



Gendered Expectations or Economic Preferences?

WWRG / EOWA Seminar, 'Gen F' Report

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John Murray

Introduction

- ◆ Increase in female labour force participation
 - Changes in household production?
 - Changes in workplace policies?
- ◆ Findings and theoretical explanations
 - Allocation of time to tasks within households is dependent on income when men earn more than women
 - Allocation of time to tasks within households is dependent on gender when women earn more than men

When Gender Trumps Money

- ◆ Based on the statistics the theories infer a particular decision making process onto couples to explain their behaviour
- ◆ The measure, the allocation of time, reflects the outcome of a decision making process
- ◆ The conclusion that ‘gender trumps money’ suggests that depending on the finding we infer a different decision making process
- ◆ Yet to question the decision making process

Findings: Men

- ◆ Undergraduates, Graduates and Fathers
 - Men plan around implied assumptions, linked to the role of breadwinner in the household
 - Assume, or have full-time careers, valuing income, reliability
 - Assume a continuous attachment to the workforce over time
 - Assume family formation will have no impact on work day
 - Emphasise the need to provide for a family
 - Believe relative income contributions and preference should be used to arbitrate in decisions over household task allocation...

 - ... but fathers reject relative income contributions as a valid reason for role reversal, and revert to gender role logic

Findings: Women

- ◆ Undergraduates, Graduates and Mothers
 - Women plan around multiple contingent possibilities, linked to an awareness of their likely responsibility for care in the household
 - Assume or have full-time careers, valuing purpose, income
 - Aware of possible movement in and out of workforce over time
 - Aware family formation may have an impact on work day
 - Believe relative income contributions and preference should be used to arbitrate in decisions over household task allocation...
- ... but mothers ended up responsible for care regardless of earned income and irrespective of struck bargain with partner, employer

Discussion

- What are the preferences of individuals/couples?
 - All interviewees imagined that at some point in their future they would form a family. The women tended to be actively creating an opportunity to work and care as mothers, while the men assumed they would take a breadwinning role
- Are particular outcomes expected?
 - General expectation akin to a modified breadwinner type arrangement, with a male primary earner and a female secondary earner
- Are there limits to preferences?
 - Men tended much more to stay within 'normal' gender boundaries of behaviour for themselves and some outright rejected a role reversal. Women more flexible although mothers experienced problems realising preferences when negotiating with employers

Discussion cont'd

- Are preferences constant across contexts?
 - 'Gender normal' boundaries appear to be highly predictable. Despite being young and single, men and women have assumptions about what their role will be and are either actively or unwittingly preparing for that particular role, possibly constraining options later
- Are work and family concerns separable?
 - Yes! If you are young, single and male, and sometimes extending to fatherhood it is possible you are oblivious to any potential overflow from family into work or vice versa
 - But all women in the sample are aware of the possibility work and family may impact one another regardless of their actual work and family situation

Conclusion

- ◆ Allocation of time within households is dependent on gender first, income second. Ironically, people are more comfortable using income as their rationale, yet they will reject the very same rationale in role reversal scenarios
- ◆ Beyond particular situations, there are institutional limits that shape, or reinforce, the range of options that couples might consider
- ◆ There is no real decision making process as such, people create particular situations that dictate their range of options. Implied assumptions by individuals ensure that any negotiation only occurs within a very narrow band of possible options