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Male hegemony in decline? Reflections on the Spanish case**Abstract**

The masculine role is built primarily on the basis of men's position as breadwinners providing income for the home through paid work. However, it has been suggested that economic and employment crises and the transformation of production systems that have been underway since the 1970s have diminished the value of work as an identitarian element. The aim of this paper is to analyze the extent to which employment crises question the model of hegemonic masculinity. Through the comparative analysis of the career paths of men and women, we show that work still forms the core of male identity, though the persistence of hegemonic masculinity is influenced by social class and generation.

Key words: Masculinity, work, career paths.

Introduction

This article is based on the idea that masculinity and femininity are social constructs that can be related by gender, and that masculinity cannot be studied without reference to femininity. A relational perspective was first taken mainly by studies on the situation of women in the labour market and of domestic and care work (Beechey 1982, Crompton 1983). These studies considered that the absence of men in domestic and care work explains the situation of inequality and discrimination in which women live. Furthermore, Connell (2005) states that productive work, i.e. work that is remunerated and done in the public domain outside the home, is the heart of masculinity.

Over 20 years ago, in view of the changes that had occurred in Western societies with the successive employment crises, the postmodern theorists (Lipovestky 1995, 2007; Bauman 2003) pointed out that paid work had been losing importance or disappearing as a fundamental element in the shaping of identity (Sennett 1998, 2003), giving way to other factors related to consumption and lifestyles.

In this article our aim is, first, to analyze the importance of paid work in the construction of male identity at the present time. Second, we analyze the relationship between paid work and domestic and care work through the practices, discourses and imageries of men in comparison with women. This analysis is based on data obtained from a larger study dealing with changes in the Spanish employment model.¹ The data analyzed were obtained through biographical interviews on career paths in the Spanish context. This technique was considered appropriate because it reveals the interrelationships between the work sphere and the domestic sphere throughout the life cycle.

¹ TRANSMODE, a research project funded by the Ministry of Science and Innovation, PN I+D+I 2008-2011 (Ref. CSO2008-01 321).

In the first section we situate the aim of the study in theoretical terms and outlines all the details about the process of information collection and analysis. We then present and interpret the results. In conclusion, we return to the theoretical debate and its impact on public policy.

Paid work as the heart of masculinity

From the different perspectives that have been used to study men, masculinity, virility and male sexuality, it has been attempted to differentiate between men, and a consensus has been reached that we should not consider masculinity in the singular but rather “masculinities”. This consensus is based on an epistemological position that considers that for men—and above all for some groups of men—masculinity has involved submission, resignation and constraint in the way of being, feeling and situating themselves in society as individuals. Our initial approach does not try to circumvent the different types of masculinity but presents the concept as one that is open and variable. As stated by Connell (2005), our approach to reality shows that although there are different types of masculinity, all are based and constructed in relation to what has been called hegemonic masculinity, which legitimizes patriarchy and is based primarily on three aspects: power relations, production relations and sexuality.

This study is based primarily on the first two, power relations and production relations, which are based on patriarchy. The power of masculinity is expressed and constructed through the roles that are manifested in work and the family (Kiesling 2006). The interrelationships between paid work and domestic and care work display masculinity in relation to femininity and the unequal position of men and women in these two spheres during the life cycle.

With regard to the production relations, instead of accepting the myth of the recent entry of women into the labour market (Torns *et al* 2007), we consider that women have had a constant presence in the labour market throughout history but that their position has always been subordinate to that of men. The world of productive paid work has up to now been the area of men par excellence, as the great majority of studies on masculinity point out (Collison and Hearn 2001; Ruiz 2003; Welzer-Lang *et al* 2005). A man's role is built primarily through his position as the breadwinner providing the home with income through paid work. As Connell (2005) points out, paid work is the heart of masculinity.

The roots of masculinity focused on the productive sphere are recent, dating only from the industrial revolution. Industrialization created a clearer separation between work and home, and the mastery of the wage-earner, thus changing the economic power relations inside the home—another sign on which masculinity is based. Because the productive work of men brings in greater income, their power as patriarchs of the household is legitimized. In contrast, the female wage is conceived and constructed as a non-essential supplement. Power continues to be legitimized by the generally greater economic contribution of men, as evidenced year after year in the data on wage inequality (Silvera 2000, Catalan Ministry of Employment and Industry 2005).

One explanation for wage discrimination between men and women comes from the history of work. During the industrialisation process wages were assigned according to physical strength and power for performing the tasks—attributes associated with men. As Molinier and Welzer-Lang (2000) point out, manhood involves the social attributes associated with men and masculinity: strength, courage, ability to fight, the right to violence and the right to dominate those who are not and cannot be manly: women, children, homosexuals, and so on. This is the collective and individual expression of

male domination. Similarly, the skilled jobs typical of the middle classes, and the jobs that have been occupied by the dominant groups, have been constructed on the basis of rationality, intellectual ability, authority, knowledge and experience. Men symbolize order, progress, self-control and moderation as key elements of public life (Garaizabal 2003).

In contemporary Western culture, paid work is one of the main elements that identifies men and allows them to be defined as such. Therefore, men who are separated from productive activity because of retirement, inactivity or unemployment are no longer the men they were: the lack of paid work in their lives discredits them as men (Guasch 2003). Lack of work and the loss of a job threaten men's identity and men's dignity (Corbiere 2005), as is pointed out in the excellent work by Merla (2007) referring to men engaged in housework and childcare outside the labour market. These men pay a high price of social and familiar stigma: their identity as men is challenged because they do not engage in paid work.

The successive crises of occupation and employment that have taken place in developed countries since the 1970s have led to theoretical approaches that call into question the role of paid work as a constituent element of individuals' identity. This thesis is defended by Rifkin (1995) and, in a different sense, by postmodern theorists such as Bauman (2000), who argues that work can no longer offer the secure axis around which to wrap and fix self-definitions, identities and life-projects. Bauman claims that work cannot be considered the ethical foundation of society or the ethical axis of individual life (2000). Sennett (1998, 2003) also dealt with the consequences and the process of loss of identity at work. Beyond their theoretical arguments, these authors question the prevalence of the productive sphere as a key element of identity.

In contrast with these positions, in this article we adopt the initial hypothesis that paid work is still key to male identity, and that domestic and care work are key to female identity. We argue that the centrality of production also occurs in the absence of work or job security affecting younger groups as a result of the current recession. We also consider the hypothesis that the increased presence of women in the labour market throughout the life cycle has not led to a loss in their practices or imageries concerning work at home, because they continue to accept domestic and care work as being proper to them.

The absence of men in the domestic sphere: the other side of productive centrality

The vast majority of studies on domestic and care work indicate that men's involvement is low, and that this work is both carried out and managed by women (Hufton 1999, Carrasco 2001, Aliaga 2006). The same studies show differences depending on the country analyzed. For example, men in Nordic countries are more involved in household work than men in Southern Europe. It also appears that middle-class men of a younger generation whose wives do paid work in a similar position to their husbands participate more in the domestic sphere and child care, forming more egalitarian couples (Castro and Pazos 2008). Nevertheless, inequality is still prevalent, and domestic work is mainly done by women.²

The explanations for this inequality are primarily based on the sociocultural backdrop of patriarchy present in our societies. Accepting this approach, we believe that a greater presence of men in paid work directly involves a greater presence of women in domestic and care work. The presence and absence of women in the labour market and the time they devote to it are strongly conditioned by the presence and dedication of their male

² According to the *European Working Conditions Survey* (2005) the total working hours of women working full time (defined as the sum of the hours devoted to paid work, domestic and care work and commuting time) is 67 hours per week compared with 55 hours for their male counterparts.

partners and by their domestic responsibilities, as pointed out by Crompton (2006) in his studies on employment and family in the United Kingdom. This is not so in the case of men: the progressive increase in the participation rate of women and their increased presence in the labour market throughout their life cycle have not involved a lower presence of men.

As a second hypothesis, we argue that in the life projects, practices and imageries of women throughout their life cycle, paid work is interwoven with domestic and care responsibilities, and the work situation of their husbands is always present. On the other hand, domestic and care work do not form part of men's mindset: They focus their life projects on paid work, which is not affected by the cycles or stages in which child and family care require more dedication. In other words, we consider that the penetration of the domestic sphere in the professional sphere is something that happens in women's paths, whereas in men's paths the professional sphere penetrates the domestic sphere.

Several qualitative studies about the Spanish case (Torns and Borràs and Carrasquer 2004) point out that one of the main difficulties that men face in taking on responsibility for domestic work is that they see the home and child care, materially and symbolically, as a female space. This means that women have primary responsibility for it, whereas men's role is that of helpers. It appears to be a male strategy to delegate the management and performance of domestic and care work to women, who feel judged, individually and socially, according to the state of their home and family.

The same line is followed by the study by Martin Corbiere (2005) on the resistance of masculinity, with specific reference to male politicians and other officials in Belgium, France and Greece. This study clearly shows the strong centrality of productive work for the vast majority of men in all three countries, and the great commitment of time that it involves. Men shape their different social times according to the requirements of

the productive sphere. All of this is justified by a naturalizing discourse on the greater availability and capacity of women for domestic and care work.

Spain forms part of the Mediterranean model, which is characterized by a weak welfare system in comparison with the Nordic countries and a strong family tradition of providing care for dependents. Both aspects reinforce the family model of the male breadwinner and female housewife, as shown by several studies (Torns and Borràs and Carrasquer 2004, Miguélez and Recio 2010).

Methodology

This work is part of a wider study into the pattern of employment in Spain. We used data from the qualitative phase of the study, which considered career paths by carrying out biographical interviews. This technique was considered appropriate because it reveals the interrelationships between the work sphere and the domestic sphere throughout the life cycle. The interviews provide interesting data on career paths for studying the practices and imageries of masculinity in the two spheres. Furthermore, we believe that the expectations, projects and demands with respect to paid work, housework and care work during the life cycle differ between men and women. The time dimension is therefore crucial to show and explain how men and women relate and how presence and absence in the two spheres are interwoven.

The informants were selected using a quantitative and qualitative approach. The quantitative approach identified the patterns of sample distribution of the most significant occupational biographies and thus defined the first type of informant. The statistical exploration was conducted mainly by consulting three official sources of statistics: the 2010 Survey of the Active Population (*Encuesta de la Población Activa*, EPA); the 2003-2003 and 2009-2010 Time Use Survey (*Encuesta de Empleo del*

Tiempo, ETT); and the 2008 Survey of Living and Working Conditions (*Encuesta de Condiciones de Vida y Trabajo*, ECVT), all published by the Spanish National Statistics Institute.

From the data of these three surveys we defined a typology of qualitative paths. The sample selection took into consideration three basic dimensions of social structure: gender, social class and generation. Gender was considered a key factor for explaining the different conditions of entering and remaining in the labour market, and the working conditions. It was also considered essential for explaining presence and absence in domestic and care work. Social class, defined by occupation and educational level, conditions the advantages and disadvantages associated with working conditions and job stability. Finally, generation, defined according to changes that occurred in the Spanish labour market after the 1980s, was introduced to differentiate the stable employment model experienced by the generation older than 50 years and the unstable employment model experienced by the generation aged 30-50 years. We analyzed a total of 19 interviews of 8 sociological profiles that include middle class and working class men and women of both generations. We did two interviews for each sociological profile. It was enough to reach the saturation point except in two profiles that needed some more interviews.

Subsequently, we conducted an initial content analysis with the help of the Atlas.ti software, in which the data were coded according to the two areas analyzed, the labour market and domestic and care work. Finally, we performed a transverse discourse analysis on the two areas.

Career paths of male hegemony

Gender emerges as one of the variables explaining the differences between life projects. Women's working life is not conceived without family life, while men's working life has its own entity and is not related specifically to family life. Paid work gives meaning to the male life project. Men's career paths are only mediated by the labour market situation, whereas they are unaffected by domestic and care work and the careers of their wives.

“Look, my wife is good-natured, and we've had problems, you see, but I haven't provided too much support, you know? And then, you see I was always... I don't know how much I worked, because when I was at home I was always on the computer, do you understand? So on Sunday afternoon I was always...” (Man, Middle Class, Older)

The importance of paid work in the careers of the men interviewed differed by generation. The discourse of older men shows that work gives them a labour identity that is assimilated into their social identity. Identification with the job can arise from involvement in and commitment to a productive sector or company. It can also be built on the basis of the role played in a labour dispute or union struggle.

“(...) As the company grows, if you do things well you grow too. Because as I've said, if in 1979 DAPSA had been a large company and losing money as it was, it would have closed down, and I would have lost my job, you know what I mean? (...).(Man, Middle Class, Older)

In the discourse of young men, work still has a central role but the reasons differ from those of older men. Furthermore, social class seems to play a greater role. Work is central in the life project of working-class young men because it is unstable. The need to seek and change jobs explains the acceptance of a continuum between formal and informal work. Fear of losing a job thus gives prominence to work in the context of an individual life.

“And of course, I sent CVs for refuse collection, for a recycling plant, for buses... and as I said, I was selected from I don't know how many, and they

said I'd been selected, but I never received a letter telling me I had to go to sign the contract. So of course, at the age of 45, having told so many people that... because usually when... unfortunately, 5 years ago, I started to have the problem... of this... God dammit, at the age of 45 am I going to die at home, am I going to stay at home doing nothing? I got a taxi driver's license, I thought to hell with it and I bought the taxi license, and that's what I'm doing today." (Man, Working Class, Young)

By contrast, the discourse of middle-class young men is more similar to that of the older generation in that occupation is part of the social identity, as has been pointed out by Moreno (2011). Importance is given to work on the basis of aspirations for personal fulfilment in a field of work chosen according to previous interests. This attitude justifies a host of conditions that are undesirable a priori, such as long working hours and poor working conditions.

"Meanwhile, I was on work placement for 6 months at TV3, doing the weather maps. I helped a bit to prepare the news. Work placement there has always been paid, but the year I was there it wasn't. I got up at 7, got home at 9, and they didn't even pay my travelling expenses

Was there no chance of staying on when you finished your work placement?

No, because at TV· everything is done by competitive examination, and no vacancies arose, and it wasn't my vocation anyway. That was all in a period of two and a half years. I started the second cycle at university when I was 25 and I finished when I was 27." (Man, Middle Class, Young)

The career paths show that working life is hegemonic in the lives of the men interviewed, as a result of the persistent social mindset that sees men as breadwinners and women as housewives. The symbolic and cultural importance of this mindset is evident when paid work disappears from the lives of men. Unemployment and retirement are good examples of the confusion generated by the absence of employment, which has consequences in the organization of everyday life and the definition of social identity. In the case of unemployment, the role of the breadwinner continues to be the reference that orients men's life project.

“Have you come to the end of your unemployment benefit?”

“4 or 5 months ago. I had almost two years, I’ve just finished. The first year I did building work and the second I suffered from depression. Though my wife’s a doctor, I reached the point where I went to a psychiatrist because... I couldn’t stop thinking about looking for a job.” (Man, Middle Class, Young)

Retirement is the end point of the male career path and may blur the life project: social identity, culture references and friends are lost. The daily lives of retired men are filled with meaningless time and the loss of job responsibility calls into question their social identity built around their role as breadwinners.

“I mean... well, it’s a problem, don’t think it’s easy, managing your free time... No, it’s not easy. They say it lasts one or two years. It’s not easy. And well, I knew how things were... I had to get over the situation, you know? Of course, it’s not all a bed of roses. (Man, Middle Class, Older)

The absence of men in the home

For men, the discourse on domestic and care work is conspicuous by its absence. It only appears when the topic is forced on them by the interviewer. When asked, some men claim to do domestic work, but they always accept that women do far more. Some of them are aware of the privilege that this entails. The younger generation recognize that if women are exclusively dedicated to domestic and family work, men have a greater degree of comfort. Still, the analysis of the interviews reveals a generational change with respect to the distribution of responsibilities for domestic and care work. Indeed, the discourse of middle class and some working class younger men incorporates the need for joint responsibility in household chores. However, when these men start to explain their positions, there arise contradictions and a gap between discourse and everyday practice: they claim to do more than they really do at home.

“Well now she does more, but nevertheless, we have 2 daughters, so we do it mostly at weekends. Most of it at weekends, but now with the two girls, the clothes and all that has to be done every day. It’s not like before when we both dealt with it. The big things, windows, tiles, cabinets ... I do that.” (Man,

Working Class, Young)

Furthermore, daily practice shows a sexual division of labour that is made explicit in domestic and care work. Thus, men's "help" in domestic and care work is not sufficient to allow women to get their homes out of their heads and hands. It must also be remembered that women are reluctant to accept male interference in the domestic sphere.

"At home it's always the women who do everything, and I don't know if that'll change one day, but we accept it... The men don't think about it... For example, it's true that I never used to imagine that my husband could vacuum the floors when he came home... It's true that when he came home, I thought the housework was my job, but now, for example, he vacuums the whole house or if I tell him we need milk or something, he goes out to buy it. He does do more in the house." (Woman, Middle Class, Older)

Certain life circumstances explain why some men are forced to take on child care work, especially when women are unable to do it because of the demands of their work and there is insufficient income to pay for outside help. The increased workload of working women is thus perceived as a loss by their husbands because it forces them to take on some of the care work. For men, especially those of the older generation, a woman should first take care of her children and husband, and then her parents or in-laws.

"Yes, I took care of my grandfather for three years. He was old, he died at the age of 92, and he came here from Galicia. My mother brought him here. But she worked nights at the Vall d'Hebron (Hospital) and I worked during the day. So I arrived at night and at weekends I looked after him, when I lived with my mother, and at the weekends I did it too. And when my mother was free at the weekend, it was a big party for me. He came here because my mother and my aunt were here. My uncle didn't want to know anything about it... and they had him for two months each." (Man, Working Class, Young)

Younger men also give job responsibility as the main reason for their absence as parents. Unlike older men, they include their role as fathers in their identities but exercise it flexibly, when it fits in with their work availability. Proof of this is that their

career path continues regardless of the domestic and family burdens assumed by their wives.

“I went to live, we bought the flat in 1998, I’d been with my wife for three years, because you reach an age when... I was 33. Then... we got married, we had children, but it wasn’t a great problem... It was more work, but... well, the older girl, for example, Maina, the 8-year-old one, when I was working at Ogilvie (company) I saw her birth and not a lot more because...”
(Man, Middle Class, Young)

Changes in the sexual division of labour within the household appear to be more significant in care work than in other household chores. Paradoxically, it is in care work that the gender referents are more present. For example, younger men are surprised that paternity leave is fairly well accepted at work and that it does not lead to problems in their work situation. However, it is not taken for granted.

“No, that always depends on your superior, as in all companies I expect. In general it’s accepted, here more and more people are doing it, so... And as you say, the conditions here are very good, so let’s say... besides the people here are 30 to 40 years old, so the problem of children is continual. I mean a few are born every year. All fathers do it, I mean it’s nothing strange. However, it’s true that some area heads don’t understand it, but that’s at an internal level. In my case, with my superior and in my area, no problem, they don’t bat an eyelid, no problem. It’s established here and it’s not challenged. It’s laid down and you take it and that’s it, whatever... It’s what you say, maybe no one says anything but your boss may not approve, that’s happened too. Fortunately, with my boss it hasn’t, perhaps because she’s a woman”.
(Man, Middle Class, Young)

The importance of the social mindset of the male breadwinner / female housewife model explains the lack of awareness with regard to work-life balance. Socially, work-life balance is seen as a problem of women that affects private life. Perhaps that is why there are no calls for a greater male presence in domestic and care work, or for the necessary services, or other policies that may affect the division of labour and the mindset that accompanies it. The strategies for coping with work and taking care of the

home and family are dealt with by women and are built through sacrifices in women's careers and by using family resources.

Career paths of twofold presence

Social and individual penalization of male absenteeism contrasts with social and individual justification of female absenteeism. In women's career paths it is observed that employment is just one more element in the life project subject to the sexual division of labour. Unlike men, women link their productive work to housework, and particularly to child and dependent care. This confirms the importance in women's career paths of rigid family burdens that affect the organization of everyday life, particularly in the Spanish case, which has a socio-political context of a weak welfare system and a strong family tradition of organizing and providing dependent care (Torns and Borràs and Carrasquer 2004, Miguélez and Recio 2010).

“And we came to [city] because Pere got the job here. So Pere, Pere the son, was 4 years old, just 4, and Joan was 7 months more or less, and that's it. And of course, when I arrived here, perhaps the kids were small and you don't think about... Well, I always say that if I'd been working in my speciality when I was pregnant, I wouldn't have given it up, but because I wasn't... we decided I'd leave the job I had, so I didn't think about looking for another one while the children were small...” (Woman, Middle Class, Older)

Among women of the older generation, there are class differences: middle-class women seem to be more conditioned by their spouse's career whereas working class women seem to be more conditioned by care work. Motherhood and childcare thus emerge in the discourse of middle-class women as a personal choice based on the desire to play the role of mother. By contrast, among working class women the opportunity cost of leaving the labour market to provide care is more important. Because of the material conditions of existence, working class women, unlike middle-class women, do not leave the labour market definitively but only while they are taking care of their children.

“Yes. And after three years, at the age of 25, I had my first child. So I stopped working.

Did you think it was better...?

Yes, because on my wages I couldn't afford to pay for a nursery... Well, I made the decision. It was a better idea for me to stay at home.

And how long did you stay at home?

Quite a long time, because I later had a daughter...

How long afterwards?

Three years. So meanwhile, of course, you only spend time with the kids and the years go by... And then, when my son was 11, I had the opportunity to go back to work.” (Woman, Working Class, Older)

The presence of women in the formal labour market almost always depends on the help of other women in the family rather than the involvement of their husbands. This is a new sign of the importance of family relationships in the organization of everyday life in the Spanish context. Family relationships hide the work of many women, acting as a cushion for the shortcomings of the State. Work of this type is not even considered as a possibility in the male life project.

“And what about the mother-in-law? How did she help? Cooking the meals...?

Yes, yes. We go there for lunch on Saturdays and Sundays. And since I've been working at the school, for example, my husband has lunch there every day. And she normally makes extra and I almost have the dinner ready. I mean, really I don't cook much, she helps me a lot. And when the kids were small she also helped me a lot. She comes to do the ironing, for example.” (Woman, Middle Class, Older)

It appears that for women of the older generation work is a necessity rather than a source of social identity. Several factors are involved: worse working conditions than their male counterparts, a large variety of jobs in their career path, the consideration of women's paid work as a supplementary income for the family, and the cultural importance of domestic and care work in the definition of the life project. The constant relationship between work and family life in women's career paths explains why women, unlike men, experience unemployment and retirement as opportunities rather

than losses. In fact, the sexual division of labour is reinforced by the fact that women see unemployment as an opportunity for care work.

“Because I’ve really enjoyed being with my children, and I’d do it again. But I’ll also say that if I’d passed my civil service exams and got a job, I wouldn’t have given it up, that’s also true. I would’ve taken it. It would have been really hard but I would’ve taken it. Because what I now have is unthinkable. Because I was the typical woman, always looking after the children... Your life’s like that. For example, I thought work, I’m a bit on the pessimistic side... I thought I wouldn’t get a job at my age, because it’s difficult, but I do want to do things, it doesn’t matter, I don’t want to stay still, computer science, Catalan, I love Catalan, I adore it, it’s something... like English” (Woman, Middle Class, Older)

The women of the older generation perceive work in different ways according to their social class. While for the middle class work it is related to goals of personal fulfilment, for the working class it is purely instrumental: work serves to make money.

“Yes, yes, and if I tell you... I’m working for FECSA-ENDESA, the electricity company. (...) It doesn’t affect me. You see? In this job there are a lot of young people who study and, of course, they can’t take it. And they say “how can you be so friendly?” And I say it’s a job for me, I’m doing a job, and when I leave here, that’s it. And if people insult me I bring them onto my ground and they even apologize. I suppose it’s my age. (Woman, Working Class, Older)

The importance of the caregiver role in women of the older generation contrasts with the inactivity of retired men. Inactive middle-class women seem to continue their role as carers once their children are emancipated, through volunteer activities and social altruism.

“Yes, I work for charity, you know? I look for occupations and that’s how I fill my life. Among others, I work for Caritas and I do catechesis in the parish. Then, for example, I help... The girl who came to do the cleaning at home got pregnant, and she’s from Rumania, and there they’re like 100 years behind us. And she was on her own and she had the little girl and, poor thing, she looked very worried so I told her “Don’t worry, I’ll help you”. And I’ve been a bit like the girl’s granny.” (Woman, Middle Class, Older)

The persistent social mindset that sees women as housewives is one of the reasons for the social tolerance towards women's lack of job security. This is true to the point that the discourse of the women interviewed was built around their family responsibilities, and they accepted more precarious working conditions and greater informality than men. This uncritical acceptance of the sexual division of labour leads to career paths of male hegemony and the twofold presence of women.

"Yes, let's see, in theory I have a contract from September to May. But really you know you haven't got a secure job: they'll give you contracts one after the other. And at home, well, now I have a lot less work at home because the children have left. And Pere has lunch at his mother's house every day, I mean, I only have to prepare lunch for myself. And then the dinner is easy. But also the thorough cleaning of the house and that at the weekends." (Woman, Middle Class, Older)

In cases of separation, women take responsibility for the care of their children. However, this work often ends up being done by other female relatives, as mothers assume the role of breadwinners and the male employment model, involving long working hours and even working at weekends. In the Spanish case, the work-life balance policies are insufficient to meet the requirements of a male-type employment relationship, mainly because these policies have not been accompanied by care services, and they are not intended to alter the labour availability that this type of employment relationship entails.

"Many, many years because I think it was ... for those three years I was there, I was there, then when they closed the fishmonger's I was taking care of a child in Barcelona. A friend told me about that too, also from Monday to Friday from 7:30 to 3 and I was still working with the old people. And then, I took care of a child in the afternoons, some men came to my house selling insurance and asked me if I wanted to work in insurance. And, ah well, I thought I'd try. So, I went to look after the child, I came home, I hardly had lunch, I came home at 3:30 and at 4 o'clock I had to be in the office here in Cerdanyola." (Woman, Working Class, Young)

A difference seems to be observed in young middle-class women who take on a male life project. The career expectations of these women explain their greater level of professional frustration and lower tolerance of insecurity compared with their mothers.

“...I admit that I chose the profession I liked. I’ve been very happy working, and that makes a difference compared with what you find everywhere. I suppose it’s our generation, I don’t know, but we were... and it’s hard to get over it... now I’m aware of it... we were educated for work, work, from an early age... Well, I said it because we’ve always had that kind of responsibility, and work, work is first, and of course, that leaves a mark on you...” (Woman, Middle Class, Young)

Conclusions

The aim of this article is to show that paid work still represents the heart of men’s life project. It argues that the hypothetical decline of hegemonic masculinity in a context of employment crisis is a false theoretical assumption. The analysis of underlying power relations and relations of production in masculinity shows that paid work determines the identity of men when employment is both present and absent. It is, however, true that, as Connell (2005) pointed out, the persistence of the hegemonic masculinity model shows slight differences of class and generation that go beyond the Spanish case.

Men who entered the labour market before the 1980s see work as a source of social identity obtained by identifying with the company and/or the trade union struggle. By contrast, working-class women of the same generation accepted with resignation a precarious employment situation that was justified socially and individually by their role as wives, mothers and daughters.

For the younger working class generation, the context of precarious employment and instability and the need to seek jobs again give employment a central role in their lives, making them accept bad working conditions in order to make money and fulfil their

social role as breadwinners. Job instability also affects the life project of young middle-class workers, but in this case they identify with and are fulfilled by the profession, as occurred in the past for both middle-class and working class men. In short, the change in the value of work is taking place especially in younger working class men who give work only an instrumental value because of the instability. However, paid work is still the core of masculinity, as is evidenced by the situations in which it is absent: unemployment, inactivity or retirement produce confusion, anxiety and personal insecurity. Young women who take on the male life project, such as separated women or middle-class women with high job expectations, also seem to reinforce the centrality of paid work.

The decline of hegemonic masculinity appears to be a generational change found in younger men of the working class and middle class. Their discourse incorporates the need for joint responsibility in household chores, in some cases as the result of life circumstances such as the demands of their wives' jobs. However, the analysis of the domestic sphere forces us to qualify this conclusion. Regardless of class and generation, all men distance themselves from care work and family responsibilities, making a clear separation between paid work and the domestic sphere. They see the organization and performance of domestic and care work as female attributes. Whereas women are authorized to organize and decide about the housework, men experience it as something alien—some because they have no time, some because they only do it sporadically, and some because they do not like it. Some men think that participation in housework will lead them to lose privileges, and are therefore reluctant to be egalitarian. They probably perceive that they cannot meet the new demands made by women because they call into question all the values in which they have been educated (Lozoya 1997).

Nevertheless, the discourse and some practices of men suggest that they may be giving more help at home. This is especially true of young men and some pre-retired men, so social class and life-cycle variables are therefore influential. Middle-class men show greater consistency between discourse and practice, especially when the volume of domestic work increases with the birth of children. In these situations, either voluntarily or because there is no other solution, they assume their role as parents and flexibly take on part of the domestic and care work, though it is still managed by women. Despite these slight changes in the patriarchal structure of the home, everything related to the professional work of men remains untouched or unaffected by this support in the domestic sphere (Le Quentrec 2005). This is proven by the fact that men feel no guilt regarding their absence from the domestic sphere. By contrast, young middle-class women with high work expectations whose life project could be compared with the male one end up prioritizing the domestic sphere when they become mothers. The twofold presence shapes their daily life and they feel guilt about their absence from the domestic sphere.

In terms of perceptions and practices, the discourses of men and women on the work and domestic spheres are complementary. Work is the fundamental sphere for men, whereas their contribution in the domestic sphere is merely a help. By contrast, domestic and care work is the fundamental sphere of women, especially of the working class, whereas their contribution to the home through paid work is merely a help. As other studies have also shown, men prefer higher wages in exchange for time, whereas women with a twofold presence prefer more time (Torns *et al* 2008).

In short, the symbolic importance of the male breadwinner and female housewife model continues; paid work is seen as mainly the responsibility of men and domestic and care work is seen as mainly the responsibility of women. This determines career paths

because men are more available and accessible for the labour market, while women are available and accessible for the domestic sphere. The persistence of this model in the social mindset explains why life projects still follow its distribution of responsibilities, and why it is difficult to change the model if it is left only in the hands of the market and individual initiatives. There is therefore a need for policies aimed at breaking this hegemonic model that go beyond work-life balance policies. The new policies should take as their target a model of a couple composed of two caregivers and two paid employees. To achieve this, one must favour the employability of women and improve their working conditions. However, one must not neglect policies that take into account men, facilitating and promoting their involvement in the domestic sphere.

The uncritical pursuance of equality policies involves the risk, as is happening today, that the vast majority of men perceive equality in the law as something that concerns minority groups and women but does not concern them. Most men are unaware of these policies and enjoy an illusion of equality. Minority groups such as separated men and men who have children with second partners and want to become more involved in parenting or the domestic sphere come up against family or work-life balance policies that are designed for women and motherhood. There is therefore a need to design new equality policies that include men.

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