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PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER EQUALITY

Making Education the Core
of Public Policies



Perspectives on Gender Equality

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7. Parental Education for Gender Equality in the Family

Sofia Bergano

Abstract: Gender equality in the family and gender equality in the workplace are interrelated dimensions, because in people's lives, the time of each person (men and women) is differentially distributed between the investment they make in their profession or career and in their personal and family life. This article aims to analyze the confluence of these domains in the daily lives of women and men, and, in this vein, we propose the analysis and interpretation of statistical data from different sources regarding indicators on the professional, family and parental life of men and women. To analyze and interpret this statistical information, we resorted to theoretical foundations in the field of women's, gender and feminist studies. The analysis of the data leads to the conclusion that, in daily life, patterns of time distribution according to sex remain which, in some way, perpetuate and legitimize gender differences in the assumption of family responsibilities.

1. Introduction

This study reflects on the promotion of gender equality from the analysis of parental responsibility, the sharing of tasks and attributions that constitute the organization of personal and family life, and results from a challenge from the "Series of Conferences on Gender Equality: A challenge for the decade," coordinated by Professor Rui Nunes, which took place in Bragança on 29 April 2017. This study stems from the systematic organization of the information shared in the relevant context to raise awareness of the path Portuguese society must still take for the equality of opportunities between men and women to become effective.

The promotion of gender equality in the family intersects with promoting gender equality in the work context because, in people's lives, these dimensions are not separable insofar as the time of each one (men and women) is differentially distributed between the investment they make in their profession or career and their personal and family life. Thus, to analyze the confluence of these domains in the daily lives of women and men, this study proposes the analysis and interpretation of statistical data from different sources, such as The National Survey on Time Use (Perista et al. 2016), the Portuguese National Statistics Institute, and the Pordata Portal. The study draws from theoretical foundations in the field of women, gender, and feminist studies to analyze and interpret this statistical information.

Accordingly, different matrices of reflection that involve different aspects of daily life and the discussion that somewhat perpetuates and legitimizes gender differences in the assumption of family responsibilities were observed. Hence, to give substance to this purpose, the issue of parenting is fundamental, along with parental functions and the diversity of the family constitution. Further, the issue of reconciling personal and family life emphasizes the professional aspirations of women and men, strategies for reconciling parenthood with careers, social support for the family, and the analysis of its beneficiaries. Finally, the family will be analyzed as a gendered space and a socializing instance that has, over time, constituted a space for the transmission of gender stereotypes, which, by necessity, must become

a space of equality between women and men, boys and girls, and young people of both sexes.

2. To Think About Parenthood

The parenthood concept has recently entered public discussions, highlighting the notion that parental responsibility and rights are independent of the sex of the parents or their substitutes. Progressively, some designations traditionally associated with motherhood or fatherhood have been replaced with parenthood, which is intended to be gender-neutral and emphasize that caring for, educating, and ensuring the well-being and development of the child is the responsibility of fathers and mothers (biological or adoptive), independent of the sex of the parent.

In the last four decades, social and economic transformations have influenced how women's (and also men's) social roles are interpreted in the family context. Women's entry into the labor market is often spoken of as a milestone in transforming the roles played by fathers in the family. However, it is necessary to understand that, in some social classes, women have always worked outside the home, significantly contributing to ensuring the livelihood of the family. This fact does not mean they were not primarily responsible for caring for the tasks inherent in family life at home. Thus, it may be more prudent to note that what has truly changed in recent decades (for some women) is the way they interpret their participation in the public sphere and the meanings they attribute to that participation. Notably, nowadays, women perceive participation in the world of work as a space for personal affirmation in which they invest and, hence, expect rewards. People began to demand a career and not just a job; for some women, especially those with more education, personal investment in work has been transformed in that it is not merely a supplement to the family's disposable income but an area of personal affirmation that should bring with it recognition and social prestige, as in the case of men.

Another factor that has transformed the way the family is interpreted regards a set of social changes related to the constitution of the family. Reconstructed families, single-parent families, and same-parent families, among other somewhat fluid households that fulfill the social functions associated with more traditional families (i.e., biparental and heteroparental families) are increasingly frequent and visible. If this diversity is presented as evidence, it is necessary to be aware that some of these forms of family organization are not exclusive to today, and what seems relatively recent is the academic interest in non-normative family organizations.

Notably, according to the data available on the Pordata (n.d.), the feminization rate of single-parent families remains high and has increased in the last two and a half decades (85.5% in 1992 and 88.1% in 2017), even though male single-parent families have achieved greater visibility than they had previously. This disproportion can be explained by the idea that mothers fulfill parental functions better than men. Hence, Marinho (2014, p. 183) notes that, in recent decades in Portuguese society, the high number of female single-parent families stems "(...) from the predominance of 'guard with maternal residence' (...), that is, from the principle that after birth (...) and after a marital breakdown (separation or divorce) children must be given to the exclusive care of their mothers (...)." This notion seems to illustrate the maternalism and essentialist vision of the care to be provided to children. As per Marinho (2014), this effect is attenuated as the children increase in age.

Between what has changed and what remains in the structure of households, it is important to note that research into the different possible family configurations has had a non-negligible effect regarding their social visibility and the progressive denaturalization of the association of the sex of the parents (or their substitutes) to their parental roles and functions. These phenomena contribute to how the relationships between the different elements of families and the attributions differentially attributed to them are perceived. Evidently, these changes do not occur in all spheres of society simultaneously. Moreover, if, in the context of the scientific community, there is increasing evidence that parental functions are ensured effectively by different family types and different adults regardless of their sex, this is not always the case in society at large. Thus, it is urgent for the promotion of gender equality to become a field of intervention, where everyone should be invited to participate. Hence, research in these areas can furnish relevant contributions.

It is essential to replace discussions that propagate the idea that the simultaneous presence of a mother and a father is necessary for a child to grow up happy and healthy, as this view is based on the conception that motherhood and fatherhood imply mutually exclusive tasks and abilities, which are stereotyped with regard to gender. In this model, motherhood and fatherhood would correspond to different social roles that are irrevocably linked to the biological sex of the parent. From the perspective of research on parenting, an increasing number of studies indicate that satisfactory parenting is not necessarily associated with heteroparental and biparental families (cf. Gato and Fontaine 2011).

In the analysis of parenting, considering the noted transformations, Aboim (2007) identifies two relevant signs of change in Portuguese society: (1) the abandonment of the ideal of man only as a provider for the home, and (2) increased male participation at home and with children. However, Aboim (2007) also notes that maternalistic ideals remain present, ultimately supporting and maintaining more traditional gender conceptions in the division of family tasks and responsibilities. These ideals are manifested in the strong association of women (men) with the world of reproduction (production). The prevalence of the ideal of a mother–woman is an important challenge in terms of promoting effective gender equality, as the development of the ideal of a professional and independent woman can conflict and induce great normative ambivalence in women and families.

3. Conciliation of Family and Professional Life

The conception that the mother is irreplaceable in caring for the children carries with it a symbolic burden that constrains many women in terms of their professional career investment, giving rise to an ambivalence concerning reconciling motherhood with investing in a career. One conclusion consistent with this notion was drawn in a more recent study involving young university students of both sexes (Coelho and Casaca 2017, p. 71): “the ideology that it is essentially women who should ensure the functions of caring and, simultaneously, professional responsibilities.” This issue has implications for family life and women’s equal participation in the labor market.

The analysis of how women and men distribute their time between paid work and tasks associated with the family is an important resource for understanding how gender inequality goes beyond family boundaries and “spreads” to public spheres; that is, in the universe, which configures one of the dimensions of people’s lives on which it is intended to reflect. Hence, in 2015, data from the Portuguese National

Survey on Time Use (Perista et al. 2016) was employed to analyze how men and women distribute their working time between paid work and unpaid work, as in Table 1.

Table 1. Average time (hours and minutes) of work (paid and unpaid per working day) of employed people by sex.

Time of Work	Men	Women
Time of paid work	9:02	8:35
Time of unpaid work	2:37	4:17
Total time of work	11:39	12:52

Source: Author's compilation based on data from Source: Author's compilation based on data from Perista et al. (2016).

From the data, the average amount of time devoted to daily tasks by men and women reveals a considerable average difference, which is especially relevant when it comes to unpaid work. Unpaid work is associated with family tasks, warranting an analysis of two fundamental aspects of the organization of family life that are deeply related to allow them to be reconciled with people's professional lives. These aspects include (1) the distribution of household chores and the time spent on them, including all the tasks that are performed, regardless of whether households have dependent children, such as cleaning the house, preparing meals, or doing laundry (although having children in the family can make these activities more time-consuming); and (2) the distribution of tasks associated with parental functions such as feeding, bathing, helping with schoolwork, playing, reading stories, and accompanying the child(ren) to extracurricular activities.

It is also pertinent to analyze the distribution of routine domestic tasks by sex and the time spent on them. Accordingly, Table 2 reveals a remarkable asymmetry per sex.

Table 2. Average time (minutes) spent carrying out routine household chores (per working day) by sex.

Household Chores	Men	Women
Doing laundry	19	33
Cleaning the house	27	53
Preparing meals	47	65

Source: Author's compilation based on data from Perista et al. (2016).

Regarding families with children, the main caregivers of the children are women; this situation is even more evident for children under the age of three (Table 3).

In families with children, men and women dedicate different average amounts of time to providing direct care to children, with men spending approximately 2 h and 14 min on this, whereas women spend 3 h and 6 min (these values are based on the last working day before the completion of the survey). The authors of the reference study indicate that these differences are present regardless of the typology of the task associated with the act of caring. Whether care takes the form of feeding; bathing; accompanying in school tasks; reading, playing, and talking; or even accompanying

children to other activities, the participation of women is always greater than that of men. Hence, women are more dedicated to tasks associated with childcare and participate in these tasks for a longer amount of time per day.

Table 3. Adults in the household who care for children, according to sex (%).

Who Takes Care of the Children?	Children Under 3 Years Old	Children Between 3 and 5 Years Old
Only one adult female person	83.2	69.2
Only one adult male person	2.6	8.2
Two adult household members of both sexes	14.2	22.2

Source: Author's compilation based on data from Perista et al. (2016).

Following the data on the articulation of professional life with activities related to the family, it is useful to consider the data on some public policies that provide for the conciliation of the profession with parental responsibilities. Indeed, the analysis of data on Social Security parental leave is warranted.

Table 4 indicates the number of beneficiaries of parental leave, regardless of the duration of the leave to which it refers. The data indicates that, despite the legal changes to support parenting that provide for the mandatory enjoyment of 15 days of leave by the male parent, there remains no equivalent distribution of initial parental leave among parents.¹

Table 4. Beneficiaries of the initial social security parental leave (number and percentage) by sex.

Year	Total	Men	Women	Men%	Women%
2017	165,824	74,699	91,125	45.05	54.95
2016	170,023	76,102	93,921	44.76	55.24
2015	161,505	71,377	90,128	44.19	55.81
2014	150,466	65,344	85,132	43.43	56.58
2013	150,886	67,047	88,839	44.44	58.88

Source: Author's compilation based on data from Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE) (2018a).

Analyzing the data on extended parental leave (not mandatory) verifies that the support is enjoyed by far fewer people because it has consequences with regard to a reduction in disposable income. However, a comparative analysis of the number of extended parental leaves taken by men and women is warranted (Table 5).

¹ The rights associated with parenthood are regulated by Law no. 120/2015, of 1 September, which makes the ninth amendment to the Labor Code approved by Law no. 7/2009, of 12 February, reinforcing maternity and paternity rights, the third amendment to Decree-Law no. 91/2009, of 9 April, and the second amendment to Decree-Law no. 89/2009, of 9 April.

Table 5. Beneficiaries of social security extended parental leave (number), by sex.

Year	Total	Men	Women	Men%	Women%
2017	8820	787	8033	8.92	91.08
2016	6952	657	6295	9.45	90.55
2015	4944	538	4406	10.88	89.12
2014	3458	376	3082	10.87	89.13
2013	2749	386	2363	14.04	85.96

Source: Author's compilation based on data from Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE) (2018b).

The data shows that, in absolute terms, increased numbers of families are resorting to extended parental leave. However, considering the comparison between men and women, the huge imbalance according to the sex of the beneficiary parent is evident. There is a tendency toward a relative increase in the number of women enjoying this social benefit.

The data presented accounts for the number of leaves taken, which, ultimately, does not translate into the time mothers and fathers dedicate to their families. Therefore, it is warranted to observe the duration, in days, of such leaves. Hence, to facilitate the data reading, it was considered pertinent to present the relative weight of days of leave taken by women and men (Table 6).

Table 6. Duration of Social Security-extended parental leave (days) by sex.

Year	Total	Men	Women	Men%	Women%
2017	566,604	46,084	520,520	8.13	91.87
2016	488,560	38,674	409,886	7.92	83.90
2015	320,683	32,456	288,227	10.12	89.88
2014	224,631	22,451	202,180	9.99	90.01
2013	181,394	24,257	157,137	13.37	86.63

Source: Author's compilation based on data from Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE) (2018c).

Comparing the days taken (within the scope of extended parental leave) reveals that women are the parental figures that most benefit from this type of family support. Once again, it can be interpreted as an indicator that it is women who, even with an active professional life, ultimately take on the task of caring for their children (babies).

However, parental responsibilities do not end with the birth of children; they extend over time. Therefore, the analysis of the data on days of absence taken to care for children in recent years is warranted (Table 7).

Table 7. Days of absence related to childcare, by sex (annual).

Year	Total	Men	Women	Men%	Women%
2017	945,099	98,832	846,267	10.46	89.54
2016	872,077	85,289	786,788	9.78	90.22
2015	810,303	75,952	734,351	9.37	90.63
2014	680,824	60,632	620,192	8.91	91.09
2013	629,821	49,753	580,068	7.90	92.10

Source: Author's compilation based on data from Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE) (2018d).

As can be observed, the tendency toward women taking care of children continues, and, despite the perception that men's participation in these tasks is increasing, it appears that participation remains very uneven. The data presented concur with other investigations that address issues of gender difference in the family (Bergano 2012; Múrias 2015), indicating that it is women who invest the most time and dedication in issues related to the care and education of children. Several studies also note that women legitimize this inequality in the family by resorting to arguments that justify them because there are attributes inherent to motherhood and feminine characteristics in the family, such as empathy, sensitivity, the ability to take care of others, and house organization skills.

Saavedra and Taveira (2007) revealed three categories of people (of both sexes) who assign different values to the domains of family and work: the double profile, which includes people who attach equal importance to family and professional roles; and the "work profile" and the "family profile," made up of people who value their profession or family more, respectively. Apparently, more women (men) were in the "family profile" ("work profile"). Among the group of women, an equivalent distribution was found between the "family profile" and the "double profile" and a very reduced representation in the "work profile" (Cinamon and Rich 2002), which naturally highlights a differentiated articulation between the family and paid work for people of different sexes.

These observations, affected by culturally defined conceptions of the roles of men and women in family contexts, have implications for how women perceive the reconciliation of professional and family life. Thus, according to Bergano (2012), women at different stages of their lives indicated that issues associated with reconciling family and work are more often posed to women than to men. In most cases, women must find strategies that make this conciliation possible. Regarding the strategies and operationalization of reconciling family and professional life, the diversity of answers is greater, as the economic condition of the household seems to influence the type of strategy used; that is, the use of external services to respond to situations (e.g., paid external domestic work), or the use of social support networks (especially centered on women in the family, as is the case of their mothers-in-law, grandmothers, sisters, or aunts).

Moreover, different women (from different socio-cultural conditions and ages) consider that disinvestment in their careers, extending the working day into the night, and reorganizing their professional lives are strategies to which they resort or plan to appeal. Before concluding on the articulation of personal and family life with professional life, it is pertinent to mention that, in the responses of the research participants, reference to the reorganization of the professional life of male partners or parents is completely absent.

4. The Family as a Space of Inequality

The family is recognized as the social institution that bears the fundamental responsibility for the education of children and young people. As the main (and first) agent of education, it comprises an important space for the reproduction of the beliefs of adults therein regarding masculinity and femininity. Most fathers and mothers, as educators, are concerned with transmitting to their sons and daughters the values and attitudes they consider appropriate for them to become happy and successful adults. This cultural heritage conveys culturally defined ideas about masculinity and

femininity, which sometimes represent stereotyped views about the characteristics of boys and girls or men and women.

Hence, family upbringing will be strongly influenced by the parents' ideals of men and women, and this ideal will guide the education of boys and girls and the interactions established between the different elements of the family. Thus, Vieira (2007, p. 18) mentions that, despite the resistance to changing convictions about the characteristics considered specific to each sex, some factors such as "the improvement of living conditions, or access to education, have progressively associated with a liberalization of the ideas of fathers and mothers about the education of their sons and daughters." Even so, Vieira (2007) adds that, despite these changes, the treatment of boys and girls, by fathers and mothers, tends to be differentiated.

In the analysis of the family as a space of gender inequality, it is important to refer to the complexity inherent to the learning that takes place in this context and give special emphasis to the dynamics of the relationship established between the different elements of the family. Gender learning in the family context takes place in different ways; for example, through the differential interaction that adults establish with children, playful and leisure activities to which children and young people are directed, the different expectations and evaluation of behaviors according to their sex, the differentiation of girls and boys regarding empowerment processes and, not least, the example set by parents in the distribution of responsibilities and tasks associated with the family and investment in a professional career.

In the family education context, many stereotyped ideas are used to interpret and justify the characteristics and behavior of children. In fact, certain behaviors are ascertained according to the sex of the child or young person. Accordingly, Vieira's (2007) study on pregnant women notes that some pregnant mothers associate the movements of the fetus with knowing its sex; that is, "vigorous and strong" movements for male babies and "soft" or "not excessively active" movements for female babies (Beal 1994). As there are no real differences between the movements of male and female fetuses, this difference in the mothers' perception suggests the presence of the stereotyped idea of serenity in girls and energy and vigor in boys. It is just one example of the differential interpretation of the behavior and characteristics of daughters and sons that begins before birth and accompanies their entire development process.

The differential treatment extends to all of childhood; it is present in the daily lives of families, such as the purchase of toys for girls and boys, the unequal assignment of tasks, or even the different perceptions of personality characteristics of children and young people in strong association with the sex of each one. Assignment of tasks at home is also differentiated per sex, as fathers and mothers ask boys and girls and young men and women to participate in different domestic tasks. Throughout their development and through this differentiation, children and young people experience different situations that may promote different skills. Hence, a complex learning process is constructed based on sexual differences, consolidating gender differences.

Participation in games and domestic activities seems to encourage girls to imitate the mother's role in taking on domestic responsibilities (i.e., taking care of the family). Boys seem to be more encouraged to increase their contact with the outside world, allowing them to interact with their peers, which is more continuous and

less supervised by adults. Boys and girls grow up in this difference, initiated in the processes of family education, thereby affecting their adult life as men and women.

Therefore, childhood and adolescence constitute, within the family space, a time of learning about the tasks performed by men and women which, in many cases, reproduce the existing asymmetries regarding the distribution of tasks according to sex. The education of sons and daughters seems to be differentiated, which is not independent of the stereotyped view of feminine and masculine on the part of the parents. In fact, one does not educate beyond a framework of adjusted values and behaviors regarding gender. Mothers and fathers bring with them a heritage of knowledge that guides their educational tasks. This knowledge underlies its gender performativity and constitutes instrumental knowledge placed at the service of the education of children and young people. However, unintentionally, such knowledge ultimately influences how their sons and daughters perceive and act. The development process, which allows children and young people to become men or women, occurs in a context in which men and women exist and act.

In this educational task, the interactions of the parents with their sons and daughters are important, but the interactions of the parents with each other are also relevant. The characteristics of these interactions will be part of the repertoire of gender behaviors available to children and young people who observe and interpret them in the consolidation of their gender identity and the development of attributes and display of behaviors they believe to be proper to one sex or the other. Hence, it is important to analyze how fathers and mothers play their roles, how they share family tasks and responsibilities, and the couple's (or individual) strategies for reconciling family life with professional life.

5. Final Notes on the Ethical Commitment to Gender Equality

The data presented point to family socialization marked by traditional values regarding family and parental roles and responsibilities. This fact warrants the need to reflect together on the foundations of the noted values and how contemporary societies perpetuate them uncritically.

Portuguese society has followed a path of remarkable gains in promoting gender equality, such as public policies that seek to ensure equal opportunities. However, there remains much room for improvement concerning the necessary changes in the lives of men and women. Gender inequality in the family operates in the sphere of private life but must effectively become a public domain issue in that its effects compromise the most basic citizenship rights, such as equality and non-discrimination. Although society recognizes women's effective right to work and a career, women's entry into the public sphere has not represented an "equivalent male entry into the private sphere" (Aboim 2006, p. 55).

It is also relevant to note that research on reconciling work and family, even using samples or groups of younger participants, highlights results indicating that women penalize their professional life or reorganize their expectations of investment in their career when considering maternity projects (Saavedra and Taveira 2007; Lima and Neves 2011; Bergano 2012; Coelho and Casaca 2017).

Overall, it is necessary to invest in a concerted way to promote gender equality aimed at young adults and adults of working age, as it is essential to change family patterns that contribute to inequality between people. Moreover, for this purpose, all

adult educators who work in formal, non-formal, and informal education or training contexts must be summoned.

In this sense, a serious investment in parental education in this area is justified. This should begin with monitoring pregnancy in health centers and extending through parental education programs in schools and communities. In Portugal, there are didactic materials that address these issues at the family and school levels. CIG publications, the Guides on Citizenship and Gender Equality (e.g., Pinto et al. 2010; Vieira 2017) or the Coeducation Notebooks (e.g., Neto et al. 1999; Abranches and Carvalho 1999), and works especially aimed at the family (Vieira 2007) are good examples. However, its dissemination and impact would be greater with parents who are not yet aware of these issues, such as Parents' Associations; institutions dedicated to community education, such as Private Institutions of Social Solidarity; and associations of local development. These organizations normally have privileged contact with families at risk of social exclusion or belonging to ethnic minorities—situations that, combined with gender inequalities, can increase the degree of discrimination to which women (and men) are subject.

Starting this process of parental education in the primary healthcare network and maternal and child health programs allows for the deconstruction of some myths that induce mothers to assume the role of irreplaceable caregiver, promoting the participation of members of the couple in these tasks. This process may translate into an effective sharing of tasks between the parents and the reduction of social pressure on the mother regarding reconciling professional and family life. Further, it would be an unrepeatable opportunity to encourage men to enjoy early contact with their sons and daughters, enriching their parenting experience.

Regarding labor inequality, educational tasks are essential in the professional training of workers and the training of employers. In these contexts, issues such as wage discrimination and inequality in access to leadership positions, labor legislation, and violence in the workplace must be addressed. Meanwhile, the gender stereotypes that legitimize these asymmetries must be deconstructed and the legal mechanisms that already exist in our country to combat them must be made known. The incorporation of these themes in initial professional training or professional updating in a work context allows men and women to be aware of the presence of a logic of inequality that tends, but not exclusively, to be more penalizing for women.

This education–training work demands that training professionals develop the ability to think critically about their gender stereotypes, many of which are consolidated through fundamentally androcentric scientific paradigms and somewhat out of phase with the current social realities, where men and women face new challenges that are often difficult to reconcile with old ways of perceiving family roles and attributions.

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