Book Review/Compte rendu

Judith Treas and **Sonja Drobnic,** eds., *Dividing the Domestic: Men, Women, and Household Work in Cross-national Perspective*. Studies in Social Inequality. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010, 280 pp. $US 50.00 hardcover (987-0-8047-6357-8).

The seventeen authors of this excellent collection have produced a very unified volume on the division of domestic work. Just as the division of housework is asymmetric by gender, so is the division of labour in sociology, as represented here by 13 women and 4 men authors. The authors do not use the same definition of domestic work, and thus the introductory chapter on "why study housework" does not define the concept, nor do we know if it includes child care and household maintenance, in the view of the editors. Narrow definitions pose problems, in my view, because unequal divisions of a narrow range of tasks is not as serious as inequality in the distribution of the total unpaid work. Including the introductory and concluding chapters by the editors, the book is divided into four sections: overview, political economy, cultural influences, and evaluation of cross-national research.

The overview chapter by Judith Treas provides an excellent theoretical statement, starting with rational choice and constraints, then going to gender ideology and relative resources, and finally to gender in the institutional context of the broader society. All chapters are theoretically informed and empirically based. On the latter, the following provides a useful snapshot:

> In short, not only has time use generally converged between men and women, but there is also evidence that men and women have become more alike in terms of the factors determining their housekeeping efforts. [Yet] ... marriage, parenthood, and employment continue to matter more for women's housework in conservative countries than in liberal states and Nordic social democracies. (p. 9)

While showing that there is change in the direction of gradual convergence between men and women in hours of domestic work, there could be more attention to the observation from Shirley Dex that the average total hours of paid plus unpaid work are nearly the same for men as for women. The similarity in total productive work provides a rather different context for interpreting the extent of exploitation in the unequal

division of housework. It is also of interest that marriage brings increases in the housework of both women and men, so that there is more similarity in the work patterns of people in marital unions than people who are not in union.

In the chapter on "trends in housework" Liana Sayer places the trends in the context of the second demographic transition, which includes delays in union formation and parenthood, narrowing gender differences in education and employment, and eroding cultural support for the ideology of separate spheres. Since Sayer wants to study the trends for all adults, she leaves out child care, which is much lower for adults who are not parents. Among the 9 countries for which she has data on the gender gap over time, Canada is toward the middle both in the 1970s and in the late 1990s. In particular, the Canadian average time spent for total housework was 61 minutes per day for men and 214 for women in 1971 (men doing 28.5% as much as women), compared to 86 minutes for men and 156 for women in 1998 (men doing 55.1% as much as women). The author speaks of how "time investment in housework has stalled" in several countries, yet the graph could be interpreted as slower change rather than stalling.

The effect of employment is to reduce the housework time for both women and men, but employed women do considerably more housework in some countries (Austria, Germany, France) than in others (Canada, Sweden), while there are much fewer variations across countries for employed men.

In the concluding chapter, Sonja Drobnic observes that housework is a symbolic enactment of gender relations, and thus the theoretical models of new home economics, resource bargaining, and marital dependency provide only partial explanations, and the change is much slower than these other models would suggest. This symbolic enactment includes cultural ideas on motherhood, and their institutional contexts. There could be better treatment of the extent to which dedicated paternal leave can have an influence on this cultural context.

The amount of housework performed in given households depends on the culture of the country, the social class of the household, and the welfare regime. While the juxtaposition is far from perfect, several authors make reference to welfare regimes in suggesting the impact of policy and the broader society on the gender division of domestic work. At stake are policies related to child care services, parental leave, in-work benefits and tax credits, and also the "huge range of policies, institutions, infrastructure, preferences, and behavior patterns that overlap and reinforce each other." That must cover it!

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