

From Work-Sharing Couples to Equal Parents – Changing Perspectives of Men and Gender Equality

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Involving men in the care of children has become an important part of Norwegian, Nordic and, increasingly, international policies on gender equality. This article takes as its starting point the critique of the male breadwinner model in early Norwegian family research and the radical model of equal sharing of breadwinning and care that was suggested by the sociologist Erik Grønseth. These ideas were implemented in an experimental research project – the Work-Sharing Couples Project – in which both spouses worked part-time and shared housework, at a time when Norwegian family policies were in their formative years in the early 1970s. The article draws on a recent follow-up study of the project, and discusses current conceptualisations of men and gender equality as compared to the Work-Sharing Couples Project and its policy ambitions.

Despite its ambition to influence family policy, the Work-Sharing Couples Project did not succeed in this respect. Rather, as will be argued in this article, gender equality policies have shrunk from a broad focus on sharing equally both in the labour market and the family, to a narrow focus on the family and the sharing of a welfare benefit – paid parental leave during the child's first year.

In the time that has passed, major changes have taken place in family law; in the development of welfare benefits for parents; in parental practices; as well as in the theorisation and general views on parenthood, couple relationships and children. The Work-Sharing Couples Project was founded on a critique of the male breadwinner model and a vision of a symmetrical arrangement of paid work and care as the basis of equality between men and women. These ideas were formulated as a radical social critique of contemporary arrangements of work and care within early Norwegian family research from the 1950s onwards. Today, the 'double' gender equality project has become hegemonic in family policy. In this paper I reflect on this transformation from a radical critique into a model of state steering. How did the once radical ideas and visions fare in the process, and how did the current model of gender equality emerge?

There are obvious similarities as well as important differences between contemporary conceptualisations and policies and the model of gender

equality that the Work-Sharing Couples Project sought to promote. This example is therefore particularly useful in discussing how some ideas and policy ambitions succeed and some do not, based on the view that what does not become policy is just as important as what does. By retracing how the current gender equality model emerged and became hegemonic in policy making and what happened to a competing policy model, I hope to shed some critical light on the current gender equality project, employing Carol Bacchi's policy analysis (Bacchi 1999; 2009).

What was/is the problem represented to be? (WPR)

According to Carol Bacchi, all policy proposals imply specific problematisations which reflect subconscious cultural assumptions, and within which power structures may be lodged. In Bacchi's conceptualisation, 'problems' are created within the policy-making process. Problematisations constitute or give shape to 'problems', and particular representations of problems play a central role in how we are governed. Representations, the ways in which policy problems are represented in public policies, translate into real, lived experience. Bacchi's policy analysis – 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) – is a way of conducting a critical policy analysis. The WPR analysis takes a 'backward' approach, using concrete policy proposals to reveal what is represented to be the 'problems' within those proposals, with an explicitly normative agenda:

It presumes that some problem representations benefit the members of some groups at the expense of others. It also takes the side of those who are harmed. The goal is to intervene to challenge problem representations that have these deleterious effects [...] (Bacchi 2009:44).

Bacchi's (2009:2) analytical approach consists of six questions:

1. What's the 'problem' (e.g. problem gamblers, drug use/abuse, gender inequality, domestic violence, global warming, or child sexual abuse) represented to be in a specific policy?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?
3. How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?
4. What is left as unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?
6. How/where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?

In seeing ‘problems’ as being ‘produced’ in the process of policy making, and in seeing ‘problematizations’ as part of ruling, Bacchi is heavily indebted to and makes extensive use of Foucault. Foucault is attending to the history of knowledge production, which he has variously termed the ‘archaeology’ or ‘genealogy’ of knowledge production. His method is to look at the continuities and discontinuities between the knowledge systems which informed the thinking during certain periods of history, and the social context within which certain knowledge and practices emerged as permissible and desirable, or were changed. In his view, knowledge is inextricably connected to power and often referred to as power/knowledge.

Internationally, there is an increasing interest in studying processes of knowledge production and policy development as processes of *co-production* (Jasanoff 2004) or *co-construction* (Taylor 1995) in which boundary organisations such as governmental commissions and social movements, play a key role. In Scandinavia, researchers of the development of the welfare state increasingly acknowledge the role of the social sciences in the construction of the welfare state, and the development of family policies as a ‘result of the amalgamation of political ambitions, social reforms and policy proposals put forward by social scientists employed as experts in governmental commissions’ (Lundquist and Roman 2008, 219).

In this paper, the ‘problem’ is men and gender equality, and I will start with genealogy (Bacchi’s third question). How has the current conceptualisation of men and gender equality come about? In so doing, I will use the Work-Sharing Couples Project of the 1970s and the theories that informed it, as well as the political fate of those ideas, as my point of reference.

Having worked my way through history, trying to trace the co-production of knowledge and policies from early Norwegian family research towards the present, I will return to Bacchi’s remaining questions to compare previous and contemporary conceptualisations of men and gender equality.

Men and gender equality in early Norwegian family research

Erik Grønseth was among the first Norwegian family researchers to draw attention to the question of men and gender equality. Drawing on the feminist pioneer Margarete Bonnevie and Wilhelm Reich, Grønseth (1956; 1970) criticised the male breadwinner model for jeopardising personal development as well as love relations between men and women, for its alienating effects on men, and for strengthening patriarchal dominance in the family. He emphasised the need for women to be financially independent of their husbands; only when meeting as free and equal individuals would love relationships be free of dominance and repression, and men and women would be able to develop their full potential as human beings. He further

emphasised the need for men to participate more equally in the daily care of their families, which he saw as emotionally gratifying for men as well as important for children's development.

Orchestrating egalitarian patterns of breadwinning and care in the 1970s

The Work-Sharing Couples Project was the realisation of Erik Grønseth's ideas in an experimental research project designed to promote more egalitarian family relations by orchestrating the mutual sharing of paid and unpaid work between husbands and wives, through both spouses working part-time and sharing domestic work and childcare. The study was carried out 1971–1975¹ on the initiative of the Norwegian Family Council and its leader, Ola Rokkones, and led by Erik Grønseth² from the Department of Sociology at the University of Oslo. Thirty years later, the participating couples were interviewed in a follow-up study.³ The original project was an action research project and – as the title of the main report indicates⁴ – men (too) working part-time were the main tool of change.

In a follow-up study, carried out 2005–2009, I found that the men had played a key role in initiating and implementing the work-sharing arrangement (Bjørnholt 2009a; 2011). This led me to pursue the question of men and gender equality.

Theorising gender relations 1950–70

In Norway, the Institute for Social Research (ISF), established in 1950, played a pivotal role in the development of sociology as a discipline, as well as in establishment of social research as an important element in the socio-democratic development of the welfare state (Thue 1997; Slagstad 2009). The ISF provided a thriving environment for interdisciplinary social research in the 1950s and 1960s, including studies of socialisation, the family and gender relations. Research into family, socialisation and gender relations involved psychologists and social psychologists, as well as the sociologist Erik Grønseth.

1. The project was initiated in 1969, but due to low response on the first sampling strategy, in which low-skill share-jobs were provided by large enterprises, aimed at recruiting working-class participants, the project team had to change strategy and eventually recruited a predominantly middle-class sample, mainly through the media and snowballing techniques, and in this way gradually succeeded in recruiting participants from 1971 onwards (Grønseth 1975).

2. Erik Grønseth was very enthusiastic about the follow-up study. He provided the material from the original study, as well as actively aiding the new study – he traced and contacted the first half of the participants before he died in the autumn of 2005.

3. The follow-up study was funded by the Research Council of Norway, the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs and the Department of Sociology and Human Geography at the University of Oslo.

4. Grønseth, E. 1975. *Også mannen på deltid i arbeidslivet* (Also the man working part-time). (Own translation.)

Erik Grønseth formulated a theoretical critique of Parsons's sex-role theory and the functionalist understanding of the family in 1956. Grønseth was inspired by Wilhelm Reich (Sand 2006), as well as by the Norwegian feminist pioneer Margarete Bonnevie (1932), who more than two decades earlier had formulated many of the ideas that Grønseth adopted and developed further.

The male breadwinner in Bonnevie/Grønseth's conceptualisation made women dependent on men, financially and emotionally, and the male provider role represented a basis for male power that led to an authoritarian family form which was detrimental to love. Grønseth also claimed that men's human potential was impaired through the lack of participation in the daily lives of their families.

Brun-Gulbrandsen and two of Grønseth's colleagues from the ISF, the psychologist Per Olav Tiller and sociologist Harriet Holter, contributed to the groundbreaking Swedish-Norwegian book, *Kvinnors liv och arbete* (Women's lives and work), edited by Edmund Dahlström (1962). Along with Dahlström, both Brun-Gulbrandsen and Holter presented important theoretical contributions to what would become the radical Scandinavian version of sex-role theory (Ellingsæter 2000).

Holter was the greatest contributor, and in her theoretical chapter (Holter 1962), she discussed sex-roles as a social structure, including the individual and social mechanisms that make sex-roles part of the societal structure. She further discussed continuity and change, both in a cross-cultural and historical perspective, and thus contributed to an understanding of sex-roles as dynamic and changeable.

In his contribution, Brun-Gulbrandsen (1962) focused on the negative aspects of the male sex-role and pointed out how socialisation into the (normal) male sex-role enhanced anti-social behaviour and characteristics, and how the male sex-role put men at risk in terms of health, as well as delinquency. Tiller's research into the socialisation of boys in seamen's families, established the 'danger' of father absence, which has repeatedly re-emerged in Norwegian research and public opinion right up to the present day.

During the 1960s, (the Scandinavian version of) sex-role theory became the paradigmatic approach to studying gender relations in the Nordic countries. Towards the end of the decade, the use of sex-role theory culminated with Harriet Holter's dissertation, *Sex Roles and Social Structure*, published in 1970, shortly before this theoretical framework was abandoned to give way to second-wave feminist academic scholarship.

Theorising gender in the 1970s

During the first part of the 1970s, under the influence of second-wave feminism and Marxism, the emphasis shifted towards theories of conflict and power.

At the same time there was considerable continuity in empirical research on families, and family research very much remained an interdisciplinary venture between sociologists and psychologists. From 1969, Holter participated in a large family research project – a collaboration between the ISF and the Department of Psychology at the University of Oslo. The title of the book from this project, *The Family in Class Society* (Holter, Ve Henriksen, Gjertsen and Hjort 1975) is indicative of a new theoretical paradigm. Throughout the 1970s, there was a strengthened focus on women through the emerging women's studies which combined empirical study of women's lives and the development of theory on women's subjugation, male dominance, patriarchy and gender in capitalist society. The state of the field by the mid-1970s is well covered in the anthology *Kvinnekunnskap* (Women's knowledge/Knowledge of women), edited by Støren and Schou Wetlesen (1976). In this anthology, Holter's contribution was titled 'On the Subjugation of Women, the Subjugation of Men and Techniques of Dominance', which illustrates the turn towards questions of structure and power.

Family and gender equality policy

Policy development has relied on inter-relations between researchers and policymakers in the national as well as the Nordic context, with governmental commissions and social movements, as important boundary organisations. In 1964 the Norwegian Labour Party established a commission on women's role, led by the Prime Minister Einar Gerhardsen, and with participation from the Labour Union as well as experts such as Harriet Holter and Åse Gruda Skard. The commission presented a broad programme for men and women's equal rights to paid work and equal responsibility for family life. In 1968 the twelfth meeting of the Nordic Federation of Women's Rights Association in Reykjavik, agreed upon a resolution pointing out the concept of the male breadwinner as the most important impediment to women's equal participation in society, and which emphasised the need for a revised social legislation and tax reforms as steps towards gender equality in all Scandinavian countries (Schönberg 1969).

With the first White Paper on children and the family (St.meld 51, 1973-74), the dual breadwinner model was introduced as the aim of family policies, and the promotion of women's paid work was declared a political goal. Further, the public responsibility to provide care facilities for children was acknowledged. In the first place, the change was primarily ideological and women's labour market participation preceded by far the development of welfare state benefits (Leira 1992). A substantial expansion of parental leave was finally gradually implemented 1987–93, while the aim of providing day-care to all children was not reached until 2008.

The rise of the women-friendly welfare state

During the 1970s and 1980s, important political initiatives that were aimed at the promotion of gender equality, took place. The women's movement can be seen to have been institutionalised, and its claims were (to some extent) taken up by the political apparatus. Helga Hernes (1987) argued that the relations between women and the state in the Scandinavian countries, represented a unique situation for the promotion of women's interests, based on alliances between women of different political orientations, as well as between women and the state, i.e. the state could be an instrument in developing a woman-friendly welfare state.

The publication of a series of books, *Kvinnens levekår og livsløp* (Women's living conditions and life course), contributed to legitimate women's claims for woman-friendly reforms. Still progress in this direction was slow. When policies gradually were implemented, they were framed within a consensual view on gender relations based on an alliance between pragmatic political actors and empirical research that focused on the organisation of everyday life, and to a large extent bracketing the radical thinking and theorising of the 1970s. I would claim that in Norway, the conflict perspective on gender relations, which dominated theorising in the 1970s and early 1980s, never reached policy making.

The Norwegian Gender Equality Act, passed in 1978, as well as the concept of gender equality, clearly bears the imprint of their conceptualisation within the consensual framework and the gender-neutral terminology of sex-role theory. This indicates that policies in this period were perhaps not so much the result of a co-production, as of a 'cultural lag' – a concept coined by Ogburn (1922) to describe the tendency for several phenomena, such as laws and wages, to lag behind other aspects of social change. The Scandinavian welfare states are, however, also prominent examples of proactive law reforms that preceded rather than lagged behind public opinion, as illustrated by Nordic family law reforms at the beginning of the 20th century, which placed the Nordic countries half a century ahead of other European countries in strengthening women's family based rights and financial citizen rights (Melby, Pylkkänen, Rosenbeck and Carlsson Wetterberg 2006).

Policy ambitions and activities

The Work-Sharing Couples Project was launched with an explicit ambition to influence policies. Parallel to the experimental research project, a Law Committee was established in 1972 to analyse the need for reforms that would facilitate the general implementation of the work-sharing model. The Committee (Norges familieråd 1975) suggested reforms in several domains, such as tax reductions for employers of part-time workers in order to replace tax rules that privileged the male breadwinner model with rules that

stimulated a dual-earner model based on both partners working part-time. It proposed to strengthen the rights of part-time workers in several ways, such as protection from discrimination and increased rights to pensions. People with high and middle incomes were expected to bear the costs of their part-time work themselves, but the committee proposed compensation for low-income groups. The committee also proposed welfare benefits, such as two weeks' paternity leave. This had the twofold motivation of husbands providing support to their wives, and allowing men to become more involved in their families. The reform proposals were presented in two broad hearings/seminars, which included policymakers, the main employers and workers' organisations and other participants.

In addition to the Law Committee, a survey of working-hours preferences was conducted (Gleffjell 1984), revealing that a large proportion of the population (45 %) supported a model that involved both parents working part-time, and only a tiny minority (1 %) supported the dual-earner model with both parents working full time. Gleffjell (1984, 27) concluded that in view of the strong support for the work-sharing model, the main obstacle to its general implementation must be the lack of political will.

In spite of the project's success as a research intervention and its broad reformatory ambition, the Work-Sharing Couples Project did not have any direct effect on policies, although many of the proposed reforms were later 'reinvented' and implemented during the 1980s and 1990s.

Erik Grønseth – a pioneer and the odd man out

Despite his pioneering role in theorising gender relations, Grønseth was in many respects the odd man out among his contemporaries. In *The Family in Class Society*, Holter and Ve Henriksen (1975, 18) reflected on the fact that from the mid-1950s, Erik Grønseth was alone in providing a theoretical analysis of the relations between the male provider role, the authoritarian family and the oppression of women, and in suggesting reforms such as the equal sharing of paid and unpaid work, as well as a cash-for-care scheme. They asked why Grønseth's ideas were not accepted in political and administrative circles, and pointed to three possible explanations: firstly, the work-sharing model conflicted with the demands of working life; secondly, his suggestion of a compensation to carers (cash-for-care) was seen to perpetuate a traditional breadwinning arrangement; and finally, they concluded that Grønseth's strongly liberal views on sexuality and marriage may have played a role.⁵

5. Interestingly, Holter and Ve Henriksen (1975) made no mention of the Work-Sharing Couples Project in which Grønseth had finally had the opportunity to try out some of his ideas. This omission is interesting in view of the strong public and media interest in the Work-Sharing Couples Project at the time. Grønseth's views on sexuality and marriage were highly controversial in the 1960s, but today they are generally accepted.

In my view, there were probably other reasons, too, why the double part-time model was not adopted.

Why did the double full-time, rather than the double part-time model become hegemonic?

That the gender equality project did not succeed in changing the norm of full-time work for men, nor the relation between paid and unpaid work in terms of a general reduction of working hours, relies on the embeddedness of the socio-democratic project in growth logic, where the demands of production and the labour market prevailed (Slagstad 1998). As a consequence, questions of working hours, as well as pay, have been left largely to the parties in working life, a sphere in which women have been weakly represented and gender equality has to a large extent been subordinated to the right of independent negotiations. This may again be seen as part of a general tendency for gender equality to be subordinate to other policy aims (Skjeie and Teigen 2003).

Another point is the proximity to and collapse of gender equality policies into family policies. Hernes (1987) argued that women's status as clients and employees in the Scandinavian welfare states represented a particular ground for political consensus among women on issues of particular interest to women: above all on sexual politics and the organisation of everyday life. Women's demands from below and state feminist policies of integration from above, represented a potential for state feminist policies and woman-friendly welfare states in the Scandinavian countries. The role of women and women's organisations in the development of the welfare state has increasingly become acknowledged (Berven and Selle 2002). In retrospect, the state feminist project has above all led to reforms in the domains of sexual policy, family and children, while it has been less influential in the economical domain.

The question is whether this success in traditionally female domains also became a trap that limited and restricted the gender equality project to the family sphere. The confounding of gender equality policies and family policies may thus be one of the paradoxes of the woman-made and woman-friendly welfare state. The reduction of gender equality policies to family policies may also be understood in view of the lack of success in relation to the economy and the labour market, which may have led to a compensatory emphasis on the family as an accessible domain for political reforms.

How daddy policies became gender equality policies and vice versa

Today, equal parenthood, and father policies in particular, are important elements in gender equality policies. The origin of such policies is also to be found in early family research. In addition to Grønseth, the child psychologist

Åse Gruda Skard (1953) argued that men's participation in the everyday care of their children was necessary to bring gender equality forward. However, from having been an important part of early family research, the question of men and gender equality receded into the background in research and policy-making in the 1970s, with the exception that parental leave was made gender neutral in 1978. Nevertheless, fathers' rights have been an important but not fully recognised undercurrent in the processes of family law reforms from the mid-1970s, starting with the breakthrough of fathers' rights perspectives in the family law reform in 1981 (Gundersen 1984).

In 1988 the 'man question' re-emerged in public debate and policymaking with a governmental commission on the men's role (St.meld 4 1988/89, NOU 1991:3). One of its most important proposals was the paternal quota of parental leave, which was introduced in 1993. With the commission on the men's role as a boundary organisation, men's rights policies from below were supplemented by state masculinity policies from above. The commission on the men's role was criticised for its unclear position in relation to a 'rights' versus a 'care' perspective (Fosshaug 1991).

In the commission on the men's role, state feminist policy from above – aimed at getting men to take a greater responsibility in the family – is amalgamated with an organised fathers' rights struggle from below. In the further development of paternal policy, some of the ideas from early family research were recirculated, among them the 'dangers of father absence' and the 'need for male role models' (NOU 1993:12; NOU 1995:27), regardless of the fact that these ideas by then had been deemed scientifically obsolete for a long time (Tiller 1985; Bjørnholt 2009b).

Men and gender equality – what was/is the problem represented to be?

Having so far dealt in some detail with genealogy (Bacchi's third question) I will now turn to the 'problematizations' of men and gender equality in the Work-Sharing Couples Project as compared to today, employing a structured WPR-analysis. Bacchi's analytical framework may be used in different ways, either attending to all questions systematically or as part of an integrated analysis. In this paper I choose to let Bacchi's remaining questions structure the final analysis of the problematizations, hidden assumptions and implications of Grønseth's model of gender equality, as compared to the conceptualisation of men and gender equality underlying current policies. Although an integrated analysis may be more elegant, I find the systematic approach preferable in this case, as it provides a framework for a combined analysis and comparison of the two different policy approaches. I hope the reader will be patient with the overlaps and repetitions resulting from this strategy.

I will now compare Grønseth's ambitious dual-earner/dual carer model,

based on double part-time and parental shifts in the home, and the current policy of equal parenthood, i.e. the paternal quota of parental leave.

What was/is the ‘problem’ of men and gender equality represented to be? (Q1)

In Erik Grønseth’s conceptualisation, the ‘problem’ was represented to be unequal couple relationships and the detrimental effect of patriarchal power in the family on the heterosexual love relation. Men’s breadwinner role in a gender complementarian arrangement of paid work and care was seen as a source of male dominance and of inauthentic heterosexual love relations. Part of the ‘problem’ was also a threatening care crisis as a result of women entering the labour market, demanding an increase in men’s caring.

Grønseth’s model was based on a two-sphere way of thinking, in which the unpaid household work was seen as being of equal value in relation to paid work. The family as a unit was the main focus and the couple relation the main arena for change (Bjørnholt 2009a). The Work-Sharing Couples Project aimed at a reallocation of paid and unpaid work between men and women, rather than an increase in families’ total supply of paid labour at the cost of domestic work and family time.

The most important tool in Grønseth’s conceptualisation was the changing of men’s relations to work, in that men (too) were to work part-time and to share the unpaid work in the home, which comprised both childcare and domestic work. The project had a longitudinal perspective; the aim was a better balance of work and family, in which the perceived need for a caretaker at home was not restricted to the short period of infancy.

The present reservation of a non-transferable share of parental leave for fathers represents the ‘problem’ as unequal parenthood. Within this problematisation women’s larger share of parental leave is seen as part of the ‘problem’. The father-child relation and individual parenthood make up the main focus, and changing men’s relation to children is the main tool in transforming gender relations.

The current representation of men and gender equality is contradictory. Depending on the eye that sees, the mandatory sharing of parental leave represents fathers as equally responsible for child-care and as equally encumbered with caring responsibilities as mothers vis-à-vis employers. On the other hand, it also represents men as unwilling, irresponsible, weak, and not capable of prioritising care, but it also constructs men and fathers as particularly valuable carers, while mothers’ care is presented as part of the problem, which may lead to a ‘paradox of valuation’ (Bekkengen 2002). There is a conflation of the struggle for men’s rights and the struggle for gender equality. Arguments of redistribution – the need for men to share the burdens of parenthood – are intertwined or confounded with arguments of

recognition of men as equal parents and of fathers' rights to a more equal share of the pleasures of parenthood, including paid parental leave. This ambiguity makes it unclear whether men are to *contribute* to gender equality in the family or if men are to be *treated more equally* as parents.

What presuppositions or assumptions underlie the representation of the 'problem'? (Q2)

Presuppositions or assumptions refer to background knowledge that is taken for granted and that lodges within problem representations. This question employs Foucault's archaeological method to uncover the (assumed) thought behind specific problem representations. It is not about why something happens but what could be thought, what it is possible to think, at the level of basic and fundamental world views. At this stage of the analysis, Bacchi suggests to focus on binaries, key concepts and categories.

In Grønseth's model, the most important binaries are male domination and female subordination, or life-enhancing versus oppressive families and societies. The key concept is *liberation*. Grønseth's representation relies on the categories men and women; for Grønseth, changing the heterosexual relationship is the main concern, and the couple relationship is the locus of change.

In current representations, the main binary is that between modern versus traditional couples. The father-child dyad is seen as the key element of the modern imagery, while the mother-child dyad is coded as traditional. The key concept is *gender equality/equal parenthood*. The key categories in this representation are *fathers* and *mothers*, and the reallocation of parental involvement rests on a hydraulic model of gender equality, assuming that if women retrench their parenting, men will automatically fill in.

The implied problem in current representations of the 'problem' may both be men being denied equal participation, and men's lack of will, as the paternal quota is sometimes referred to as 'the mild force of the state'. Another implied problem is lacking recognition of men as fathers, as well as the unjust distribution of a welfare state benefit (paid parental leave), and of women and or employers not allowing for men to care.

In Grønseth's representation it is men's responsibility to change, while women and children are the implied victims of male domination, although Grønseth also thought that men too, were the victims of the male breadwinner arrangement, and that men, too, stood to gain from gender equality. In relying on a reallocation, rather than an expansion of the total amount of parent's paid work, this model implicitly values the family sphere and personal life equally as high or higher than paid work.

The paternal quota of parental leave is based on the implicit assumption of double full-time and the institutionalisation of child-care from the age

of one. The model also implicitly subordinates love, care, the family sphere and personal life to paid work, as the right to paid parental leave, including the paternal quota, is derived from labour market participation. Paid parental leave is a substitute for income, rather than a means of securing infants the right to be cared for by parents and parents the right to care.

Although men's lack of will is implied in the 'mild force' of the paternal quota, men are represented in discourse as basically willing to share care equally, but being kept out by women or employers, therefore needing a little help from the state. Women (and employers) are to blame for unequal parenthood, and women's larger share of parental leave is seen as the result of female power. Society, women and employers are responsible for giving men access to their rights as equal parents.

What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? (Q4)

At this stage, Bacchi suggests focusing on the distortions and misrepresentations that emerge from the way the 'problem' is represented, its assumptions and the way it has been shaped. Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?

Grønseth problematised the male full-time worker norm and men's own responsibility to shape egalitarian families – issues that have been silenced today. He also problematised institutional care and emphasised children's need to be cared for in the home. On the other hand, both in Grønseth's as well as the contemporary representation of the 'problem', occupational symmetry and the harmonisation of men's and women's life courses are the implicit prerequisite for egalitarian relationships. Grønseth did not problematise class, nor is class part of contemporary problematisations, and the middle-class bias of this model of gender symmetry remains unproblematised.

Stefansen and Farstad (2010) found that the model of parenting and family life promoted in policies, is modelled on middle-class parenting practices and middle-class family ideals. The middle-class family ideal is based on individual and serial parenting of a presumed robust child in need of new challenges from an early age. This model conflicts with a working-class model of what constitutes a good family life and working-class parents' perceptions of children's needs. In contrast to the middle-class model, working-class parents tend to see parenting more as a common family responsibility, and emphasise the mother-child bond, small children's vulnerability and their need to be cared for at home and postpone daycare. Similarly, postcolonial critiques draw attention to how the Scandinavian model of gender equality becomes part of discourses that produce inequality and of paternalising civilising strategies towards those constructed as 'the others' (Larsen 2009; Vouri 2009).

The strong focus today on gender equality as a family issue, silences the impact of the labour market and of other factors outside the family in the causation of gender inequity, and the strong focus on family policies silences other policy options. Working life and the male norm of full-time work have remained largely unchallenged, and the idea that men, too, should reduce the time spent on paid work to make room for family, let alone to promote their partner's career, is not part of current discussions of gender equality. In the current conceptualisation of sharing equally, Grønseth's vision of a society in which paid and unpaid work were to be equally shared and equally valued by men and women, and by society, has shrunk into a narrow focus on the sharing of parental leave during children's first year.

In the current representation, the causal relation between equal parenthood and egalitarian couple relationships is taken for granted, but left unproblematised. It is taken for granted that the paternal quota will lead to gender equality, in the family as well as in the labour market, although its effects are far from documented. A recent and extensive longitudinal study (Cools et al. 2010) found an adverse effect on women's labour market participation and wages.

Children are represented as items that should and can be shared equally between the parents during their first year, and be enrolled in day-care from the age of one. Possible differences between fathers' and mothers' needs, as well as possible differences in parenting practices related to gender/class/ethnicity are left unproblematised. The desirability and quality of institutional care for all children is not problematised, nor are children's vulnerability and possible differences in children's needs. One (middle-class/ethnic Norwegian) model of gender symmetry is seen as superior, compared with other family models, along the 'modern-traditional' binary. Other means of obtaining gender justice, like redistribution, are silenced, as are the persistently low valuation of care and the resulting different economic valuation of male and female life-courses.

What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'? (Q5)

This question starts with the presumption that some problem representations create difficulties for some groups, and that problematisations need to be interrogated in order to 'see where and how they function to benefit some and harm others, and what can be done about this' (Bacchi 2009:15). Three interconnected effects are pointed out: discursive effects, subjectification effects and lived effects.

In Grønseth's representation, the discursive effects were to change the idea of the benefits of the gender complementary arrangement of work and care. Further, men were constituted in discourse as responsible for changing

their working hours in order to change their relation to their wives, and men and women were constituted as equally responsible for paid work and care. The follow-up study of the Work-Sharing Couples Project found that the men acted from a subject position of egalitarian-minded, ‘modern’ and caring men who, to a large extent, had their wives’ career and personal development in mind (Bjørnholt 2011). The lived effects for the participants in the Work-Sharing Couples Project were predominantly beneficial (Bjørnholt 2009a; 2010b), but as I have pointed out above, this model of gender equality has a middle-class bias and may be problematic as a general policy model.

The discursive effect of the non-transferable paternal quota is a more individualised and competitive parenthood, as fathers are positioned in discourse as equally good parents and as right-holders, in addition to being agents of change. Mothers are positioned as gate-keepers and obstacles to change. Mothers’ greater family responsibility is being left unrecognised and they are being blamed for their more extensive adaptation to care, which is seen as an individual choice. Policies based on an ‘imagined equality’ (Lewis 2003), which does not reflect men’s and women’s different adaptations to work and care, may have negative effects on women’s self-esteem as well as negative redistributive effects for women over the life course, and in case of divorce.

The middle-class and ethnocentric bias of the underlying model of gender equality, based on the harmonisation of men’s and women’s life courses (Q 4) is potentially harmful and discriminatory to the working-class and ethnical minorities.

How/where has this representation of the ‘problem’ been produced, disseminated and defended? (Q6)

This question links to question number three (genealogy), in drawing attention to ‘the practices and processes that allow certain problem representations to dominate’ (Bacchi 2009, 19), and aims at pointing out how they can be questioned, disrupted and replaced. The work-sharing couples model of double part-time, combined with shift-parenting, represented a heretic and oppositional vision in the 1970s. Grønseth was controversial. His partner in the project, Ola Rokkones, and the organisation he established and headed, the Norwegian Family Council, was an independent social entrepreneur who was clearly not part of the political establishment. It was closed after losing their state funding in 1979 (Vollset 2011).

The current representation of the ‘problem’ of men and gender equality, relies on the partly institutionalised co-production by researchers and policymakers from above, as well as the initiative of social movements and pressure groups – the women’s movement and organised men’s rights interests – from below. Media has also played an important role in the

dissemination of the contemporary representation of the ‘problem’ as one of unequal parenthood, women’s gate-keeping, lacking recognition of men as parents and men who lack rights.

Conclusion

This article took as its starting point the radical model of equal sharing of breadwinning and care that was suggested by the sociologist Erik Grønseth. These ideas were implemented in an experimental research project in the 1970s – at a time when Norwegian family policies were in their formative years – in which both spouses worked part-time and shared housework. Despite its ambition to influence family policy, the work-sharing model did not influence policies. Neither the sharing of paid work, nor the reduction of working hours, became important issues in Norwegian gender equality policies. Rather, gender equality policies have shrunk from a broad focus on sharing equally in the labour market and the family, to a narrow focus on the sharing of parental leave. This article traces the emergence of the current policies for equal parenthood, as compared to the vision of egalitarian couples as represented by the work-sharing model.

Having outlined its historical and class-based contingency, as well as some of the implicit assumptions, silences and negative implications of the current model of equal parenting, in comparison with Grønseth’s work-sharing model, and the middle-class bias of both models, I hope to raise awareness of the historical and social contingency, blind spots and unintended effects of current problematisations and policies of men, family and gender equality.

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GENDER AND CHANGE

Research on gender aims to contribute towards a better society with the help of scientific tools. Change is therefore a key concept in gender studies. With a wide range of theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches and empirical materials from Sweden, Norway and Iceland, this book investigates how gender relations are shaped, reproduced, and challenged. Collectively, the papers in this volume point to where we are heading in terms of gender relations. Where are the seeds to change, and how does power make possible or impede on change?

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