

SETTING THE STAGE

I

Introduction

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Gender is changing. Men's and women's lives are converging in many ways. Globally, there has been a dramatic increase in women's legal rights since the mid-20th century when the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the United Nations. Following suit, legislation throughout the world now reflects the increasing consensus that women should have the same political and social rights as men, and should be free of harmful practices such as domestic violence, genital cutting, and early marriage. Girls now are as likely as boys to go to primary school in 117 out of 187 countries, and overall, around the world today, young women are even more likely than young men to attend universities. Fertility rates have fallen dramatically, from 5 births per woman in 1960 to 2.5 in 2008, which means a decrease in maternal death and more time for women to improve their economic standing (World Bank, 2012). During the same period, women entered the labor force in increasing numbers all over the world. In the overwhelming majority of countries, women's labor force participation rate increased between 1980 and 2016, although men's participation rate is still higher than women's in every country (Ortiz-Ospina & Tzvetkova, 2017).

While women's lives have changed dramatically in the public sphere, numerous studies around the globe document the persistence of gender inequality at home. After spending a day at the workplace, women are often burdened by a second shift at home, a situation that Arlie Hochschild (1989) has dubbed "the stalled revolution." True, in many countries today, it is no longer a shock to see men diapering a baby or washing the dishes. Over the past few decades, men have been increasing their

contributions to domestic labor and women have been reducing theirs, easing the disproportionate burden on women. Interestingly, at least in Europe, some of the more conservative countries (e.g., Italy, Spain) have shown the biggest leaps, albeit they are still behind the most egalitarian countries (e.g., Sweden, Finland) (Altintas & Sullivan, 2017).

Despite these accounts of the decreasing gender gap, women still do more childcare and housework than men in every country studied in the world (Adams & Trost, 2005; Camilleri-Cassar, 2017; Galey, 2007; Habib, Nuwayhid, & Yeretjian, 2006; Knudsen & Wærness, 2008; Moon & Shin, 2018; Ortiz-Ospina & Tzvetkova, 2017; Simister, 2013; Simulja, Wulandari, & Wulansari, 2014; Teerawichitchainan, Knodel, Vu, & Vu, 2010; Torosyan, Gerber, & Gonalons-Pons, 2016; Treas & Tai, 2016; United Nations Development Program in Montenegro, 2012).¹ Even in tiny Vanatinai, an island in the South Pacific touted as the most egalitarian place on earth, men hunt the wild boar, which confers status, while women sweep up pigshit (Wilford, 1994). Moreover, there is some evidence that in the most egalitarian countries the gap between men and women is no longer decreasing (Altintas & Sullivan, 2017).

Paradoxically, even in the most unlikely contexts couples can and do choose equality. *Creating Equality at Home* tells the real-life stories of heterosexual couples in 22 countries who are bucking the tide and equally sharing the work of the home. The 22 countries represent 5 continents, different levels of development, and are predominantly Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, or Jewish. Among the countries included are the UN's top-ranked gender egalitarian country, as well as a country that ranks 117 out of 189 countries (United Nations Development Programme, 2018). Despite the vast cultural diversity, the book tells a story of similarity rather than difference. In all cases, from Brazil to Bhutan, from Iceland to Indonesia, men and women are undoing gender on a daily basis, having

¹ The countries referenced in these citations include: Albania, Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Bhutan, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Macedonia, Madagascar, Mali, Malta, Mexico, Mongolia, Montenegro, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Nicaragua, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tanzania, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, United Kingdom, and the United States. For a number of these countries there are multiple studies confirming the inequality. To save space, they are not cited here because they merely confirm the findings already cited.

to contend with the social costs of doing so, but also reaping its rewards. *Creating Equality at Home* is a story of gender resisters. These are couples who refuse to simply enact the norms that surround them. Defying constraints, finding structural loopholes, or taking advantage of equality-friendly policies, through their own agency these couples find ways to forge revolutionary ways of living.

Why It Matters

For both women and men, this new kind of family can be liberating. Women increase their power by having an equal chance to succeed in the paid work force. Gender inequality is a self-perpetuating system that is driven by the gendered division of labor. When women specialize in domestic work, while men focus on breadwinning/career, husbands' jobs give them more economic power, which translates into more time in the labor force and less contribution to the work at home. As women take on more domestic labor, they invest less in career, which results in lower wages and less of the nonmaterial rewards of achievement and public recognition as well as less power in and outside the family (Chafetz, 1988; Noonan, 2001). These dynamics are buttressed by ideologies perpetuated by men that tout women's superior nurturing abilities, and by a "rhetoric of choice," which in a world of pressure and constraint pushing them toward gendered roles, women claim to be freely choosing those roles (Stone, 2007).

It is not simply power that is at issue, though. By sharing the work of the home, both men and women access the opportunity to develop key capacities within themselves, opportunities that Nussbaum (2011) has argued are central to the quality of human life. Theories that focus on power emphasize that women are victims of constraining gendered roles, but men's capabilities are stunted as well by the constraints of masculinity (Elliott, 2016). By sharing childcare men are able to develop as nurturers and experience the kind of closeness with their children that is typically reserved for mothers. Moreover, the shared breadwinning that is enabled by shared domestic labor could potentially give men (at least in more economically privileged families) more freedom to pursue the work of their choice, even if it is not well compensated financially.

The Research Literature

Creating Equality addresses questions raised in the research literature. Is it necessary for women to have a high income or at least high relative to

their husbands to achieve equal sharing? How do husbands and wives decide on how to allot time to paid and family work? What drives the equal sharers' deployment of free time to childcare and housework? To what extent does explicit nontraditional gender ideology underwrite equality? Are other beliefs, such as the rejection of essentialism, key to creating equality? How are a country's policies addressed at the couple level? In egalitarian countries, do couples explicitly acknowledge the ways in which structural factors help them? How do couples in less gender equality-friendly countries get around the lack of supportive policies and cultures?

Creating Equality shows how couples undo gender. At the core, the undoing gender perspective assumes human agency. The structural and ideological context in which families live can push them toward or away from equality, but where couples end up depends on how they interpret and respond to those contexts. Gendered norms are strong forces that shape everyday life. We don't dispute that men and women are accountable to those norms and often suffer disapproval or worse if they don't live up to them. However, norms can be thwarted. How equal sharers resist and undo gender to create equality unfolds in *Creating Equality at Home*.

The Case Studies

Twenty-three chapters include 25 case studies of equally sharing couples from 22 different countries. (Two chapters represent the United States, and two chapters include two contrasting cases.) Each chapter includes: 1) the everyday life of the couple, the "who does what" of equality; 2) the history of how equality was developed in their family; 3) the ways in which paid work and family are integrated; and 4) an analysis of the factors that facilitate and impede the couple's efforts to share equally.

A typical day in the life of each couple is described: the nuts and bolts of who gets breakfast together for the kids, takes them to school, puts them to bed, wakes up with a crying child at night, who cleans up, who makes sure everyone has clean laundry. Parenting entails more than chores, however, so the relationships between parents and children are also described: who comforts, who plays. In these descriptions, equality emerges in different ways that vary in the extent to which couples undo gender. The history examines whether equality was an agreed-upon principle adopted from the outset. Did negotiations over time promote a

more egalitarian life or did circumstances conspire to push a given couple in an egalitarian direction? Careers are then considered. In what ways do couples subvert the typical pattern that women cut back while men forge ahead? How are schedules managed to allow for sharing? The analysis then takes a careful look at the forces that operate for each couple. What allows them to undo powerful gendered norms? What is the role of families of origin, their social worlds, their jobs/careers, their country's family policies, and their beliefs about gender? Finally, to help the reader put the couple in context, in addition to the case description and analysis, each country chapter offers a description of the demographics, the typical division of household labor, and the family policy in that country.

Organization of the Chapters

After the introduction, a chapter will review extant theories and research on domestic labor and will describe how our global study was conducted. The 23 case study chapters that follow will be presented in five groups. Each group highlights a different aspect of equal sharing: how couples consciously create equality; resist social norms; prioritize family; draw on lessons from families of origin; and use government policies. Although all of the chapters have information that bears on each of these aspects, this structure emphasizes that creating equality and the factors that facilitate it operate similarly in the diverse cultures represented in our research. We start with Israel, Honduras, Montenegro, Switzerland, and Sweden to illustrate couples who consciously translate egalitarian principles into equally sharing practice. The second group (Indonesia, Croatia, Bhutan, Hungary, and USA: California) provide examples of couples who thwart gendered social norms, despite criticism. The third group (USA: New England, Brazil, Australia, and Singapore) illustrates the prioritization of family. In the fourth group (Austria, Turkey, Czech Republic, People's Republic of China, and Slovenia), family of origin provides models and anti-models for equal sharing. The fifth group comprises Iceland, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Portugal, where couples took advantage of government leave policies that promoted paternal care. Finally, we bring the insights across countries together with two concluding chapters: a chapter describing the key aspects of undoing gender, the "how" of equality; and a chapter analyzing the factors that facilitate the undoing of gender, the "why" of equality.

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