
Men and Women: A Sociological Vision of Differences: The Case of Spain

A Summary

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Based on research done to assess the characteristic use of time and nature of work in Spain, Almárcegui¹ presents an argument against the hypothesis “that one of the most modern features of our society is the incorporation of women to the work world; that women seem to be present in all aspects of social life and that this seems to be a general development in most of the social sectors; there are women in public works, education and companies.”

Contrary to the hypothesis above, Almárcegui observes that social transformation during the last few decades manifests an intense division of the tasks between men and women in society. The scope of work for both man and woman has increased and has changed since the medieval period. Nevertheless,

- 1) the woman has always had her work responsibility in society;
- 2) that she has been part and parcel of the development of the occidental culture of work;

¹ Almárcegui, A. Moreno, *Hombres y Mujeres: Una Visión Sociológica de sus Diferencias: El Caso de España: en la Obra de Enciso, Agustín, “Mas Allá de la División del Trabajo: (2007): Pamplona.*

3) that the division of work between man and woman is still present in our societies and that the key to this division is the paternity – maternity relationship;

4) that strongly masculine activities are those that demand physical exertion and involve risk (such as construction, mining and handling heavy machinery).

The feminine activities are oriented towards the developing human relationships (domestic services, education, health and retail trade). He postulates that the future concept of division of work may continue along the same ideology based on career selection in the universities which currently indicates that young people, both male and female, are freely choosing their careers along the same ideology of the paternity-maternity relationship.

However, he notes that there is an area of the job market in which both man and woman are both inclined equally. The tasks in which men and women work together are those of public administration, the leisure-sport and cultural activities, recreational, culture and sport. This also occurs in the financial sector, real estate services and research activities. Almárcegui calls these range of jobs “the social perception of reality”. He is of the opinion that it is in this sector of the job market that the future discussions on equality of work and work opportunities for man and woman is to take place.

He finally observes that family relationships still define the division of work between man and woman. However, time dedicated to the family for both man and woman has generally reduced. Men and women professionals seem to be dedicating long hours at work leaving the family two hours in the evening when they are tired. Women home-makers still follow the same dedication as always, dedicating their prime hours to taking care of the house and the family.

It also seems reasonable to postulate that technological development, which has made tasks requiring brute force easier to carry out, has made them more accessible to

women. In addition, freedom of enterprise allows women the possibility of working in any aspect of social life. Thus, the traditional scope of work that the woman could engage has amplified since the middle ages. As technology develops it will change the scope of work for the woman. Brute force and risk in many job environments will reduce as technology changes the methods and tools of work. For example, there are more and more women drivers of big trucks and public transport auto-buses. The reason seems to be that it is much easier to manipulate big vehicles today and the time schedule for this type of work is predictable.

Engels, in his classical thesis on the division of work between man and woman, had postulated that "the oppression of the women began much before during the arrival of the concept of private property and the formation of social classes. In this period he affirms that man's supremacy in all important institutions of society became apparent. Men exercised supremacy in all institutions of work while Women were deprived of the power of access to these institutions." Gerda Lerner on the other hand postulates that that the Patriarchal era paved the way to the division of work according to sex."² (Maria Encarna Sanahuja, *Gender, objects and prehistory*; Published by Universitat de València, 2002, p. 141) She is opposed to Engels' classical thesis. However, Lerner does not say that the women were not able to work in these institutions, nor were they deprived of that right through influences and resources. She postulates that;

- a. women and men together have constructed civilizations.
- b. there does not exist a "unique origin" of the patriarchal system, hence we have to avoid a unified-causal explanation of the patriarchal system and replace it with an interacting system of multiple forces;
- c. women are not victims, they participated in the construction of the patriarchal system that apparently has subordinated them;

² María Encarna Sanahuja Yll, *Cuerpos sexuados, objetos y prehistoria*; Publicado por Universitat de València, 2002, p. 141

- d. an alternative and inverse matriarchal system would be an Andre-centric idea.
- e. the differences between man and woman in the world of work must disappear in democratic and egalitarian societies.

She provides the common example, that there is a scarcity of women within the leadership classes and that the majority family responsibilities fall on the woman. She seems to be proposing a “defamiliarization” of the Woman and incorporating men into family responsibilities.

There are others who propose the de-familiarization of the woman and hold the principle that the woman has always worked and has had an important role in society. This seems very certain given an ample glance of human history.

There are many in our society today who seem unaware of the value of the family. According to Almárcegui’s research, the most basic division of work is that of man and woman or father-mother relationship. Differences in the job market and career selection in the universities indicate that the young people both male and female freely choose their careers and have the same possibilities career selection. They are doing so based on this age old division. He discovers that;

- a. Strongly masculine or strongly feminine Job segments add up to 48.2% of the total available jobs in the market. In Spain, jobs that are strongly masculine activities are those that require physical exertion and are risky (construction, mining, heavy machinery); feminine activities are oriented towards the human relationships (domestic services, education, health, retail trade, etc.)
- b. The division is not in terms of dominant and dominating. The masculine tasks need brute force and tend to be risky. Women in human resources, care of the more fragile in society and civil services enjoy

safer work environments, have job security, require less woman-hours of work, and have an easily predictable time schedule.

- c. This seems to respond to the most classic stereotypes of the man-woman. The man looks for work to dominate his environment while woman is a conserver of that world through attention to people and the world of human relations. She therefore becomes the key to social concord. Feminine tasks are traditionally associated with maternity. The men traditionally have the responsibility of production, work which tends to give results in the longer run.
- d. The tasks in which men and women work together are those of public administration, leisure, sport and cultural activities or recreational, culture and sports. This collaboration between man and woman also occurs in the financial sectors, real estate services and research activities. These jobs can be classified as “the social perspective of reality”.

Hence, the incorporation of the women in the job market has not been homogenous. It seems that social transformation during the last few decades has manifested an intense social division of the tasks between men and women.

Choice of university careers according to the sex of the student

2. Almárcegui made a study of career selections in Spanish universities during the period 1999-2000. This study shows that the selection of career studies by the men and women continue along the same lines has discussed above and that women have entered the business careers, law and politics just as their counterparts. Nevertheless, as family life continues being at the heart of society it does not seem necessary to evolve another social reality. For women the questions still remains that of juggling family life and professional work.

The Use of the time

Despite problems of calculating use of time preferences between women and men, Almárcegui's research shows that, outside of the time marked by primary activities like eating, sleeping and personal hygiene, women use their time in meetings, charitable work, the home and family. Men on the other hand, dedicate long hours in hobbies, sports and work. Dedication to the family continues being the main source of differences among men and women. For example, in Spain, it seems that there is a great imbalance work and leisure. Time dedicated to leisure for men with families having 4 or more members is 1,6 hours of the work for one hour of leisure time, while that of women is 2,2 hours of work for every hour of leisure time.

In larger families men dedicate fewer hours to the family, while it increases the time dedicated to children by women increases. Hence, it seems that as the family size increases the intensity of specialization between man and woman seems to be work and attention to family respectively.

For working parents, time spent with the family tends to occupy a marginal place at the later hours of the day. The morning is used for work and study for the men. In the afternoon period until 20.00 hours the time is spent between work and leisure. The data indicates that some people are still working and dedicating time to leisure until 20 and 21 hours. Afterwards, many people dedicate the 22 and 23 hours for family life and television. Men never dedicate more than 11% of their time for house work. For the women, the afternoon period is divided between time away from the family, social/leisure activities and the attention to the home. Probably, this is the result of the many opportunities and activities available to both man and woman in our society.

On the whole evidence shows that family life is decreasing remarkably.