position the possibility of relying on a specific and qualified professional identity is a crucial element in the perception they have of their autonomy within the couple and the family, but also *vis a vis* the outside world. Of course, the feeling of the worth of their family role and identity is also important, the more so when it is perceived as an untraditional choice (Michael, but also Jenny and Ruth, who feel they deviate from what other women in their reference groups do). But the strength of this choice — and the bargaining power it gives in the relationship — depends on the existence of viable alternatives, as well as from its not being too exclusive. Michael has his studies and his profession; Ruth has an intricate and extended network of friends and groups that she belongs to, as well as the perspective of going back to nursing or teaching; Jenny feels she can finally be and do what she likes, without being tied down both by the rigidity of a career and by the exclusivity of family demands.

A last thing to observe relative to the money issue, is that while all the couples have a common checking account from which they pay all

the family expenses (also Nancy so defines her arrangement with William; it was the latter who explained me that she had never bothered to put her signature in and that he was managing her money for her), in two of them the husband also has a personal account for business reasons (John D. and Jeremy E.) and in another two the wife does. Typically, in the latter cases the husbands suggest it is mostly because of a need for autonomy on the part of their wives, an evaluation Masha agrees on, while Sue says she doesn't remember why they decided she should have a personal account. No such a reason — autonomy — has been given in the case of the two men; on the contrary both husbands and wives in these cases were particularly careful in explaining it was for business, organizational reasons (both men work on their own). The data are too scarce to develop any systematic hypothesis, but it is interesting that among these couples, who value highly both personal autonomy and the couple's unity, the exclusive ownership of a specific amount of money appears linked only to the autonomy of women, not of men, indirectly confirming the data on the importance these women attribute to the fact of earning at least some money: not only for the needs of the family, but for their own sense of self dignity. Their spouses also seem to regard it as important for a woman's autonomy. In a restructuring of traditional gender role relationships, a woman's earnings seem to take on symbolic, as well as material, significance.

5. A tentative conclusion.

To modify gender roles is obviously a complex process, which involves many dimensions of experience, both at the personal and social level. A great part of my project aimed at exploring the personal dimensions of this process, which I have tried to sketch above. Certainly gender equality has become a somewhat slippery concept during it, and I am well conscious of the theoretical and political risks this lack of clarity implies. Such an outcome was however foreseeable, given both the fact that we are talking of relationships developing over time, and the fact that to modify the gender structure of family organization doesn't mean simply to homogenize one role to the other, be it the masculine or the feminine one. Also the couples of my sample are or have become uncomfortable with a concept of equality meaning simply splitting everything right down the middle, or having identical work commitments. The career woman does not, after all, encompass the ideal of a complete woman/human being.

This does not mean that we should discard altogether the issue of

gender equality as meaningless or confused. It means that, as with gender oppression, gender equality is a discursive and relational phenomenon: it can neither be pinpointed to a unique dimension, nor be considered outside social and personal relations. At the couple's level, it is also a question of keeping together individual autonomy as well as caring, of sharing costs and responsibilities, as well as benefits and pleasures. But it means also to materially pattern one's life, and that of one's family, without relying on the gender role structure. From this point of view, I have been impressed both by the degree of flexibility acquired by the couples in the sample vis a vis gender roles, by the amount of taken for granted sharing of family work and child care, and by the facility with which most of them, some time or another, fall back on the principal bread winner/principal caretaker role pattern, along traditional gender lines, when the presence of young children is involved.

There are however three dimensions to this question, which must be distinguished. In the first place all these couples believe that children require a great deal of time and attention, especially in the first years, time and attention which cannot be given by two full time working parents, but which can only be very partially substituted for with other people's time. Therefore, and this is the second dimension, in their opinion not only should both parents be greatly involved in caring and raising the children, but either they both have a reduced work schedule, or one of them has to work part time. The third dimension concerns why, given the first two, it is usually the woman who cuts her work time.

It is through reflection on these interrelated, but distinct, dimensions that the gender structure/gender equality issue shows all its discursive and social dimensions: certainly as they are reflected in personal behaviors and attitudes, as they are shaped by the socialization process, but also as they are shaped by the institutional organization of society.

« Work is organized against the family », says George F. It is true, in so far the organization of work does not take into account the family responsibilities of workers, in the way hours are set, moves required, careers timed. But it is even more radically true in so far the organization of work, while denying their family responsibilities, expects workers to be « liberated » from their personal and family needs by someone else, usually a wife or a mother, who works for them and their children. This is historically the principal reason why women, especially mothers, who cannot grant this « freedom » to themselves, are outsiders in the structure of the occupational world. And they either have to accommodate to it, acting as if they were males, or are singled out as workers with special needs, for which they have to pay in financial and career terms.

One could say that the American occupational world uses both approaches simultaneously: on one hand there is no system of (paid or unpaid) mandatory maternity leaves; the figure of the working mother, though a statistically and socially widespread experience, is not acknowledged in the legislation or in practice; on the other hand the principle of equal pay for equal work is still far from being applied. At the same time, there is a steady expansion of part time unprotected jobs for women. Socialization processes and gender specific practical options mesh much too easily when one has to decide who is going to stay home with the children and to pay for it in economic and professional terms. Since none of the couples of the sample had the economic means of the conventional dual career couples to hire a full time housekeeper, and in general they are all both ideologically opposed to hiring such a person, and believe in giving their own time to their children, only those who had jobs conventionally full time, but *de facto* with a short schedule, have been able not to face this kind of choice⁽²³⁾.

It is because it is such a taken for granted decision, with no guarantee whatsoever in terms of reversing it, or at least of having all the fringe benefits a full time job gives (Health insurance, pension, etc.), that even when the women speak of choice this does not appear completely to be the case: both in terms of options available and in terms of professional and economic outcomes in the long run. Moreover, these outcomes make them economically dependent on their husbands, not only in the present, but also in the future, making them more vulnerable in case of divorce.

On the other side, the need for somebody to be home with the children, at least part time, is stressed and motivated not only by the organization of paid work, but also by the structure and organization of services aimed at children. Day care is expensive, stigmatized and its schedule is rigid (it cannot be used on a part time basis); public kindergarten in the U.S. does not start until a child is five; school ends at 2.30 and there is not a widespread system of extended day or after school programs. All this does not hinder the development of a demand for extra-familial and group care, even for very young children and even if they do not belong to a dual worker family, as I pointed out. But, given the lack of an institutional acknowledgement of such a need on an universalistic basis (the U.S. is the western industrialized country which is most lacking in this respect⁽²⁴⁾), each family perceives it as an exclusively private issue, to be solved privately. This may appear as a sensible solution, more flexible and attuned to the specific needs of individual families and children than the development of a public services system. But when economic resources and time are scarce, such a solution appears at least slanted in social class terms, and also haphazard. The families in

the sample are all in a situation in which they can still manage, in different degrees, these demands with their resources. But the concerns of those who can do it only partially, or feel they might not always be able to, shed light on the tensions and costs of such a solution for those altogether without options. As William S. says of his daughter's school (a public one, and not one of the worst): « I am not satisfied with it. I think she is wasted there and is not challenged enough. But I cannot do anything to change the situation. Therefore I say it is alright ».

The energy which those who can, put in finding private solutions to their needs; weakens the demands and even the rights of those who can't⁽²⁵⁾. This phenomenon is apparent and well known in child care services and public schools, but also affects issues such as Health Insurance.

I will not draw here a map of « what needs to be done » in a society as complex and variegated as the U.S. Many suggestions have however emerged, explicitly or implicitly, in the course of my interviews and in the analysis of these families' experiences, which would help them to live less stressful lives in their choice of abandoning, partially or totally, the gender pattern of family roles, and which would help them to develop more completely this choice: more flexibility in work schedules, over the day, the week, the year, the life, for both men and women; a different timing of career ladders, so that their crisis would not always coincide with the family's ones; part time jobs with as much job security as and with all the fringe benefits of full time ones; a system of parents' leaves and insurance (as in Sweden, for instance); a system of flexible, inexpensive child care service and after school programs, and (something almost everybody explicitly asked for) a National Health Insurance system. They are all obvious, non revolutionary suggestions. However, they often appear more like dreams. Even the persons in my sample seemed to think of them as something which would be good but it is impossible to obtain: more like an utopia. It seems strange, since many of these things exist, in different combinations, around the industrialized western world (where they have not radically changed gender roles, nor capitalist relations, but have somewhat eased changes and lessened costs). More than strange, however, it is an example of how powerful the institutional framework is also in framing the symbolic world, the perception of one's own needs and of collective possibilities. Of course the actual economic and political situation seems to emphasize the dreamlike dimension of such suggestions. But this same situation points out that, perhaps, the failure to think in more collective terms about these questions and these needs, is one of the gravest and most enduring failures of political imagination.

(*) A German Marshall Fund fellowship (grant n. 3-53511) funded the first part of this project in 1982. A grant from the Centro Nazionale delle Ricerche made it possible for me to re-interview the sample in the Summer 1983.

(1) Research and theoretical reflections on this are quite numerous. Among the most important theoretical analyses is that of Gayle Rubin, « The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex », in Rayna R. Reiter (ed.), *Toward and Anthropology of Women*, New York, Monthly Review Press 1975, pp. 157-210.

(2) I developed this argument more extensively in « Il tempo nella costruzione dei ruoli e identità sessuali », in *Rassegna italiana di sociologia*, XXIV, n. 1, gennaio-marzo 1983, pp. 105-30.

(3) On the concepts of life course, time schedule, timing and career lines see Glen Elder, « Family Historie and the Life Course », in T. Hareven (ed), *Transitions. The Family and the Life Course in Historical Perspective*, New York, Academic Press, 1978.

(4) There were couples nominated as gender egalitarian by another couple or by a friend who did not accept such a nomination, because they did not feel they were gender egalitarian enough. Talking with these persons, trying to understand the reasons of their refusal of such a definition as applicable to their relationship, was an invaluable part of the research process itself. I do not know if my sample is more gender egalitarian than those who (often regretfully) did not accept such a definition for themselves. But self-definitions and perceptions, as well as expectations, are an important part of reality.

(5) On the collaborative research style, as applied specifically to research on families and couples, see Barbara Laslett, Rhona Rapoport, « Collaborative Interviewing and Interactive Research », in *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 37, November 1975, pp. 968-977. My approach was different (and defective) in relation to that suggested by these two authors in so far I did all my interviews alone and was not monitored during them. I did, however, have the couples themselves monitor my interpretations afterwards.

(6) On the problems of both collecting and interpreting time budget data see for instance Robinson J., *How American Use Time: A Social Psychological Analysis*, New York, Praeger 1977; See also L. Lein, *Work and Family Life*, Center for the Study of Public Policy, Cambridge, Mass., 1974 (mimeo).

(7) On this issue see the different contributions by P. Berger, H. Kellner, « Marriage and the Construction of Reality », *Diogenes*, Summer 1964; D. Kantor, W. Lehr, *Inside the Family*, San Francisco, Jossey Bass, 1975; D. Reiss, *The Family's Construction of Reality*, Harvard University Press Cambridge, Mass. 1981. From a methodological point of view, see also L. Thompson, A. J. Walker, « The Dyad as the Unit of Analysis: Conceptual and Methodological Issues », and J. Gottman, « Temporal Form: Toward a New Language for Describing Relationships », both in *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol. 44, november 1982, pp. 889-900 and 943-62.

(8) See for instance Roger Gould, *Transformations. Growth and Change in Adult Life*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1978; Berenice L. Neugarten, « The Awareness of Middle Age », in Berenice L. Neugarten (ed.), *Middle Age and Aging*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1978, pp. 93-98.

(9) On this concept see Joseph H. Pleck, « The Work-Family Role System », in *Social Problems*, XXIV, pp. 417-27.

(10) The same was observed by Donna E. Healey in her comparative research on 60 women living in three different kind of marriages (20 traditional, with the wife not working, 20 traditional, with the wife working, 20 egalitarian, with the wife working). See Donna E. Healey, *Attitudes, Status and Psychological Functioning of Women in Egalitarian and Traditional Marriages*, Ph.d. thesis, Boston University, Graduate Department of Psychology, 1980. The data set of this research is now at the Murray Center for the Study on Lives, Radcliffe College, Harvard University.

(11) See for instance Rapoport Robert, Rapoport Rhona (eds.), *Working Couples*, New York, Harper, 1978.

(12) On the « work attachment » concept see Martin Rein, « Women and Work - The Incomplete Revolution », in *The Australian Economic Review*, 3rd Quarter, 1980, pp. 11-17.

(13) See for instance Charlotte Dowling's warnings in *The Cinderella Complex. Women's Hidden Fear of Independence*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1981.

(14) « Family work » is becoming a commonly used concept, especially in Italy.

(15) Lilian Rubin, in *Worlds of Pain*, New York, Basic Books, 1976, pointed out the importance of this kind of work among working class men. Within my sample it appears to be an experience not linked to a specific social class, although the lower the income, the more frequently it appears as an economic necessity.

(16) He adds that when he was a student he used to operate the coin launderette, but that « it appeared to be simpler ».

(17) This is Ruth's version. Ben didn't mention in the individual interview the crisis and separation of two years before. Concerning the division of family labor he said that he realized that « it was just human for me to help out and take my share. Ruth couldn't possibly manage with four children ». He defines their relationship as a « working team ».

(18) On the importance of time structures in shaping women's experiences and identity as against men's I have written more extensively elsewhere. See « Il tempo nella costruzione dei ruoli e identità sessuali », cit.

(19) See for instance Kahn A., Kamerman Sh., *Child Care, Family Benefits and Working Parents*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1981; See also C. Saraceno, « Childhood as a socially constructed experience. Childcare and Education policies in Italy and in the United States », forthcoming in *Social Problems*, February 1984.

(20) Also working in these services is increasingly a feminine job. See M. Bianchi, *I servizi sociali*, Bari, De Donato, 1981.

(21) See for instance J. L. Turk and N.W. Bell, « Measuring Power in Families », in *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 1972, 34, pp. 222 ss.

(22) He however says that some of their women, even feminist, friends sometime treat him the way men usually treat women. When they are at a political meeting they would pay attention only to Masha, leaving him aside, since he is taking care of their daughter. Between themselves, he and Masha also split their political commitments: for instance they take turns in being visible during street demonstrations, in order that one of them only runs the risk of being arrested. We had to postpone our joint interview some time after the New York anti-nuclear demonstration, since it was Masha's turn to be visible (and eventually to be arrested), though both took part to it.

(23) Hunt J. and Hunt L. suggest that for these reasons in the near future job and career discrimination will happen not so much along gender lines, but increasingly on the basis of family ties and loads. Women and men without family responsibilities will be better off than women and men with family responsibilities. See J. C. Hunt and L. H. Hunt, « The Dualities of Careers and Families: New Integrations or New Polarizations? », in *Social Problems*, 5, June 1982, pp. 498-510. For an accurate critique of the approach which sees in dual career marriages and families the vanguard of gender egalitarian relationship, without taking into account the different distribution of resources in society, see Harold Benenson, « Women's Occupational and Family Achievement in the U.S. Class System: A Critique of the Dual-Career Family Analysis », forthcoming in the *British Journal of Sociology*, May, 1984.

(24) See for instance Alfred Kahn and Sheila Kamerman, *Child Care, Family Benefits and Working Parents*, cit.

(25) See for instance the analysis of F. Hirsch, *Social Limits to Growth*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977.

