

Against the odds? Keeping a non-traditional division of domestic work after first parenthood¹

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Abstract

This article analyzes changes in the division of routine domestic work after first parenthood. We wanted to know whether and how it was possible for couples to resist the trend towards traditionalization that has been shown in the literature. To do so, we analyze semi-structured interviews with 27 Spanish couples who were expecting their first child in 2011, and interviewed them again in 2013. The couples were selected from a bigger sample because of their non-traditional practices pre-parenthood. Our results show that 17 of them were able to maintain a non-traditional division of domestic work, whereas ten traditionalized. In our analysis, relative resources and time availability did not sufficiently explain the changes in the division of work, but specific characteristics of the division of work before childbirth –men’s active participation, the routinization of tasks and flexible standards- emerged as key factors to resist the trend towards more traditional arrangements.

Keywords: Families and Work, Housework/division of labor, Gender, Fairness and equality

Introduction

Studies on the division of domestic work have consistently shown that, in spite of recent changes towards more egalitarian arrangements, domestic chores are persistently gendered (Coltrane, 2000; Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010). But divisions of work are not static, and they change along the life cycle, especially as a consequence of changes in family configurations. The arrival of the first child marks a particularly important turning point in couples’ arrangements, which tend to become more traditional than prior to childbirth, according to the evidence available from longitudinal studies carried out in several countries (Baxter et al., 2014; Grunow et al., 2012; Kühhirt, 2012; Sanchez & Thomson, 1997; Schober, 2013).

Qualitative research has offered a valuable insight into the processes that lead to gendered divisions of work (Hochschild & Machung, 1989), but also into the possibility of undoing gender for some couples (Deutsch, 1999). Recently, Fox (2009) has highlighted in her longitudinal research on Canadian parents, that couples with more egalitarian arrangements pre-childbirth, which she describes as “reciprocal economies of care”, make a smoother transition to parenthood and are less subject to traditionalization, although not completely immune against it. In this sense, prior arrangements seem to be vital to explain the division of work after childbirth.

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In this research we will study whether and how it is possible for couples with nontraditional arrangements to resist the trend towards traditionalization after the birth of the first child. To do so, we will analyze qualitative longitudinal data on a sample of Spanish first-time parents (27 couples) who had non-traditional divisions of domestic work before parenthood (for more information on their division of work before parenthood see Dominguez-Folgueras et al. 2016). Our analysis shows that there are specific characteristics of the division of work that help couples resist traditionalization, namely men's active participation, flexibility of standards, and the routinization of tasks.

Background

The division of domestic work between men and women is most frequently asymmetrical, and there is a rich body of literature in sociology and gender studies analyzing the factors that contribute to the persistence of that asymmetry. As a summary, the main factors identified by research are relative economic resources –earnings and earnings' potential-, that allow for better negotiating positions inside the family; gendered norms –that specify social expectations about men's and women's behavior-, and time availability (see Coltrane, 2000; Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010 for reviews). These factors can be more or less relevant depending on the country and level of gender equality (Aasve et al., 2014), and seem to have more explanatory power for the division of routine tasks (Kroska, 2004). But the literature has also shown that the division of work is dynamic and can be altered by life events. In this sense, first childbirth is an especially disrupting transition that often leads to more traditional divisions of work. Such trend –that will be labeled “traditionalization” in this article- has been reported for different countries where it has been possible to analyze the evolution of domestic work using longitudinal datasets and samples representative of the population: Australia (Baxter et al., 2014), Britain (Schober, 2013), Germany (Kühhirt, 2012, Grunow et al. 2012), and the USA (Sanchez & Thomson, 1997). Recent analyses have also pointed out that parenthood has more gendered effects in countries where the welfare state does not support gender equality (Neilson & Stanfors, 2014), which would be the case in Southern Europe.

These quantitative longitudinal studies have taken into account the main variables considered to intervene in the domestic division of work (resources, available time, and gender attitudes) to explain the effects of parenthood although few studies have been able to control for resources and attitudes at the same time. Results from this line of research show that women's advantage in relative or absolute resources seems to mitigate traditionalization, and so do egalitarian values (Baxter et al., 2014; Grunow et al., 2012; Kühhirt, 2012; Schober, 2013), although the trend toward traditionalization is present even for couples with similar resources. Other studies have shown the importance of time availability, as women reduce their working hours after childbirth more often than men (Régnier-Lollier & Hiron, 2010). Qualitative research has also shown that anticipation and open discussions about the division of work can mitigate the traditionalization effect (Wiesman et al., 2008).

The above mentioned studies focus on the persistence –or emergence- of doing gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987) patterns. But some feminist scholars have pointed out that more research is needed on couples who undo gender –understood as «social interactions that reduce gender differences » (Deutsch, 2007:122)- because these couples are a source of change and can shed light on the mechanisms that would allow couples to overcome traditional conceptions of gender (Deutsch, 2007; Risman, 2011; Sullivan, 2004). In this paper we will follow this strategy and concentrate on one aspect of undoing gender: we choose couples who do succeed in achieving a non-traditional division of routine domestic

work before parenthood, and analyze if and how they are able to resist traditionalization after the birth of their first child.

The richness of a qualitative approach to understand the division of work has been shown in a number of studies. Hochschild & Machung's (1989) path-breaking analysis illustrated the importance of emotional and subjective dimensions to account for the division of work inside the family, as well as the embedding of the intervening factors. Feelings about the second shift exemplified also that gender roles and ideals are complex and can entail contradictions among beliefs, feelings, and actions. Gendered strategies, such as playing dumb –presenting oneself as incompetent in domestic chores- or waiting to be asked to do chores, helped explain men's lower participation in domestic work because with these strategies, men rendered women ultimately responsible of chores.

The interdependence and internal complexity of resources, gendered norms, and couple dynamics has been consistently highlighted by this methodological approach. For instance, Risman and Johnson-Sumerford (1998) analyzed 15 elite couples who at the beginning of the 1990s shared housework on a 60/40 basis and had specific gender attitudes. The authors concluded that in their sample women's resources were relevant, but that also both spouses had to oppose hegemonic beliefs in essentialist gender differences, which otherwise might have served as justification for an unequal split of domestic work. In turn, Deutsch and Saxon (1998) analyzed couples with traditional attitudes that had a non-traditional division of work due to external circumstances, and concluded that the demands of the labor market sometimes facilitated equal sharing. Deutsch's study on equal sharing couples (1999) demonstrated that egalitarian gender ideologies and comparable careers did not ensure an "equal-sharing" arrangement. Some couples with egalitarian values failed to realize their ideals because "those ideals meet practical difficulties, don't feel right, or clash with gendered beliefs, goals, and prerogatives that deep down are more important to them" (Deutsch, 1999:152-153). The interrelationship of ideologies and socio-structural factors has also been analysed in quantitative research: Gaunt and Scott (2016) observe that the division of paid work influences differently the centrality and saliency of identities for men and women.

There are few longitudinal qualitative analyses on the transition to parenthood and its effect on the division of work. LaRossa and Mulligan LaRossa (1981) interviewed parents in the USA several times after the birth of their children –at 3, 6 and 9 months-, but their study did not include data gathered before the birth. However, they showed that the division of domestic work was a source of conflict in these families and that equity was an important concern for them when discussing the division of work. Cowan and Cowan (1992) followed couples who had their first child in the USA between 1975 and 1980, and observed a trend toward traditionalization. They attributed this to women's time away from the labour market, which rendered them responsible for all things related to the home. Couples with more egalitarian ideologies and with more realistic expectations about parenthood seemed to adapt better to the transition. They also highlighted the lack of egalitarian role models and of family policies that would facilitate less traditional family arrangements. Belsky and Kelly (1994) also followed new parents of children born in the eighties in the USA, and described a similar trend toward traditionalization, although their study focused more on couple satisfaction, conflict and parenting. More recently, Fox's study (2009) interviewed Canadian men and women in 40 couples before childbirth and several times afterwards. To characterize the division of domestic work she used the term "economy of care"; which describes the type of care that each member of the couple provides to the other. "Care" could have emotional and economic dimensions but included also the performance of domestic chores, necessary for the wellbeing of household members. The idea of an economy of care was inspired by Hochschild & Machung (1989), who stated that "the personal meanings of the second shift differed

greatly, but to most people they either meant “I am taken care of” or “I am taking care of someone” (p. 188). In Fox’s analysis, couples with a “reciprocal” economy of care –where both members provided similar care to each other- had a smoother transition to parenthood than couples with more traditional economies of care, although all couples in general were pushed towards more gender differentiation. Like Cowan and Cowan (1992) she highlighted the time that women spent at home during their maternity leaves, a period when they developed new standards and assumed more responsibilities around the household.

The aim of this study is to explore the idea that pre-child practices are highly predictive of the possibilities to resist the traditionalization, and to analyze what are the specific characteristics of the division of work that allow some couples to maintain a nontraditional arrangement after the birth of their first child. The Spanish case is interesting because the characteristics of the welfare state and gender equality lead to expect a strong effect of parenthood (Neilson & Stanfors, 2004). Spain is a Southern European welfare state that relies on families to take care on dependents and that has not adapted to women’s new roles (Esping Andersen, 2009). Although a high rate of young women are employed (66.5 percent of women between 30 and 34 in 2015, according to the Spanish Labour Force Surveys), gender inequality is still very present in the domestic sphere: the most recent time use survey (2010) shows that women spend twice as much time in domestic and care work than men. On the other hand, we think that the qualitative characteristics that we analyze for Spain could also be applicable to other settings.

Data and Method

This article draws on a research project that interviewed 68 dual-income couples in four Spanish towns. Couples were interviewed while expecting their first child –first wave of interviews- and 18-24 months after birth –second wave-. Most couples (53) were contacted through childbirth preparation courses, which most women attend free of charge. The researchers presented an outline of the project in a neutral fashion, mentioning leisure time, working life and domestic work as some of the topics to be discussed, but not “gender”. Some couples (13) were contacted through social networks, and two were snow-balled by participating couples. Respondents were not paid to participate in the study, although they did receive a gift as a sign of gratitude. Most interviews took place at the couples’ homes in 2011 and 2013 by nine different interviewers, eight women and one man, of a similar age group to that of the couples (between 30 and 45 years of age).

Couples were selected according to a non-probabilistic but stratified purposive sampling. Both members of the couple had to be active in the labor market, and we included couples with different levels of education, employment trajectories and earnings. Couples were not selected on their gender ideology or attitudes. In general, it is very unlikely that couples with a high degree of conflict –about anything- agree to be interviewed, so we must take into account that in this type of research we are probably interviewing couples with a more harmonious relationship than the average. Despite this, we did observe some conflict and disagreement in the couples studied.

Interviews followed a list of topics to be covered in depth. In the first wave, both partners were interviewed individually to explore their life courses, and then a third interview was held with both members of the couple at the same time to get an impression of couple dynamics and the changes in the division of domestic work during their life together. For each couple, all three interviews were carried out by the same interviewer, and the total duration of the interviews varied between 100 and 180 minutes. In the second wave, partners were interviewed separately. This strategy was adopted to give respondents more freedom to

explore dissatisfaction if needed, but it was also more practical, as it was difficult to carry out interviews with a child present. In the second wave the interview covered perceptions as parents, and the adaptations of career, leisure, and domestic work after parenthood. In the second wave 58 couples were interviewed due to attrition. For both waves, all the conversations were tape-recorded, transcribed and made anonymous.

According to the 2010 Spanish Time Use Survey, childless women aged 18 to 50 performed on average 68 percent of routine housework compared to 32 percent done by their male partners, which means that among childless couples in Spain an asymmetric division of housework still predominates. We considered that couples who agreed that the woman did up to 60 percent of domestic work and where the man did at least 40 percent qualified as nontraditional couples in the Spanish context. It must be noted that, according to the National Statistics Institute (INE, 2009), outsourcing domestic work in Spain is quite frequent. In a special survey on this topic carried out in 2009, 14.4 percent of households had paid domestic help, and the percentage was higher among families in which the main respondent had college studies (37 percent), as well as in cities. In accordance with these data, many couples in our sample had some domestic help for two-three hours a week. Four high-income couples had more than four hours of help every week before parenthood, and we decided to exclude them from the analysis, as few tasks were left to be divided among the partners and this made it difficult to compare them with the rest of the sample.

To select couples with a non-traditional arrangement in the first wave, we turned first to couples' own reports about the percentage distributions of domestic work. Interviewees had been asked to describe their daily routines and how they organized routine domestic chores (general cleaning, toilet cleaning, cooking, washing up, laundry, hanging clothes to dry, ironing and shopping for groceries) which are considered more "feminine" tasks (Coltrane, 2000). We analyze only these tasks because they represent the greater bulk of work and are stereotyped as female. After describing the domestic tasks that they performed pre-pregnancy, respondents were asked to reach an agreement about the percentage of domestic chores that each of them did, as a "summary measure". Frequently, the couples discussed each one's relative contribution to housework, which nuanced previous self-perceptions and sometimes showed latent conflicts. We then checked for consistency between the percentages the couple had agreed upon and the detailed descriptions about who performed each task in the individual and couple interviews, and two cases were considered inconsistent because the couple had provided a fifty/fifty estimation but in the more detailed accounts women were doing more tasks and more often than men. After cross-checking all the information, the final subsample to be analyzed was made up of 27 non-traditional couples in the first wave, all of which were also interviewed in the second wave (see Appendix A for details). Women in these couples were highly educated: 24 had a college degree and three had vocational training. In contrast, men were more heterogeneous: 13 had a college degree, whereas 10 had vocational training and four had attained primary or secondary education. Thus, this sample is skewed towards women with a high level of education.

We use the same 60/40 as a reference for the second wave: if women who were doing less than 60 percent in the first wave declared doing more than that in the second one, we consider that the couple has traditionalized. An important methodological problem when analyzing the division of domestic work in the second wave was the relationship between childcare and domestic chores. These activities are not easy to separate –neither for the couples nor for the researcher-, but there are important analytical differences between them that must be kept in mind. First, routine domestic chores (cleaning, cooking, doing the laundry) are often considered as annoying and a burden. This type of work has always been part of families' everyday lives, and is likely to be influenced by former arrangements and routines after

parenthood. In contrast, childcare tasks are new to first-time parents, and thus childcare patterns have to be developed and might be influenced by a broader set of norms on education or parenting styles. Furthermore, many childcare activities are highly valued by parents. In this research we will follow Ishii-Kuntz and Coltrane (1992) and treat housework and childcare as two distinct but interrelated activities.

The analysis was carried out by the three authors in a collaborative way, which means that all of us participated in the coding process and read and analyzed the transcripts of the interviews as a group. In addition, all authors had been interviewers. The coding process included multi-person inter-rater reliability checks of coding and interpretation. Both the individual and the couple interviews were analyzed together, which means we triangulated “his”, “her” and “their” interviews, as well as the interviews from the second wave. We studied the 27 couples with at least a 60/40 housework division before childbirth in-depth following an abductive reasoning such as that suggested by Timmermans and Tavory (2012). This means we moved back and forth between data and theory iteratively, discussing our findings as a group. The notions about what a fair division of work would be, as well as attitudes towards domestic work and gender issues in general, were not directly asked in the interviews but have been deduced and analyzed from the discourses throughout the interviews. Interviewees made such normative statements at different moments: when they remembered how the initial housework arrangement came into place, when they justified changes in the division of domestic chores, or when they compared themselves to significant others, for example.

Results

None of the traditional couples in the original study became non-traditional after childbirth, but for the 27 non-traditional couples we observed two different evolutions concerning the division of domestic work: 17 couples managed to resist traditionalization whereas ten couples traditionalized. In this section we will examine the factors that influenced these different transitions.

Keeping a non-traditional division of domestic work

According to the literature, the fact that some couples managed not to traditionalize could be explained by economic factors: if both members of the couple had similar economic resources and therefore similar bargaining power. However, when we examined the distribution of resources within these couples before childbirth, we found different configurations, and six cases where women had indeed lower resources than men (see Appendix A). The only resource that was always balanced or favored women was educational attainment: all women in this subsample had at least the same educational attainment as their partners. But we must note that even if women’s relative advantage in education could be considered a necessary factor, it cannot be deemed sufficient, as we also found couples with traditional arrangements where this relative advantage was present. The relative distribution of resources did not change significantly after childbirth, except for two couples (1 and 15 in the Appendix A), where women reduced their participation in the labor market after becoming mothers. These reductions entailed lower salaries, but were temporary, and were not associated with changes in the division of domestic work.

Time availability is another factor highlighted in the literature that could help explain this non-traditional equilibrium. Yet, both before and after childbirth, we found cases where women had more time available than their partners. Some women did increase their time availability after childbirth by reducing their working hours, but this time was used to care for

their children and did not influence their involvement in routine domestic work. Thus, neither economic resources nor time availability provided a sufficiently good explanation for these non-traditional arrangements, although equality in educational attainment (or women's relative advantage) was a common feature of these couples. Six couples outsourced domestic work (they paid someone to do the cleaning two hours a week) before childbirth, but outsourcing did not change on the second wave, therefore it does not explain the resistance to traditionalization.

In turn, our analysis showed that the most important factor that helped explain the maintenance of a non-traditional division were couples' previous practices. These divisions of domestic work were based on egalitarian beliefs, as shown by Risman and Summerford (1998), but these practices had additional characteristics that proved vital for the future: they were well established and had become "routine"; they relied in most cases on flexible standards about domestic work, and on an active participation of men. These qualitative characteristics of the division of domestic work allowed couples to resist traditionalization. We will describe them in more details.

For the couples that succeed in keeping the division of domestic work non-traditional, such a division had been established for some time. This involved developing practical strategies to accomplish chores, for instance each partner specializing in specific tasks, or taking turns, or setting one specific day of the week to do the cleaning together. The strategies entailed also reductions of domestic work, for instance not ironing clothes. Although doing the domestic work with a baby at home posed some challenges and some specific tasks had to be rearranged—for example one of the parents did the vacuum cleaning while the other one took the child to the park-, the general strategies did not change, as they were well established routines. For instance, Sergio and Sara had established their division of domestic work in a non-traditional way since the beginning of their relationship. They both had college studies and had jobs that they enjoyed, although Sergio had a higher salary and a more flexible time schedule than Sara. They did the shopping together and cleaned the house on the weekends. When one of them prepared the meal, the other one would do the dishes, and they both did the laundry when it was needed and they had a moment. Sergio summarized the division of work in his interview after becoming a father by highlighting its stability:

Interviewer (I): "Has the division of domestic work changed after the arrival of the baby?"

SERGIO: "No, not substantially. Substantially, I do not think so. I think that we keep working (the same way). At least now that we have a routine that is established, and we keep working like we did before, at least as far as I can remember." (second wave)

Both before and after childbirth, most couples showed some specialization (one of the partners always did one specific task), combined with sharing other tasks, notably cleaning the apartment, which was often carried out by both members of the couple at the same time.

The non-traditionalism of these couples must be nuanced here, because when there was specialization, it was often gendered, particularly for women: we observed that women were more often in charge of chores related to clothes (washing, folding). After childbirth, food preparation for the babies was also taken up more frequently by women. These examples illustrate that a quantitatively non-traditional share can be qualitatively gendered.

In addition to well-established routines, a second characteristic of these non-traditional divisions of work were the relatively lower standards that these couples showed, compared to the other couples in our study. Before childbirth, standards of cleanliness and tidiness were an

important factor to explain non-traditional arrangements. Among most couples maintaining non-traditional divisions we found that women's standards were more relaxed, or that men's standards were higher than their partners'. In these couples many women found domestic work cumbersome and preferred to invest their time in other activities. This was the case for Conchi and Carlos, who had a non-traditional division of housework where Carlos did more tasks under the week, and they cleaned the house together on the weekend. They attributed their division of work to their different preferences: Conchi was very work-centered and preferred to spend her free time in more relaxing activities, whereas for Carlos it was more important to keep the dwelling tidy. Conchi illustrated this idea, when she explained that she did not dedicate much time to housework:

I: "Then, domestic work is more or less residual for you?"

CONCHI: "Yes, well (laughs). That's true. I mean, I like having (the house) tidy, but my philosophy is... For instance, if I have been working all week, or if we have both been working all week, and we have practically not seen each other, and the weather is nice, I am not going to stay (home) to do the cleaning and miss a wonderful day. I mean, I prefer going out. And well, we have a small house (...). When we did (the cleaning) together, then each of us would start on one side, for instance I did the kitchen, he did the dusting, I did the ironing, he did the vacuum cleaning, and maybe that could take us two hours on a Saturday morning ." (first wave)

This factor was strongly present also after childbirth; on the second wave, Conchi said that she prioritized and preferred spending time with her baby rather than cleaning. In this new stage, flexibility was crucial: there was a baby in the family and therefore the dwelling could not be cleaned with the same frequency or thoroughness; there were more tasks to attend to, and less time to do them. For some couples it was clear that the standards had to be reconsidered, and for them it was easier to keep the non-traditional arrangement. For instance, for Sara and Sergio it was obvious that keeping the house clean was more complicated after the birth of the baby, and both seemed to accept that standards had to be relaxed:

SARA: "(...)We have not changed radically (regarding domestic chores), well, maybe I am less fussy about cleanliness, because lately I have become more careless." (second wave)

SERGIO: "I think we are satisfied (with the division of domestic work), keeping in mind that sometimes our house is a mess. Because you accumulate tasks, and at one point you tell yourself: wow, what are we doing here? But I can live with that and so does my wife, so that's it." (second wave)

The decision to flexibilize standards was important to reduce the potential increase of domestic work that would have to be assumed, were the same standards to be maintained with a baby or a toddler. It was also important to help dealing with couple conflicts when partners had different standards, which could often lead to traditionalization as we will see below.

Another interesting characteristic of couples that managed to keep a non-traditional division was that men had a more active attitude towards doing the domestic work than other men in our sample. Although most men, even those in more traditional arrangements, expressed the politically correct view that domestic work did not have to be gendered, not all of them backed this opinion with their actions, and many used the strategies identified by Hochschild and Machung (1989) to defer housework, such as playing dumb (showing incompetence to do

chores, which leads the person who is more competent to take up more) or waiting to be asked (showing willingness to do chores but lack of initiative, sending back to the other person the responsibility to ask for help). Men in couples that stayed non-traditional after parenthood did not wait to be asked to do the domestic work –or did so less than others–: they had internalized the need to do it and integrated on their daily lives at least part of the planning and organizing. This attitude is often ascribed to women, and sometimes couples perceived that they were indeed different from others in this sense, as illustrated by Conchi:

CONCHI: “(...) Here (in her couple) the roles are reversed. Carlos wants to have the house more (tidy). If there are clothes to be ironed, then he does the ironing. And me, I’m more careless, but well, I prioritize, maybe we can do the ironing tomorrow. And Carlos gets really nervous about it. Like right now, he told me “while you are doing the interview I think I will go swimming”, and afterwards he told me he was not going to the swimming pool, that he was staying home to get the ironing done. And I thought “boy, you can do the ironing later”.” (second wave)

On the background of their relatively flexible standards and established routines, these couples shared the idea that work should not be divided along gender lines, but they formulated this egalitarian idea in different ways. We found two approaches to egalitarian values, which implied different ideas about what constitutes a fair division of work: the first one was based on a 50-50 division of domestic work, whereas the second one was based on a 50-50 division of all work (paid and unpaid). For couples on the first approach, both members considered that sharing the domestic work equally (around 50-50) was the fair arrangement, irrespective of time constraints or availabilities. Paid work and unpaid work were separate issues, and time spent in domestic work was to be divided equally, whereas time spent in paid work was an individual matter.

In contrast, couples on the second approach had a different idea: for them, it was not merely unpaid work, but the overall amount of work, paid and unpaid, that should be equally shared. For these couples one member should do more at home if he or she did less paid work, thus time availability would be the main predictor of the division of domestic work. To be sure, this logic could result in a traditional division of work, but it can also foster a non-traditional division if women have less time available at home. When these couples explained how their divisions of domestic chores had evolved during their life together, their narratives showed that men and women had changed their involvement according to their job constraints. Institutional factors were determinant for them, but we can also say that they wanted to share work equitably. These two approaches to fairness were not static, and indeed we found some couples whose discourse changed from the first approach to the second one after childbirth.

Despite the somewhat different approaches to equality, all couples that did not traditionalize shared the idea that domestic work should not be gendered and that both his time, her time, and their time together was important. Men’s attitudes and readiness to get involved in domestic work were crucial to achieve and maintain such non-traditional divisions. We found examples of this involvement for instance in cases where men presented doing housework as a way to spend more leisure time with their partners, or when they assumed more tasks to take care of their wives during pregnancy. Their female partners were aware of this and showed gratitude. Sara and Sergio are a good illustration of this. Sergio had a flexible working schedule, which he used for some time to sleep in. But at one point, before we first interviewed him, he decided to start working earlier to leave earlier, so as to have more free time in the afternoons. He used that free time to do domestic chores and run errands, so that when Sara arrived from work, they could enjoy some time together. They had a non-

traditional division of work before pregnancy, but when she got pregnant, she started feeling very tired and felt lazy about doing some of the tasks she used to do, which Sergio assumed instead:

SARA: “Now, with my pregnancy he does much more at home. I still clean the bathroom, but he does the ironing, the kitchen, tidying up... Much more than me. Sometimes I feel a bit ashamed, because after lunch, I feel like I don’t want to do the dishes because I want to rest a bit. And then I feel bad because when he gets home he has to clean up my mess.”

SERGIO: “Don’t worry, I don’t mind about it at all.”

SARA: “And then, after dinner it’s the same...”

SERGIO: Nothing, nothing, that’s nothing” (first wave)

The acknowledgement of men’s involvement and the feelings of gratitude about that involvement were part of the division of work that these couples had established before becoming parents. Sergio’s words and his decision about how to use his flexible work time also demonstrate that he had internalized the need to do the housework.

Thus, our analysis shows that couples who managed to maintain a non-traditional division of domestic chores after becoming parents shared egalitarian ideas about gender roles, expressed either as a commitment to a 50-50 division of tasks or to a division based on relative time availability. Domestic routines were well-established in these couples, with domestic standards that were more flexible than in traditional households. Men’s active participation was a key element to resist traditionalization.

An important caveat of our analysis is that it is often difficult to separate routine tasks from childcare in the interviews. For instance, some couples described food preparation for the babies as childcare, others as cooking. The analysis of child care patterns goes beyond the scope of this paper, but we can briefly note that many of the couples that managed to stay non-traditional in routine domestic work also distributed the amount of care in a nontraditional manner, and in some cases, fathers assumed more care than mothers. This was not always the case and in some couples mothers did assume more care while keeping a nontraditional arrangement for the domestic chores. This is an interesting fact because the literature has shown that men tend to devote more time to care tasks than to routine housework, which leads women to “traditionalize” by investing more in routine chores (Bianchi et al., 2012). In our sample we find that it was not always the case, and that some men invest themselves in care without abandoning domestic chores.

Becoming more traditional in the division of domestic work

Ten couples (18-27 in the appendix) in our sample did not maintain their nontraditional division of routine domestic work after parenthood. For two couples (18-19), external factors –job loss- altered couple’s time availability and redefined their ideas about a fair division of work. Both couples had well-established divisions, but women became unemployed after having their babies, losing resources and increasing their time availability significantly. Although these couples’ discourse on the first wave was based on the idea that the domestic work should be divided equally, their perception changed in the second wave, and their discourses were more centered around the idea that it was fair for one member of the couple to do more if he or she worked less time for pay than the other. However, this new division

was perceived as temporary and women were not satisfied with it. These changes illustrated that the division of work can be dynamic and redefined, and influenced by contextual factors.

After becoming parents, there were some changes in employment and relative resources, although in most couples women continued to have at least similar resources than their partners (except for one, where she also increased her time availability, see couple 23 in the Appendix A). Despite having balanced resources, women in these couples increased their involvement in domestic work after childbirth, and did more than 60 percent, while men kept doing and avoiding domestic tasks as before, so bargaining power does not seem to be a candidate to explain the changes in the housework division. Regarding time availability, it stayed similar to the first wave or it decreased for women (only one woman reduced her working hours and became more available than her partner to do domestic chores, number 27 in the Appendix A). In principle, these women were as able as before to push the men to do their share of routine housework. One of the couples started outsourcing (two hours a week) domestic work, and another increased the amount of help they received, but this increase in outsourcing did not prevent traditionalization.

For most couples (20-27 in the Appendix A) traditionalization was related to the division of work before parenthood: their non-traditional division was indeed fragile and not well-established as it was in couples who resisted traditionalization. The division of work in these couples had specific characteristics in the first wave, when we compare it to the couples that resisted traditionalization: men did a significant part of domestic work, but often at the insistence of their partners; men's involvement in domestic work was less proactive, and in these couples we also find disagreements about standards that were not as flexible as in the couples that resisted traditionalization. These three characteristics are interrelated.

Before parenthood, men expressed egalitarian attitudes and supported in principle the idea that domestic chores had to be shared equally, but they showed a more passive attitude towards actually doing the work. Women would have liked to have had a 50/50 arrangement, and had tried to get their partners involved in such a division, but men showed a passive attitude or directly confronted it. What they contested was not the idea of an equal share *per se*, but the domestic standards pursued by the female members of the couple, deemed too demanding. Some couples outsourced domestic work as a way to solve this conflict, but the level of outsourcing was, in general, quite low (usually a cleaner coming two-three hours a week to clean the apartment and do some ironing). Outsourcing was also used by couples that maintained a non-traditional division after childbirth.

All women in this group had a strong bargaining power, that is, they were in a good position to try to mobilize their male counterparts as their resources were similar or superior to their partners' in all cases. To solve the contradiction between their egalitarian attitudes and their partners' behavior, some women had raised the question and sought an agreement to share more equally. Explicit negotiation is a strategy being reported also by non-traditional couples in the Netherlands (Wiesmann et al., 2008). Also, some women had to relax their standards and avoid gate-keeping attitudes to maintain the desired non-traditional division because their partners were not ready to comply with their higher standards. For these couples, having a configuration of time or resources that favored a non-traditional arrangement did not automatically produce one. Elements of traditional gender roles were present: gendered standards and ways of doing things, the use of the gendered strategy of reducing needs suggested by Hochschild and Machung (1989), and the difficulty to give up male privilege in practice. So, men resisted in a more or less open way and women needed to be constantly pushing, which meant that conflict was latent on many occasions. Men actually did a significant share of chores, but this was the result of women's initiative: women either

organized chores, or the couple had periodic arguments about the division of work and women remained vigilant that the agreements were honored.

This was the case for Fabiola and Federico, who showed very egalitarian attitudes towards housework in wave one. Both said that an equal share was fair and they described cleaning, shopping and laundering together, whereas she ironed and he cooked. But their division of work relied heavily on Fabiola's initiative and vigilance, as illustrated by this quotation from the first wave:

FEDERICO: "Yes, she is a bit more in charge of planning like, "we have to do the laundry". I am more the executing arm.

Interviewer: [to FABIOLA] "So, you take the initiative more often?"

FEDERICO: "Yes, yes."

FABIOLA: "The laundry is done when I say "Federico, do the laundry", and then he does it. But I have to say that he does not complain, he just does not think about it himself (laughs), so well..."

Interviewer: "And this happens only with the laundry or with other things too?"

FABIOLA: "No, with everything... It was just an example, yes, (I say) "Federico, the curtains are dirty", and (he says) "What? Why cleaning them?" And the bed sheets, (for him) we don't need to change them, because there are no stains on them."

(...)"

FEDERICO: "(...) But I have also carved out some routines in my day, for instance, for sweeping the floor, or dusting, those (chores) are part of my routine." (first wave)

This discussion illustrates that the division of work was partly based on a manager (Fabiola) and helper (Federico) dynamic, but also on the division of certain tasks and the development of routines. Fabiola appears to have higher standards than Federico, who would wait to clean something until it is visibly stained. After childbirth we observed that the organization and planning of tasks became constantly present for Fabiola, whereas her spouse did not think ahead of the chores that had to get done. Fabiola was aware that she assumed more work at home after the birth of her child, and she disliked the situation, which she blamed on her partner, because he did not have the same standards and preferred to relax when he had the time, waiting to be asked to do housework. Federico was also aware of the imbalance. The conflict became explicit at times, but it was always present for Fabiola, as illustrated by these descriptions of a similar event in their respective individual interviews at wave two:

FABIOLA: "Washing clothes, tidying up (laughs), I do more domestic chores than him (...): I argue a lot with him because when the baby falls asleep, often I make the most of that time to do the ironing: on the weekends, in the morning... And Federico, well, he chooses that moment to play videogames. And of course, that drives me crazy. I try to be understanding, but you see yourself ironing like crazy because you only have one free hour and there he is playing videogames (...)." (second wave)

FEDERICO: "Well, sometimes we do (argue), but mostly because I am lazier. When the weekend comes and you say "I don't feel like it" (...). I think it is more because she says "come on, we have to do whatever, clean the curtains", and she has to take the initiative and suggest it, and I am lazier. I am fed up with working, I don't want to go on working on weekends, I think."

I: "And how do you solve this?"

FEDERICO: "In the end we discuss it, and I think about it, and I say "yes, you are right, we must do it", and then we do it (laughs)." (second wave)

Fabiola was the organizer of the tasks, but she also had high standards compared to the women who resisted traditionalization, because she described ironing or washing the curtains very often. In this couple, traditional attitudes conflicted with gender egalitarian attitudes and the first seemed to win over the second after childbirth. This regendering of housework occurred despite both couples' favorable conditions for undoing gender. At wave two, traditionalization did not seem to be related to external changes, but rather to the fact that Fabiola kept adhering to high standards concerning cleaning, order and ironing, while Federico preferred to spend time playing, or with their child, and waited to be asked to do domestic chores. His strategy of waiting to be asked and his passive attitude became too difficult to bear for Fabiola. In wave one the different standards and the management of tasks did not weight so much in this couple's perception of their division of housework. Now, with an increasing work load and tiredness, Fabiola perceived she did more than him, while he considered doing nearly half of the domestic chores.

In the couples that traditionalized after having a child, none of the women relaxed their standards, and in some cases they increased them, because new and high standards were set in place for childcare and related activities. Men's passive attitudes automatically turned the person who managed housework or who had higher standards into the one "responsible", or "expert" about tasks. The "expert" often preferred to assume the tasks solo, so as not to raise conflicts, or because she perceived that eventually doing it herself took less time and effort than repeatedly asking for help. Mara and Mauro illustrate this dynamic. In their first interview, they agreed that their division of work was 60 percent for Mara and 40 percent for Mauro, and explained that they had achieved this after Mara had complained that she was doing too much, and Mauro had accepted to divide the chores more equally. But Mauro recognized that he still tried to avoid cleaning the bathroom, which was one of the chores he was supposed to do.

MAURO: "(laughs) I am messy. I don't like doing it (cleaning the bathroom), and I try to avoid it, but that does not mean that I don't do anything else."

(...)

MARA: "You tell yourself "If I have to wait until he does it, I'd better do it myself", but that would be a mistake."

MAURO: "I pull the rope, I know how much I can pull it, I imagine she (Mara) does the same for other things, but well, there is no conflict, some frictions, for sure, but it's OK."

MARA: "(...) For the time being it's not a conflict, but I don't know, with the baby it might be more, because in addition to the house, and work, you have to take care of the baby (...)" (first wave)

After becoming parents, Mauro reduced his working hours to take care of the child, becoming a very involved father, while Mara worked long hours. They did not outsource domestic work but Mara increased her share of tasks, cleaning and doing the laundry while her partner was already in bed. She also started ironing the baby's clothes, but ironing was a task that she did not do before motherhood. She was not happy with their division of work in the second wave,

but saw it as the most practical alternative. In doing so, she was adopting the behavior she had described as a mistake in the first wave.

MARA: "So we have changed completely, we have adapted, we liked it better before but now this is what we have. He does more of the cooking and we were discussing it the other day, I am tired because I tell myself "in the end, I am the one who is cleaning, tidying up etcetera". (...). What happens is that I get exhausted if I have to be telling (Mauro): "do this, do that", because in the end, to be more practical, at eleven or at midnight, because I do it at that time, I get everything (the chores) done in half an hour, because I do it really fast." (second wave)

Having different standards was also related to women perceiving themselves as the organizers of domestic chores. This additional chore –planning the tasks that need to be done, worrying, thinking about them- emerged in many women’s discourses in the second wave as a task on its own, whereas in the interviews before childbirth it was hardly mentioned by our sample. After becoming mothers some women described it as a particularly heavy and omnipresent load. This “invisible task” became more visible with children in the household, because of their specific needs concerning food and hygiene, and the schedules that were not easy to flexibilize. This invisible task generated dissatisfaction and fatigue, as the time spent thinking, planning, and taking the initiative created the feeling of never disconnecting from the needs of the household, which had an effect on women’s wellbeing. In turn, this affected women’s satisfaction with the emotional support they received and, possibly, their satisfaction with the relationship. Although the weight of the “invisible task” was not exclusive of these couples, it was much more present in the discourses of couples that traditionalized.

To conclude, two factors led to traditionalization in our sample: having a nontraditional division that was fragile before childbirth due to gender strategies, and in two cases, external factors that radically altered women’s time availability. The fragile division entailed a passive participation of men and disagreements about standards, with women playing a more active role in managing the division of domestic work. Men continued preserving, more or less implicitly, some of their male privileges, or seemed to trade involvement in child care for less domestic work. In these couples the presence of a child strengthened the pre-existing gender strategies.

Discussion

In this article we have analyzed changes in the division of domestic work after first parenthood, using a longitudinal qualitative methodology and a sample of 27 Spanish couples that had a non-traditional division of routine domestic chores before childbirth. Our couples were selected from a larger sample because of their non-traditional practices. We wanted to know whether and how it was possible for couples to resist the trend towards traditionalization that has been shown in the literature. Our results show that 17 couples in our sample were able to maintain a non-traditional division of domestic work, whereas ten couples traditionalized. In our analysis, relative resources and time availability did not explain traditionalization or the lack of it. In contrast, the specific characteristics of the division of work before childbirth emerged as crucial factors to resist the trend towards more traditional arrangements. These characteristics were related to gendered norms and gendered interactions.

The division of work in couples that resisted traditionalization was based on egalitarian beliefs about domestic work, as has been pointed out by the literature. However, these

practices had additional characteristics that proved important for the future: they were well established and had become “routine”; they relied on an active participation of men, and in most cases on flexible standards about domestic work. Couples that traditionalized also expressed egalitarian beliefs, but the non-traditional division of domestic work in wave one was still a work in progress, much dependent on women’s initiative and on men playing the gender strategies described by Hochschild and Machung (1989). Those gender strategies were accentuated by parenthood and pushed couples towards more traditional divisions of chores.

Our study contributes to theories on the division of domestic work by unveiling qualitative factors that were determinant to understand changes in the division of domestic work in the transition to parenthood. Our 27 couples were non-traditional in quantitative terms, but the specific characteristics of their division of work made all the difference in the transition to parenthood. To be sure, this does not mean that couples who did not traditionalize were free from gendered interactions. For instance, specialization in feminine or masculine tasks was still present in many cases, especially concerning clothes. The couples that resisted traditionalization were not perfectly undoing gender, but they were making a significant step in that direction in the Spanish context.

Certainly, the Spanish context has had an influence on our results, but less than we had anticipated. Outsourcing domestic work in Spain is cheaper than in other countries, but most couples in our sample did already outsource in the first wave - two hours per week approximately- and did not alter their outsourcing patterns after childbirth. Given that the division of domestic work in Spain remains more traditional than in other European countries, gendered expectations might be stronger here than in other cases, and gender strategies and conflicts, such as those found in couples that traditionalize, might be more salient. On the other hand, the need of two wages in the Spanish economic context might also explain why none of the participants in our sample took parental leave for an extended period of time, which would have entailed a change in domestic work (Fox, 2009). However, the mechanisms that facilitate a non-traditional division of work described in our analysis need not be exclusive of the Spanish case: men’s active or passive attitudes, standards concerning domestic tasks, and the routinization of chores can be significant characteristics in other contexts.

Our definition of a non-traditional arrangement has important limitations, as it referred to the amount of work performed. The increase of women’s share of routine domestic work after first parenthood is only one aspect of the effects that the transition to parenthood can have on the division of work and the gender structure. The quality of the work performed is an additional element that could be explored in further research. We have also deliberately separated domestic work and childcare, but the interrelationship of both types of work after parenthood, as well as the relationship with the labor market, should also be explored if we want to fully understand the impact that parenthood has on the division of domestic work, care work and on gendered interactions.

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Appendix. Subsample of 27 Non-Traditional Couples (Definitions in text or below)

ID and names ID. Woman Man	Education level	ID / Family income	Relative Resources Wave1 Wave2	Available Time Wave1 Wave2	Out-sourcing Wave 1 Wave 2	Share of domestic work Wave 1 Maintained Wave 2
1. Sara Sergio	University University	Middle	Similar <i>She less</i>	She less <i>She less</i>	No <i>No</i>	50/50 Yes
2. Elena Enrique	University Vocational	Middle	She more <i>She more</i>	She less <i>She less</i>	No <i>No</i>	50/50 Yes
3. Delia David	University University	Middle	She more <i>She more</i>	She less <i>She less</i>	No <i>No</i>	50/50 Yes
4. Julia Javier	University University	Middle	She more <i>She more</i>	Similar <i>Similar</i>	Yes <i>Yes*</i>	30/70 Yes
5. Karina Karlos	University Vocational	High	Similar <i>Similar</i>	She less <i>She more</i>	Yes <i>Yes*</i>	50/50 Yes
6. Mar Rogelio	University Secondary	Middle	She more <i>Similar</i>	She more <i>She more</i>	Yes <i>Yes*</i>	60/40 Yes
7. Gema Gabriel	University Vocational	Low	She more <i>She more</i>	She less <i>She less</i>	No <i>No</i>	30/70 Yes
8. Noemi Abel	Vocational Primary	Low	She less <i>She less</i>	She less <i>She less</i>	No <i>No</i>	60/40 Yes
9. Rebeca Roberto	University University	High	She less <i>She less</i>	She more <i>She more</i>	Yes <i>Yes*</i>	50/50 Yes
10. Luisa Felipe	Vocational Vocational	Middle	She less <i>She less</i>	She less <i>She more</i>	No <i>No</i>	55/45 Yes
11. Alba Andrés	University University	Middle	She less <i>She less</i>	Similar <i>She more</i>	Yes <i>Yes*</i>	50/50 Yes
12. Feli Fermín	Vocational Vocational	Middle	Similar <i>Similar</i>	She less <i>She less</i>	No <i>No</i>	30/70 Yes
13. Eva Eloy	University University	Middle	She more <i>She more</i>	She less <i>She less</i>	No <i>No</i>	50/50 Yes

14. Ana Ángel	University University	Middle	Similar <i>Similar</i>	She less <i>She less</i>	No <i>No</i>	40/60 Yes
15. Marta Miguel	University University	Middle	She more <i>She less</i>	She less She less	Yes <i>Yes*</i>	50/50 Yes
16. Conchi Carlos	University University	Middle	She more <i>She more</i>	She less <i>Similar</i>	No <i>No</i>	40/60 Yes
17.Fátima Ferrán	University Primary	Middle	She more <i>She more</i>	She less <i>She less</i>	No <i>No</i>	50/50 Yes
18. Bego Blas	University Vocational	Middle	She less <i>She less</i>	She more <i>She more</i>	No <i>No</i>	60/40 No
19. Caro César	University University	Low	She less <i>Similar</i>	She more <i>She more</i>	No <i>No</i>	60/40 No
20. Laura Luis	University University	High	Similar <i>Similar</i>	Similar <i>Similar</i>	Yes <i>Yes*</i>	60/40 No
21. Verónica Víctor	University Vocational	Low	She more <i>She more</i>	She less <i>She less</i>	No <i>No</i>	40/60 No
22. Rosa Rafael	University Vocational	High	She more <i>She more</i>	She less <i>She less</i>	Yes <i>Yes⁺</i>	50/50 No
23. María Mario	University University	Middle	Similar <i>She less</i>	She more <i>She more</i>	No <i>Yes</i>	60/40 No
24. Mara Mauro	University Secondary	Middle	She more <i>Similar</i>	She more <i>She less</i>	No <i>No</i>	60/40 No
25. Isabel Israel	University Vocational	Middle	She more <i>Similar</i>	She less <i>She less</i>	Yes <i>Yes*</i>	50/50 No
26. Fabiola Federico	University University	Middle	Similar <i>Similar</i>	She less <i>She less</i>	No <i>No</i>	60/40 No
27.Olga Oscar	University Vocational	Middle	She more <i>Similar</i>	Similar <i>She more</i>	Yes <i>No</i>	60/40 No

Note: Household income intervals: Low is up to 2,799 €, Middle is up to 3,999 €, and High is from 4,000 € upwards. Educational level: Vocational means Vocational Training. *Same amount of hours + more hours.