

Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis

Studia ad Didacticam Biologiae Pertinentia 9 (2019)

ISSN 2083-7276

DOI 10.24917/20837276.9.9

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How contemporary women and men combine family and work

Introduction

Socio-cultural and economic changes taking place nowadays – in the times of globalization and homogenization of the world – enable us to experience cultural pluralism on everyday basis as a result of the mass media, as well as increasing mobility. Undoubtedly, we live in a “global village” (McLuhan, 1964), in which everyone has access to the same sort of information, goods and is able to participate in the same events regardless of their dwelling place wherever it is. Being the recipients of culture, we encounter various ways of life currently being promoted, the multiplicity of personal models and different relations between individuals and social groups. The job market requirements have already changed, individualization is increasing, traditional bonds and social relations are disintegrating.

The relations between males and females are also changing rapidly, liberating themselves from cultural and traditional pressure. While the exclusion of traditional bonds makes an individual free from controlling and previous compulsions, it also deprives them of security and support, which were prevalent in the conditions established in pre-modern society (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 2013: 55–58). Due to these transformations, we can notice that a traditional way of demonstrating femininity and masculinity has been disappearing and the standards determining both of these categories are no longer obligatory. Consequently, it leads to the situation in which the features and roles traditionally assigned to a given sex are becoming less and less meaningful. Traditional attributes characterizing both of the sexes were the basis for a distinct, frequently unfair treatment of men and women in private, professional and public spheres. It is the sex which has revealed the most considerable disparities in people’s positions and their social functioning.

Gender – female and male role transformations

Traditional social roles attributed to men and women are regulated by the so-called “*gender contract*”. It is a socio-cultural contract determining the relations between men and women. Traditionally, it assigned women to the private sphere, connected with household jobs, while men’s roles were attributed to professional careers.

In consequence, it results in doing unpaid jobs consisting in household maintenance, taking care of children, ill people, the disabled and the elderly on the part of women. The female activeness in household is treated by the public opinion as the way of realizing their natural roles of wives and mothers (Titkow, Duch-Krzyszczek

2009: 35). Informally, activities done at home and for the family have been defined as “household jobs”, which are considered to be unpaid. That is why female activeness in household is rarely perceived in the “work” category, being defined in economy as one of the production factors, whose value is determined in terms of payment. The notion of “household jobs” has not been included in the economic workflow, since women are not to be paid for them. Nevertheless, the term “job” or “unpaid job” used to define the female activities done at home or for families seems to be justified. It has been confirmed by the surveys related to the activities performed in order to maintain the household. The majority of respondents claim that such activities should be treated in terms of a job. Almost half of the interviewees regard childcare to be a job and they say that household jobs should be financed by state budget (Titkow, Duch-Krzyszczak, Budrowska 2004: 183).

Together with implementing the necessity of abiding European Union standards concerning equal rights and respecting citizens, Poland has undertaken to treat men and women equally. The equality of male and female rights is legitimized by Amsterdam treaty and the Council of Europe orders. Gendermainstreaming ought to be respected in all the social, political and economic actions, which was noted down in UN declarations in 1995 (Beijing declaration). Essential questions regulating actions related to male and female equal rights are included in the final document of the 4th World Conference about women’s rights, which took place in Beijing in 1995 – “Platform for Action”. It summoned all the governments to form national programs aiming at popularization of male and female equal treatment in law, job market, family, political and social life. Transformations taking place after 1945 connected with women’s massive activation and changes at the job market initiated an increase in female professional activeness, as well as gradual incorporation of men into the private sphere.

Thus, it can be described as gender emancipation taking place nowadays. *What does it mean, however, for men, and what for women? And what are the consequences for their functioning?* An interesting attitude in this matter is presented by Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (2013). They claim that an increase in equality leads to realizing the existence of an inequality, which is even growing (2013: 18). It reveals the contradictions between the traditional forms of marital and family life and new experiences – as it may initially seem – emancipational. While tradition is being blurred, partnership may be of some support. However, there is also a contradiction in the sphere of partnership, which was practically invisible in the times when marriage required a woman to give up a career, take responsibility for the family and follow the way dependent on her husband’s professional path. It becomes clear only when spouses “*want or have to be dispositional due to the provision of existence, being dependant on a job*” (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, 2013: 45).

U. Beck points out the factors determining the release of men and women from their traditional roles. In women’s case, these are: the displacement of biographical structure and life event order, restructuring household jobs, an increasing use of contraceptives, growing number of divorce indicating the vulnerability of marriage and the equalization of educational prospects. As far as men are concerned, we can observe the process of releasing themselves from being the only breadwinners as

the result of taking up jobs by women, spoiling the family harmony, as well as their growing awareness of being dependent on women in everyday and emotional matters (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, 2013: 39–41).

Equal rights of men and women constitute two completely separate transformational directions in their functioning. It involves prospects of better education, growing professional chances and less work in household for women, while for men it means more competitiveness, resigning from the career, and doing more household chores. U. Beck notices that although there is a growth in freedom on the part of women, they are not provided with sufficient social protection, which is a new source of their enslavement. Men, on the other hand “*trained themselves in the rhetoric of equal rights*” (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, 2013: 18) and they do not proceed from words to deeds, unfortunately. They hope that it is possible to reconcile the male and female equal rights with keeping previous share of duties. They justify existing inequalities using biological reasons and women’s predispositions to maternity, as well as their feeling responsible for family and household. (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, 2013: 18).

This is the reason of conflicts, which put both men and women in difficult situations. Such conflicts lead to manifesting the antonyms between the sexes more and more clearly, while the most frequent subjects – catalysts are: children, economic security and, in turn, family well-being and a professional career.

Gender in family and at work

The most frequent subject matters of conflicts between spouses are family and work. These are the two values determining Poles’ aims of life. The results of CBOS research (2019, no. 22) indicate that for many years family has invariably been placed at the top in the value system of Polish citizens (80%). More than one third of respondents regards profession to be the most important (36%), and this is the profession which took seventh place in their value system all in all. What is more, in the course of time the importance of job has gradually decreased (44% in 2008, 41% in 2013, 36% in 2019).

Despite the importance of family in human life, professional career is an indispensable sphere of activity, determining, constructing and validating an individual’s social position. It accompanies a person for the whole life and influences their value system, shapes their lifestyles and personalities, decides on consumptive abilities, and, what is the most important, is their source of income (Domański, 2004: 105). Having obtained by women the possibility of education and pursuing a career resulted in improving their social status. In consequence, the family model which until now defined the female and male duties as family and professional ones respectively, must be changed.

At present, men and women have to set down relations between job and family. Both of these activity spheres interfere with each other and rarely are we able to show the boundary separating them.

The necessity of combining the family and professional sphere is becoming more and more difficult for European societies, as shown by the research of European Quality Life Study EQLS (2017: 39–40). It has been stated that:

- 60% of respondents from EU countries (in Poland 63%) claims that at least a few times a week and a few times a month they come home from work too tired to do basic household chores;
- 38% of respondents (in Poland 50%) has difficulty performing household duties due to the amount of time devoted to professional career;
- 19% of respondents (in Poland 28%) finds it difficult to concentrate at work because of family commitments.

The type of occupation and working conditions have a considerable influence on the relations between an individual and their family. There are several forms of family–job relations:

- *independent*: little or lack of mutual influence of job and family environment, work time is limited, work is performed outside the house (officials, clerks etc.);
- *infiltrating*: one sphere of activeness (family life) shapes the other one (professional work), successes, failures and emotions are transferred from one sphere to the other (artists);
- *conflicting*: a direct transfer of tasks and professional duties to the family sphere, caused by flexible working time and the need of full availability, as well as disturbing the professional role owing to family duties (scientists, managers, jobs connected with security and health protection);
- *compensatory*: equalizing and compensating one sphere by the other one (job compensates for the shortcomings or failures in family life or family life compensates for failures in professional life);
- *instrumental*: treating a job as the means enabling an individual to achieve other objectives, which is often connected with the realization of financial needs necessary for leading a successful family life;
- *integrated*: carrying out a professional life almost in family (farmers, craftsmen, people working in home workshops) (Evans, Bartolome, 1984; Paszkowska-Rogacz, 2002; Piorunek, 2009: 118–119, Smyła, 2016).

The influence of profession on family life is the source of numerous conflicts, which results in: smaller number of marriages, greater unwillingness to maternity, postponing the decision to have the first child, an increase in professional aspiration on the part of women, workload, perceiving job and family as the domains competing with each other, changes in the amount of time spent together by family members (Tomaszewska-Lipiec, 2017: 172–175). At the expense of family cohesion, greater emphasis is put on the feelings of freedom and ease (Tyszka, 2003). Family bonds are weakening, illegitimate relationships and single parents are growing in number (Szymański, 2002: 161–170). Workers suffer from stress and depression due to flexible working hours, overtime, employers' growing demands. Moreover, women encounter difficulties while coming back to work after childbirth.

Analysing female position on the job market one should take into consideration socio-cultural factors as its main determinants. As regards women who are

professionally active on everyday basis, there are still barriers related to the access to a job market. These are the following:

1. *Internal barriers and limitations*: emerging through inner emotions, dilemmas, hesitations, fears, low self-esteem, uncertainty, disbelief in one's own abilities, etc.;
2. *Assigning traditional roles to women*: those roles are connected with maternity, and their burdens are not considered at the stage of planning the organization and institution functioning;
3. *Family-job conflict*: connected with the necessity of joining the family and professional duties on the part of women due to their being burdened by more household chores;
4. *External barriers connected with discriminating attitude*: attitudes, the norms of political and professional environment functioning;
5. *Distinct socialization*: generating different expectations related to professional jobs, family life and duties connected with them;
6. *Employment discrimination*: mainly appearing in employers' preferences to take on men rather than women;
7. *Professional segregation*;
8. *Token syndrome*: consisting in noticing women more than men at workplace, especially in those trades where women constitute a minority, and in consequence noticing their failures. They are under pressure to demonstrate their skills and put more effort in performing their duties. In spite of this, they are excluded from informal structures;
9. *Excluding women from informal contacts*: being established at workplace. It is visible by not allowing women to join casual meetings, their impossibility to participate in those meetings due to the necessity of performing household duties or their unwillingness to take part in male gatherings;
10. *A man of success stereotype*: which characterizes a man or a person possessing features commonly regarded to belong to men (Mandal, 2004: 16–18).

Reconciling work and family conditions being based on male and female responsibility may be demonstrated by the following family classification: 1) *traditional family*, in which a man is exempted from the responsibility for doing household duties while a woman is forced to reconcile professional job with carrying out most household chores; 2) *role-sharing family* – based on partnership, characterized by activeness and responsibility in professional and family sphere on the part of both men and women; and 3) *participating family* – being an intermediate sort in comparison with the previous ones. It occurs when a husband helps in household but it is the woman's responsibility to take care of home (Lisowska, 2008: 105).

Considering the spouses' profession as the division criteria, economic family models have been developed. We can enumerate the following categories:

- *male breadwinner*: a traditional model, according to which a man is the one who earns a living while a woman takes care of home and children;
- *modernized male breadwinner*: family model in which a woman works part-time in a profession and her income constitutes only a part of the house budget;

- *dual earner – female double burden*: family model in which both of the spouses work professionally and a woman is additionally responsible for household duties;
- *dual earner – dual carrier*: model based on partnership, in which a man as well as a woman work professionally and are together responsible for bringing up children and they share household duties (Baranowska, 2007: 404).

Here emerges the question: *What does the issue of a family model look like in practice?* A recent opinion poll of CBOS (2018, no. 127) indicates that although many respondents declare they realize the model based on partnership, it is not necessarily reflected in reality. Working professionally by both of the spouses has little influence on sharing household duties. “Typically female” tasks remain as such despite the flow of time, while “typically male” ones are more and more frequently performed together or in turn. 20% of Polish respondents admits that everyday life, household duties and messy house are the most popular causes of conflicts and arguments (CBOS 2019, no. 48). Poles are getting more and more willing to have multigenerational families nowadays, which is connected with two phenomena. On one hand, grandparents can help look after children, and on the other hand they can expect support and care in their everyday lives, which appears to be the simplest way to realize in multigenerational home (CBOS 2019, no. 46).

Thus, how to combine professional and family life? Its solution may be the idea of work–life balance, involving the ability to connect professional work with other spheres of human life. Achieving such a balance is possible only when work and life do not function on their own. The work–life balance idea generated in the USA in the late 1980s. It was mainly caused by the needs of employees who considered it essential to work in a good atmosphere and be able to reconcile professional duties with private life (Encyclopedia of Management, access April 20, 2019). The research shown in “*Workers Preference and Workplace Ability*” (2014) proves that for 42% workers in Poland and 56% workers in the world, work–life balance is much more important than earnings and promotions (Leoński, 2015: 3).

Balance can be seen as “satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict” (Clark, 2000: 751). Balance between work and private life constitutes some sort of a symbol and stipulated way of thinking. Each of us decides as an individual what their priorities are and finds their own way to achieve harmony, satisfaction and feeling of security (Rzepka, 2016: 11–12).

Summary and conclusion

The process of intertwining family with work is visible in male and female lives. Traditionally, women were more burdened with family duties and housework and only today a part of these chores is being taken over by men. It is difficult or even impossible to determine unambiguously which sex is in a better position. Both females and males find it difficult to carry out their home and professional duties at equally satisfactory level. An opinion poll published by CBOS is not optimistic, claiming that in spite of growing professional and social activeness women are still burdened by household duties. *Therefore, is gender contract still functioning, but in a slightly*

implied form? This being the case, we should pay more attention to the correlation between professional and private lives of women and men.

In postmodern times, when people of both sexes have to face the necessity of making continuous choices this is the freedom which used to be the guarantee of equal rights and it is now enslaving both males and females making them choose steadily. They still have to strike a balance between work and home. It is necessary to find a golden mean allowing them to fulfill the commitments arising from the role of a wife, mother and worker on the part of a woman who has so far been treated as the one guarding hearth and home and, in the case of men – previous breadwinners who now have to take over the roles of workers, husbands and fathers. This role reversal forces people to make ceaseless choices, reach compromises and find new solutions to the conflicts continuously emerging in this context. However, it is not possible to solve those conflicts only on home ground, since, as it has been pointed out by U. Beck (2013: 32) “*family is only the place, but not the cause of events*”. In addition, results of surveys conducted in 21 European countries (Riedmann et al., 2006: 49–51) indicate that reconciling home life with work is no longer a worker’s private matter. That is why private and political strategies should be implemented in a mutual relation. There is a need for institutional solutions which would ease “domestic” conflicts in relations between males and females.

The aim of this paper was to outline urgent problems which men and women have to face rather than presenting ready prescriptions and solutions. At present I reckon that considering the subject matter complexity it is a difficult task that requires further profound analysis. I do hope, however, that this discourse will be an inspiration to additional considerations and seeking new solutions, which will facilitate the reconciliation of private and professional life, contribute to changing men’s and women’s stereotypical images being too deeply rooted in the society, and allay chaos in their relations in order to build equivalent relations satisfactory for both sides. The connections between those two most significant spheres of human life will constitute the area of further scientific explorations.

People who suffer the most from the imbalance between these two areas and those who are able to counteract it should take interest in learning how women and men can balance their careers and private lives and how to apply the concept of work–life balance in practice. Such people include: (1) **management practitioners** – in their case, the imbalance experienced by the employee produces expenses for the organization, reduces the satisfaction resulting from the job, and may lead to absences and problems in finding replacements; (2) **politicians in charge of social and economic policies** – a common imbalance may produce adverse effects on the society and reduce the professional activity of the people experiencing it; (3) **workers and family members** who experience the effects of imbalance directly. This imbalance may lead to greater stress, poor health, diminished disposition and satisfaction from family and professional lives, professional burnout, and disintegrating families; (4) **specialists: psychologists, educators, physicians, social workers**, etc., who can take advantage of continuing research and proposals of practical solutions to help implement the work–life balance concept into the life of workers and

workplaces and reduce the effects of potential imbalance for the aforementioned entities.

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Abstract

This article covers the relations between the family lives and careers of contemporary women and men. The process of intertwining family with work is visible in male and female lives. The text analyses the most important transformations in the roles of women and men in scope of “*gender contract*”, which have occurred in Poland and in Europe in recent years. Due to the growth in equality between women and men resulting from Poland joining the European Union and the socio-cultural and economic changes, the relations between males and females are also changing rapidly, liberating themselves from cultural and traditional pressure. This leads to the following question: *What does it mean, however, for men, and what for women? And what are the consequences for their functioning?* This is particularly important in the context of relations between family lives and careers, because this is an area of frequent conflicts between spouses.

Keywords: gender, work–life balance, gendermainstreaming, gender contract

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