The division of work and care before and after the first birth in Dutch couples: a longitudinal mixed-method analysis

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Introduction

Transition to parenthood is critical moment for division of labor (Baxter, Hewitt, & Haynes, 2008; Grunow, Schulz, & Blossfeld, 2012)

• Women increase unpaid work and decrease paid work (Gjerdingen & Center, 2005)
• Incoherence between values and practice emerges (Bühlmann, Elcheroth, & Tettamanti, 2009)
• Couples might diverge in their attitudes / preferences (Jansen & Liefbroer, 2006)

Influence of values on behavior

• Traditional gender attitudes associated with earlier marriage (e.g., Barber & Axinn, 1998)
• Modern values associated with later childbirth and more equal division of housework (Davis & Greenstein, 2009)
• Norms and values important determinants of the division of labor (Kühhirt 2011; van Wel & Knijn 2006; Verbakel 2010)

Influence of behavior on values

• Marriage increases traditional gender role norms (Barber & Axinn, 1998)
• (First time) parents more traditional after childbirth, work salience decreases (Katz-Wise, Priess, & Hyde, 2010)
Research questions

1. How do couples’ adapt their care and work divisions during the transition to parenthood?

1. Why do couples’ adapt their care and work divisions during the transition to parenthood?

   1. (How) does this relate to couples’ gender role attitudes?
   2. Do couples’ gender role attitudes change during the transition to parenthood?
   3. How do couples’ make sense of their work and care divisions and adaptations in relation to gender role attitudes and experiences?
Longitudinal mixed methods approach

Data: Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS)

- **Quantitative:** wave 1 (2002/04) and wave 2 (2006/07) → Dutch GGP
  - Analytical sample:
    - Couples childless at wave 1
    - Female partner aged < 45 at wave 2
  - N = 575
  - 226 (39%) had child at wave 2
- Path analysis with dichotomous outcomes
  - Conducted in Mplus 5.1 using Weighted Least Square Means and Variance Adjusted (WLSMV) estimator
  - Results as standardized coefficients
- **Qualitative:** 31 couples
  - Interviewed jointly and individually at T1 (during pregnancy or 1 to 11 months after birth) and T2 (1 year later)
Gender role attitudes, work commitment and division of work

- Couples who were childless at T1
- In the Netherlands where variety in labor market outcomes is large → Room for influence of norms and values

Research questions

a. Do family/gender role attitudes and commitment to work change after childbirth? → Adaptation effects
b. What is the relationship between family/gender role attitudes + commitment to work and the division of work?
c. Do these associations differ between the male and female partner?
# Measurement of Division of Paid Work

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Measurement Gender Role Attitudes

• Mean score of agreement with 11 items on family and gender roles, i.e.:
  • ‘A woman must quit her job when she becomes a mother’
  • ‘It’s more important for boys than it is for girls to be able to earn a living later in life’
  • Range 1 to 5
  • Higher Values imply more modern attitude
• Skewed to the right

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<td>4.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean men</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach’s α</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.85</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Measurement *Commitment to Work Attitude*

- Mean score of agreement with 4 items on commitment to work, i.e.:
  - ‘*My job is very important to me*’
  - ‘*I’d rather work overtime than fail to get something done on time*’
  - Range 1 to 5
  - Higher Values imply higher work commitment
- Skewed to the right

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Screeplot
The Path Model

Wave 1

Gender Role Attitude

Equal Sharing of Household Tasks

Both Partners work >35 h/week

Commitment to Work Attitude

Wave 2

Gender Role Attitude

Equal Sharing of Household Tasks

Both Partners work >35 h/week

1st Birth

Commitment to Work Attitude

Not shown:
- Correlations between work and gender attitude measures
- Controlled for educational attainment and age at wave 1
Adaptation – Female Partner

Gender Role Attitude

Equal Sharing of Household Tasks

Both Partners work >35 h/week

Commitment to Work Attitude

1st Birth

Gender Role Attitude

Equal Sharing of Household Tasks

Both Partners work >35 h/week

Commitment to Work Attitude

Model fit: CFI 0.98 / TLI 0.92, RMSEA 0.05
Adaptation – Male Partner

Model fit: CFI 0.97 / TLI 0.90, RMSEA 0.05
Summary

Adaptation

• Becoming a parent decreases women’s attitude on the commitment to work while it strengthens commitment to work in men
• Becoming a parent does not affect gender attitudes

Division of labor

• Becoming a parent changes the division of paid work
• Higher commitment to work associated with higher likelihood to be dual earner couple
When family/ gender attitudes are modern and do not change, why do equal divisions change?

• Between couple comparison

• Blurring of (gender) boundaries, decline of traditional values (Beck 2003; Zinn 2008)

• More implicit gender attitudes might be more traditional and/ or change, following behaviour/ experiences

• Family/ gender attitudes do not change, but the gap with practices becomes bigger
(Why) do family/ gender attitudes not change?

A  Men and women are allowed to live together outside of marriage
B  Children are allowed to choose their own marriage partners
C  Two men or two women are allowed to live together
D  A woman must quit her job when she becomes a mother
E  The parents’ opinion must play an important role in the choice of a  
   partner for their child
F  Married couples with young children are not allowed to divorce
G  Single mothers are very capable of raising their children
H  It’s unnatural if men in a business are supervised or managed by women
I  It’s more important for boys than it is for girls to be able to earn a living 
   later in life
J  Working mothers put themselves first rather than their families.
K  It’s best to divide tasks and responsibilities in a relationship according to 
   the customs, traditions and rules that have always been force
(Why) do family/ gender attitudes not change?

- Sample: couples with children in wave 2

- Blurring of (gender) boundaries (Beck 2003; Zinn 2008)

- More implicit gender attitudes might be more traditional and/or change following behaviour/ experiences

- Family/ gender attitudes do not change, but the gap with practices increases
When family/ gender attitudes are modern and do not change, why do equal divisions change?

Qualitative study Wiesmann (2010)

- **Traditionalization processes among most couples**
  
  *women* decreased working hours; primarily responsible for care tasks;  
  *men* primarily responsible for income, participated to varying degrees in care tasks

- **Parallel: equal sharing values; gendered division of tasks**
  
  - Divisions implicit and taken for granted
  - Dutch context: one and a half earner; part-time work

- **Four types of changes**
  
  - Group 1: Intended specialization  
    
    Unintended specialization
  - Group 2: Intended equal sharing
  - Group 3: Unintended reversed breadwinning
When family/ gender attitudes are modern and do not change, why do equal divisions change?

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    - Group 1: Intended specialization
    - Unintended specialization
    - Group 2: Intended equal sharing
    - Group 3: Unintended reversed breadwinning
‘Intended’ equal sharing  
Couple 1: Joke, Jos and Ruben

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>T1 (2 months); Ideal</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Joke:</strong> Work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joke 3/ 4 days; Jos 4 days</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Care</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joke 2/ 1 days + 2 weekend; Jos 1 day + 2 weekend</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Family member: 1 day</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Day care: 2 days</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Jos:</strong> Work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Joke 4 days; Jos 4 days</td>
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<td><strong>Care</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joke 1 day + 2 weekend; Jos 1 day + 2 weekend</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandmother/ grandfather: 1 day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day care: 2 days</td>
<td></td>
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‘Intended’ equal sharing
Couple 1: Joke, Jos and Ruben

T2 (14 months); Practice

Joke: Work From 3 days > 4 days (4 x 9)
   Care 1 day + 2 days weekend

Jos: Work From 5 days > 4 days (4 x 8) + time for commuting
   Care 1 day + 2 days weekend

Day care: 3 days
‘Intended’ equal sharing
Couple 1: Joke, Jos and Ruben

T2 (14 months); Practice

**Joke: Work**  From 3 days > 4 days (4 x 9), *but now half days (ill/overstrained)*

**Care**          1 day + 2 days weekend

**Jos: Work**     From 5 days > 4 days (4 x 8) + time for commuting

**Care**          1 day + 2 weekend

**Day care:**     3 days
### ‘Unintended’ specialization

**Couple 2: Lisa, Paul and Lotte**

#### T1 (7 months); Ideal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Care</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lisa</strong></td>
<td>4 days (4 x 8); Paul 4 days (4 x 8)</td>
<td>Lisa 1 day + 2 weekend; Paul 1 day + 2 weekend</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Grandmothers 1 day every other week</td>
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<td>Day care: 2 days</td>
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<td><strong>Paul</strong></td>
<td>Lisa 3 days; Paul 4 days</td>
<td>Lisa 2 days (+ 2 weekend); Paul 1 day (+ 2 weekend)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Family member: 2 days (grandmothers 1 day each)</td>
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‘Unintended’ specialization
Couple 2: Lisa, Paul and Lotte

T2 (18 months); Practice

Lisa: Work
From 4 days (37 hours, flexible/ work at home day) > 3 ½ days (33 hours + 4 hours parental leave)

Care
1 ½ day (alone) + weekend (together)

Paul: Work
4 days (40 hours)

Care
1 day (alone) + weekend (together)

Grandmothers: 1 day every other week

Day care: 1 ½ days
Jos at T1 (2 months):  
“I feel like I’ve slowly grown towards (the idea) that it’s nicer to work 4 days each. (...) It’s also nicer for Joke to find a job for 4 days (...) At first I was concerned whether I would do it right (with caring for the baby), like: you’re much better at it (...) But I now think it’s much (...) nicer to divide it more evenly, 4 days each. Yes, and going out with the little fellow, or in the house a bit.. I think it’s fine to be at home for a day.”

Jos at T2 (14 months)  
“For work it would certainly be possible (to go back to five days). They would like that. But for myself I would really like to keep… my division the way I have it: four days work and one day caring for Ruben. But for Joke, it seems nicer to me when she would work a day less, or at least an hour less per day. (...) I just think it would provide a bit more peace, in the family.”
Interviewer at T2 (14 months): “The fact that you’re currently working a bit less for a while, does this in your view have to do with difficulties in dividing things, with care and…”

Joke: “No, that was an interplay of factors. (…) Well, in general, four days, as we do it, it’s all possible. Only when something comes in you know, or something goes…, like when my father was ill. (…) With a child that was often ill, that didn’t want to drink. And we needed to be at the hospital at a certain time, yes, but he didn’t finish drinking yet. These are stress factors. You don’t have control over this. This caused quite some stress in my case. So the way we do it is fine, but when something happens…”
Couple 2: Lisa, Paul and Lotte; 7 months

Paul:
“*My mother was at home as a mother,* she didn’t leave *that* to Amah (household help), to pick us up or to bring us away or to welcome us when we arrived at home, my mother – or my father, but mostly my mother – was usually just at home. (…) That’s very important to me. I don’t want a stranger to be the one to do that.”
Couple 2: Lisa, Paul and Lotte; 18 months

Interviewer: “Why did you want those four hours (parental leave) at that time. You’re saying: it was really tough’. What was really tough?”
Lisa: “Well, just.. eh.. well, I had the feeling, like being rushed. That you’re just, that I missed.., yes also with Lotte so to speak. The child raising. So having the feeling, I was at home on Friday, but I had the cleaning lady as well, so I was not alone with Lotte. And on Saturdays and Sundays there were always visitors or things like that. So I never had time alone with her. What’s it called? ‘Quality time’, so to speak (laughs). So I’ve changed that now. I actually had the feeling, you know, like: gee, I see her less than others.”

Interviewer: “What do you mean: others?”
Lisa: Well, like Paul really had Thursday with her. On Wednesdays both grandmothers really have time with her. And I never really had the time alone with her. So yes, I wanted to change that.”
Interviewer: “And did that change turn out like you expected?”
Lisa: “Well, in the beginning, it’s quite complicated like, you see, when she is (at day care in village X), so you work that morning from 9.00-12.30, but in fact she sleeps at noon, so that’s not handy. You pick her up at 12.45 and as soon as you’re in the car, she sleeps, and that’s actually too short. So as soon as you’re home, she’s really out of her rhythm. So that’s not really handy. But… well.”
Summary

- Gender attitudes
- Practice of caring for a baby: conflict with mother’s work/ care
- Balance is vulnerable, couples switch within and between groups
Next steps

Quantitative part: focus on *adaptation* = 226 couples with child
- Path analysis: within person effect
- Detailed variable working hours: dual-earner couples versus other arrangements; did one of the partners reduce hours?
- Division/ organization of childcare after birth

Qualitative part: 31 joint and individual interviews
- Division of work and care as a *process*; how (mothers’, fathers’, joint) practices, mechanisms, gender role attitudes and experiences emerge and change over time
- Focus on changes characterized as ‘*unintended’ specialization*’; compared to ‘*intended equal sharing*’ and ‘*intended specialization*’
- Distinguish between couples T1 = pregnancy (n=17) and T1 = after birth (n=14); *prospective and retrospective perspectives*
### Measurement of Division of Paid Work

- **Dual-earner couples versus other arrangements**
- **did one of the partners reduce hours?**

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• Distinguish between couples T1 = pregnancy (n=17) and T1 = after birth (n=14); prospective and retrospective perspectives
Mixed methods longitudinal analysis

- **Advantages**
  - Relating systematic patterns of change at the transition to parenthood to values, meanings and processes involved
  - Fine tuning measure ‘gender role attitudes’

- **Challenges**
  - Being precise about what phenomena within the data set we are studying with which method and how they relate in a meaningful way
  - Distinguishing between couples’ experiences in gender roles and values as gender role attitudes
Thank you for your Attention

Questions, suggestions, comments welcome

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