

Extended abstract (2-4 pages):

In line with the traditional family model of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, early stratification research treated the family as the unit of analysis. The focus was on the position of the household head, typically the man, ignoring issues such as the division of labour, and inequalities between partners (Oppenheimer, 1977). With the growing participation of women in education and employment, this approach encountered criticism (Sørensen, 1994), shifting the unit of analysis to the individual. Initially, there was a focus on individual determinants and the family of origin, but an increasing interest in the partner brought the family back in to stratification research (e.g. Bernardi, 1999).

With the incorporation of partner effects, stratification research acknowledged the family context surrounding labour market decisions. The importance of both actor- and partner effects is recognized, yet little attention has so far been given to *couple* effects. For example, the education of the individual and partner are accepted as determining factors (e.g. Blossfeld and Drobnič, 2001), but little is known about the effect of the educational composition of the couple, despite the growing participation of women in education and employment. This growing participation has resulted in more equal opportunities for men and women, causing both partners' education to be vital in determining the family's labour market opportunities and constraints. The question is whether this has lead couples to take into account the comparative (dis)advantages originating from partners' educational differences. Or, do gendered patterns persist when it comes to the division of labour in the family?

Focusing on the division of paid labour means that we examine what determines partners' labour market participation from a relative point of view. The focus is on women, as the labor market participation of men generally shows limited variation. The role of the educational composition of the couple – educational heterogamy – is examined by means of two opposing hypotheses. Based on specialization (Becker, 1973, 1974) and bargaining theory (Chiappori, 1992; Manser and Brown, 1980), we expect women in a heterogamous relationship in which the educational difference is to their advantage to have higher relative labour market participation, and women in a heterogamous relationship in which the educational difference is to the advantage of the man to have lower relative labour market participation, as compared to similarly educated homogamous women (*Specialization Hypothesis*). Based on gender identity theory (West and Fenstermaker, 1995; West and Zimmerman, 1987), we expect women in a heterogamous relationship in which the educational difference is to their advantage to have lower relative labour market participation, as compared to similarly educated homogamous women, and similarly educated heterogamous women in relationships where the educational difference is to the advantage of the man (*Gender Identity Hypothesis*).

Relative female labour market participation is studied in light of the educational composition of the couple. In addition, it is viewed within the context of the family life cycle, and the variation that is present

there. In terms of female labour market participation, the most important family life cycle indicator appears to be the presence of (young) children (Stier, Lewin-Epstein and Braun, 2001). Differences exist, regardless of country context, between the labour market participation of women with and without children, with the former generally suffering due to the presence of (young) children. Various factors work together but generally partnered women work full-time before having children, and then they reduce their labour supply to various extents, returning to full-time or at least part-time work once their children have grown older (Del Boca and Sauer, 2009).

In addition to the direct impact (*Direct Child Effect Hypothesis*), the presence of (young) children in the family could have an indirect impact through the importance of educational heterogamy. Such an indirect effect is suggested by several studies showing parenthood to strengthen the traditional division of labour in the family in many contexts (e.g. Dribe and Stanfors, 2009). In other words, even when educational differences determine the division of paid labour in couples without dependent children, a more gendered pattern could arise once children are present, resulting in a weaker specialization or bargaining effect of educational heterogamy, but a stronger gender identity effect (*Indirect Child Effect Hypothesis*).

The impact on relative female labour market participation will be compared between Belgium and Sweden. These two countries share many socio-economic traits, but represent different welfare state models (Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1999), which could reflect in the patterning of relative female labour market participation according to educational heterogamy and the presence of (young) children. Belgium tends to support a male-breadwinner model, as its commitment is towards the employment of male household heads, and the centrality of the family as care-giver. Sweden emphasizes universalism, egalitarianism, de-commodification, and de-familialization (Blossfeld & Drobnič, 2001; Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1999), and supports a dual-earner family model with full employment for both men and women.

Relative female labour market participation in these two countries is compared based on the pooled cross-national data from the EU-SILC 2004-2008. The data are analysed using Diagonal Reference Models (DRMs); a technique which has been shown to be particularly useful for studying heterogamy effects (Eeckhaut, Van de Putte, Gerris & Vermulst, 2011). A multinomial logistic version of the DRMs is applied, as relative female labour market participation was measured by means of a categorical variable (woman's share of couples working hours: 0%, 1-40%, 41-59%,  $\geq 60\%$ ).

The results of the DRMs show that whereas women's relative labour market participation is less education-driven in Sweden than in Belgium, it is more related to the couple effect of educational heterogamy. That is, the importance of educational heterogamy is confirmed for Sweden, but not for Belgium. Swedish women are more likely to work 0%, as compared to 41-59% of couple working hours,

when the educational difference in the couple is to the advantage of the man. This confirmation of the *specialization hypothesis* appears stronger for women without young children in the home, as expected by the *indirect child effect hypothesis*, and thus indicates that the (nearly) universal system of long parental leave in Sweden limits the effect of educational opportunities and constraints for those, but not for other women.

The *direct child effect hypothesis* is confirmed for both countries, as results show a negative association between the presence of (young) children and relative female labour market participation. The presence of children under age six appears of special importance in Sweden, as it shows a positive odds for working 0%, as compared to 41-59% of couple working hours, that is more than twice the size of that in Belgium. This extreme pattern is explained by the extended period of parental leave of 18 months in Sweden, as compared to only six months in Belgium. On the other hand, the presence of children in Sweden is also related to an elevated odds of working  $\geq 60\%$ , as compared to 41-59% of couple working hours, indicating that a minority of Swedish couples adopts a female-earner model when children are present, in addition to the majority that gives preference to a male-earner model.

Overall, the results support the differences in cultural and institutional setting between Belgium and Sweden. The higher level of egalitarianism in Sweden is reflected in the partial confirmation of the specialization hypothesis, as this indicates that both partners' education is vital for dividing paid labour. However, restricting the analysis to working women confirms that this effect of the couple composition is limited to the group of not-working women, and thus that the theoretical expectations only hold for a very particular group of women. The higher level of family friendliness in Sweden is illustrated by the stronger impact of children on relative female labour market participation. The effect of children in Sweden is more negative, yet there are indications of egalitarianism in this domain as well, as evidenced by the small number of couples adopting a female-earner, rather than a male-earner model, when children are present.

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