

# ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES, HABITUS AND FAMILY PRACTICES

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## ABSTRACT

*The importance attributed to social insertions in Doise's perspective of social representations and Bourdieu's notion of habitus are discussed and illustrated by a set of studies on family practices showing the effect of social positions on social representations and social practices. Findings reveal a consensus about what the family tasks are and who is undertaking them. They show that men and women agree to find the unequal distribution of family work fair and the traditional differentiation of family roles between husband and wife desirable. The level of education triggers variations in the belief in sex differences, the representations on family work, and spouses' actual contribution to family tasks, without threatening the asymmetrical positions of men and women in society.*

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**T**HERE ARE UNDOUBTEDLY MANY OPINIONS ABOUT THE MEANING OF CONCEPTS SUCH AS FAIRNESS, power or happiness, and the way we define these concepts has an impact on our behaviors. Since the publication, in 1961, of Moscovici's work, "Psychoanalysis: its image and its public", research on social representations has aimed at understanding how opinions are formed, why different persons have different points of view on social objects – above all when they are important and controversial –, or which factors influence our discourses when we talk about these objects.

The theory developed by Moscovici, rooted in the work of the French sociologist Durkheim, was published at a moment when social psychology and cognitive social psychology were almost synonymous: the way in which representations selectively influence the perception of the environment, their properties, and their effect on behaviors and practices was the center of all the attention (MARKUS; ZAJONC, 1985). However, because of the importance it attributes to the conversational exchanges occurring within social groups in the shaping of these representations, Moscovici's Social Representation Theory differed markedly from most North-American theories, based on more individualizing perspectives (FARR, 1995). For Moscovici (1981, 1984 for example), indeed, "thinking societies" create social representations from collective memories, ideologies, science, mass media, and personal experiences, which lead to a shared vision of the social world, to lay

theories about the world that contribute to interpret and construct social reality and, consequently, have an impact on social relationships and actions.

The theory fueled a number of controversies. Critiques pointed to the choice of “ancestors” (DEUTSCHER, 1984), the meaning of “social” (HARRE, 1985), the need for a clarification of the concept and for the definition of adequate methodological approaches to study social representations (JAHODA, 1988; see also the response of MOSCOVICI, 1988). The School of Geneva’s positional perspective of social representations results from the reflection of Doise on the definition of social representations and on the techniques of data analysis used in the studies conducted within this theoretical framework. It also results from Doise’s observation that there is some similarity between the work of Moscovici (1976) and the work of Bourdieu (1979). This observation led Doise (1985) to propose a psychosociological definition of social representations and an approach that aims at analyzing the causes, conditions and consequences of representational variations (DOISE, 1992; DOISE; CLÉMENCE; LORENZI-CIOLDI, 1992). Focusing on the process of anchoring and considering different levels of anchoring in the study of social objects, the School of Geneva has, since then, stressed the effect of ideologies, groups’ positions in the social structure, and individuals’ life experiences in the formation and expression of representations.

We will attempt to outline the points of intersection of the perspective developed by Doise with Bourdieu’s thinking, to comment on the premises, assumptions and model of the School of Geneva before describing a set of studies on family practices which highlight the importance attributed to social insertions both in Doise’s positional perspective and in Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus*.

## **PREMISES, ASSUMPTIONS AND MODEL OF THE POSITIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

The positional perspective is characterized by the importance given to people’s social insertions and to the contexts within which social objects are evoked.

### **SOCIAL INSERTIONS**

We may find the first references to the positional perspective of the School of Geneva in a paper published in the journal *Connexions* in 1985. In this text, Doise stressed the similarities between Moscovici’s (1976) and Bourdieu’s (1979) conceptions of the notion of representation.

According to Bourdieu (1979), people hold different points of view on the social space, their practices and the practices of others,

which depend on their own position in this space. The social structures, for example, the material living conditions of the social classes, produce *habitus*, i.e., different systems of norms, tendencies or dispositions, that generate reasonable practices and perceptions that give meaning to these practices.

The principle of the division of society into classes is inevitably incorporated in the dispositions of the *habitus*: the practices of a class are defined by the extent to which they are specific to that class and distinct from the practices, the lifestyles, the tastes, the judgments of the other classes, and social identity is affirmed in the difference (BOURDIEU, 1979). Because the *habitus* determines the relation between the position occupied in the social space and the positions taken on the social world, there is a structural homology between the social positions and the positions taken. For example, the positions of the two sexual groups in the social space are incorporated in men's and women's *habitus* and orientate their points of view on how they should behave and why.

For Doise, the importance given by Bourdieu (1979) to social positions for the orientation of thought and behavior is reminiscent of Moscovici's conclusion (1976, p. 31), according to which opinions must be analyzed "in the psychosocial field of the person and of the group". In Doise's (1990) terms, this means that the positions occupied by the individuals in society are associated to specific representations, which organize their knowledge and evaluation of the social environment. In other words, the relations between social groups shape the representations formed by the groups, and the representations formed by the groups shape the relations between the groups. Because social relations, social representations and social practices tend to reciprocally reinforce each other, they contribute to maintain and legitimate the social order.

Following this reasoning, Doise (1985, p. 246, free translation) proposed his definition of social representations, as "principles which generate individuals' positioning in accordance with specific insertions within a set of social relations, and which organize the symbolic processes that take place within these relations".<sup>1</sup>

## CONTEXTS

In the approach of the School of Geneva, it is, however, not possible to establish a definitive relationship between social belongingness and social representations, because the representations are subject to variations produced by the characteristics of the situations in which they are produced. Indeed, for Doise (1985), various processes occur when people take a position on a relevant social object, giving rise to a variety of individual expressions of a social representation. In this respect, it should be remembered that Moscovici (1976, p. 287)

1 In original : "principes générateurs de prises de position liées à des insertions spécifiques dans un ensemble de rapports sociaux et organisant les processus symboliques intervenant dans ces rapports."

also considered that it was important to analyze “the movement of the modes of reflection”, while observing that individuals and groups use a plurality of ways of thinking according to the objectives they pursue.

With regard to social insertions, Doise (1989a) notes that an individual belongs – or would like to belong – to various groups. In spite of the fact that some of these groups serve more as anchoring points for opinions than others, reference groups may differ according to the evoked objects or to the contexts. Indeed, the situations of evocation highlight different social relations, and the groups with which people identify themselves define the way they express themselves about a socially relevant object.

With regard to the processes that occur when people take a position about a relevant object, Doise (1989b) considers that social situations enable a “controversial” communication, in which people defend a particular position by means of argumentation forms that would be considered unacceptable within a scientific debate: they use fragmentary information, draw general conclusions from particular observations, make verdicts prevail over the judgments, base arguments of causality on associations of an evaluative nature. In sum, the communication is “adjusted” to the needs of the situation of interaction, and this subsequently produces variations in the representations formed.

In order to explain the variations in the representations formed, Doise (1990), like Moscovici (1976), considers that people’s way of thinking is ruled by two cognitive systems: an operative system and a metasystem that controls the operations performed by the operative system. He defends that the metasystem of social thinking, or common sense, is made of social regulations (norms, beliefs, expectations) that are activated by the situations of communication and are related to individuals’ social insertions in a set of social relations.

For Doise (1990), it is up to social psychologists to study which social regulations actualize which cognitive functioning in which specific contexts, because the specificity of social representations theory, in the study of social objects, consists of showing the relationship between the metasystem and the operative system.

### **THE THREE-PHASE MODEL**

According to authors working within the positional approach of social representations, to study which social regulations actualize which cognitive functioning in which specific contexts requires the uncovering of the organizing principles subjacent to the discourses produced about a specific social object, by means of various techniques of data analysis. These techniques should make it possible to study the three assumptions made by the authors about the nature of social

representations (CLÉMENCE; DOISE; LORENZI-CIOLDI, 1994; DOISE; CLÉMENCE, 1996; DOISE; CLÉMENCE; LORENZI-CIOLDI, 1992):

(a) The members of a particular population share common opinions about particular social objects because representations are formed in communication systems that need common reference points. Therefore, a first step is to identify the common reference points of the individuals or groups under study, to describe the way in which these elements are organized and possibly to ponder their importance and their emotional valence (study of objectification).

(b) Although the members of a particular population share common reference points, there is some heterogeneity in their beliefs and attitudes about social objects. If consensus was never viewed by Moscovici (1976) as an essential characteristic either of the functioning or of the product of social representations, the theory implies that the inter-individual variations are systematically organized. Therefore, in a second phase, it is necessary to look for the dimensions on which individuals take different positions.

(c) Individuals' positioning is anchored in collective realities. There are many kinds of anchoring, and it is necessary to study them at different levels. In its studies, the School of Geneva examined in particular three types of anchoring. However, this means not that there are three types of anchoring, but that the authors explored three different ways of analyzing how cognitive functioning is affected by the metasystem of social regulations (DOISE, 1992):

- at the psychological level, the relationship between the variations in positioning and the variations in the adherence to general beliefs or values is analyzed. These beliefs or values, for example, the belief in a just world or egalitarianism, are "general" to the extent that they influence the positions taken on various social objects;
- at the psycho-sociological level, the relationship between the variations in positioning and the variations in the way individuals perceive the relations between social groups or categories relevant to the object is analyzed;
- at the sociological level, the relationship between the variations in positioning and the membership in social groups is analyzed, under the assumption that shared social positions lead to specific interactions and experiences which modulate the positions on social objects, sometimes through the differentiated interventions of beliefs and values.

The analysis of a social representation should, therefore, highlight the shared knowledge about the object, the dimensions on which there are variations in the common reference points provided

by this common knowledge, as well as the different ways these variations are anchored in social realities. In fact, many studies on social representations do not systematically explore these three phases and limit themselves to the observation of one or another aspect of the representations studied. The research conducted by the School of Geneva on the representations of human rights attempted, nevertheless, to apply the methodology developed within the framework of the positional approach systematically (see DOISE; CLÉMENCE, 1996; DOISE; SPINI; CLÉMENCE, 1999; DOISE, 2001, for example).

In another paper also dedicated to the positional perspective (POESCHL; RIBEIRO, in press), we illustrated the model of the School of Geneva by means of a set of studies on globalization. Indeed, the theory of social representations was initially developed by Moscovici (1976) to study how a new scientific concept was transformed when integrated in the thought systems of different social groups, and much of the research conducted within this framework analyses how social representations are formed to deal with the complex issues arising from the advent of a new concept in the social space. In this paper we will focus on the effect of social positions on social representations and social practices. More precisely, building on the study of the relationship between family practices and the representations of the differences between men and women, we will attempt to illustrate how social relations, social representations and social practices tend to reinforce each other and thus contribute to maintain and legitimate the social order.

## MASCULINE DOMINATION AND FAMILY PRACTICES

Before describing some of the studies conducted within the theoretical framework of social representations, we present Bourdieu's analysis (1998) of the relations between the sexes and summarize some aspects of the vast research on family practices.

### BOURDIEU AND MASCULINE DOMINATION

In a book dedicated to the relations between the sexes, Bourdieu (1998,) analyzes the maintenance and/or change in the traditional domination of men over women. The author describes the division between the sexes as something so normal and natural that it is rarely questioned: social structures are incorporated in men's and women's *habitus* and function "as schemes of perception, thought and action" that legitimate the social order.

For Bourdieu (1998), masculine domination is a constant throughout history, even if the shapes it has taken have changed (in this respect, see also Poeschl, 2003, Poeschl, Múrias and Ribeiro, 2003). To illustrate how this domination may be legitimated, the author mentions

the invention by doctors of a “feminine nature”, before the Industrial Revolution, which explained how the (biological) sex determines the woman’s body and soul (cf. KNIBIEHLER, 2003). As Bourdieu (1998) underlines, the biological differences that characterize the masculine and feminine bodies not only justified (and still justify) the differences that exist between the sexes in the social structure but also were socially interpreted so as to validate the sexual division of work and, consequently, to legitimate the asymmetrical positions of men and women in society.

According to the author (BOURDIEU, 1998), even if there has been some improvement in women’s social situation, the asymmetrical relations between the sexes are still inscribed into two different categories of *habitus* that lead to the classification of objects, dispositions, expectations, and practices according to an opposition between what is masculine and what is feminine. Thus, and in line with the principle of structural homology, the social divisions inscribed in the cognitive schemes continue to organize the perception of the social world and to justify the social position of the dominant, as well as the social position of the dominated.

For Bourdieu (1998), together with the Church and the School, the family ensures the reproduction of the social order through the experience of the sexual division of work and its legitimation. In the family, women continue to think about domestic work as a feminine activity, to consider it important not to dominate their husbands and to show their femininity (by being friendly, delicate, etc.). Reciprocally, the need to differentiate themselves from women compels men to demonstrate the socially defined attributes of manhood (courage, strength, etc.) in front of the others and themselves.

In an extension of the division of work between husbands and wives in the private sphere, the sexual division of work in the public sphere obeys three principles: the functions deemed suitable for women are linked to care, education and services; women have to be maintained in the lower levels of the professional hierarchy as they cannot dominate men; technical occupations and the use of machines are reserved for men. Women are unaware of these principles of division and this explains that, like other dominated groups, they contribute to their own domination.

To summarize, for Bourdieu (1998), *habitus* are produced by the internalization of the social structures and produce perceptions and practices that justify these structures. The author does not develop the inter-individual differences that may exist in the group of men or in the group of women, although he occasionally refers to them.

In line with Bourdieu, the positional perspective considers that the representations which orientate practices are developed in



social groups that occupy specific positions in the social structure, and that therefore contribute to maintain the social order. However, this perspective still focuses on the inter-individual variations in the representations formed, under the assumption that people belong to various social groups, compare themselves to different groups in different social situations, and have different personal experiences.

## RESEARCH ON FAMILY ORGANIZATION

In conformity with the little progress observed in reducing the asymmetrical positions of men and women in Western modern societies, the studies conducted on family organization consistently show that traditional family practices have not significantly changed after women began to enter the labor market en masse in the 1960s: according to the International Labor Organization, in developed economies women spend an average of 4 hours and 20 minutes on unpaid care work while men spend 2 hours and 16 minutes per day (INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION – ILO, 2016, p. 20, for a revision of the relevant literature, see BIANCHI et al., 2012; COLTRANE, 2000; THOMPSON; WALKER, 1989; see also EUROPEAN INSTITUTE FOR GENDER EQUALITY – EIGE, 2015; ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT – OCDE, 2012).

Some authors consider that women spend less time on household chores nowadays than in the past, stressing that it is not because men are doing more, but rather because of a decision on the part of women themselves to do less (BIANCHI et al., 2000). Other authors question this reduction in the amount of time women spend doing domestic work and argue that time that was spent in the past doing such things as washing clothes by hand or making preserves is currently spent on new tasks or new requirements, such as washing clothes more frequently, ironing more, cooking more sophisticated dishes, etc. (SHELTON; JOHN, 1996).

Women not only do perform the majority of domestic tasks, but also take almost entire responsibility for the “typically feminine” tasks, such as preparing the meals or taking care of the clothes, tasks that are more time-consuming and need to be done with greater regularity than the “typically masculine” tasks, such as repairing objects or taking care of the car. Typically, women spend more time than men on “emotional work”, are more likely to show preoccupation and affection toward others, and usually take the responsibility for the “relationships’ work”, which is necessary for the maintenance of relations within the family network (SMOCK; NOONAN, 2005).

Women still undertake the greater part of parental work, considering themselves – and being considered – to have prime responsibility for children (BIANCHI et al., 2012). Although there are more and more women working outside the home, even if they are

mothers with young children, women continue to assume more than one-half of parental duties and to have more contact with children than fathers (YEUNG et al., 2001).

Nowadays, there are higher expectations than in the past that men should take care of children and this fact is reflected in an increase in the time fathers spend with children (PLECK; MASCIADRELLI, 2004). However, fathers mostly get involved in interactive activities with children, whereas mothers continue to undertake the tasks related to cleaning and food (SMOCK; NOONAN, 2005). Because men show little inclination to participate in domestic tasks, the distribution of family work becomes still more unequal after the birth of a first child (SINGLETON; MAHER, 2004).

Authors who have looked for the reasons that might explain why traditional family practices do not change have proposed different (but not incompatible) explanations (COLTRANE, 2000; MIKULA, 1998; SHELTON; JOHN, 1996; SMOCK; NOONAN, 2005; see also POESCHL, 2010). Two pragmatic perspectives have led to inconsistent results: the perspective “of relative resources”, according to which men provide more resources for the family, which gives them more power within the marriage and allows them not to share in the housework equally (GUPTA, 2006; EVERTSSON; NERMO, 2004); the perspective “of time availability”, according to which men do fewer domestic chores than women because they spend more time in outside employment (PRESSER, 1994; KITTEROD; PETERSEN, 2006; see also GOUGH; KILLEWALD, 2011 and AFONSO; POESCHL, 2006, for the case of unemployment).

On the other hand, authors who have studied the effect of the “gender roles ideology”, according to which the unequal division of domestic work is due to the internalization of beliefs associated to family roles, came to the conclusion that men only participate more in housework when the two spouses are egalitarian (GREENSTEIN, 1996), whereas authors working within the “construction of gender” perspective (WEST; ZIMMERMAN, 1987) have argued that the traditional family organization might, in fact, be a culturally appropriate way for people to express their feminine or their masculine essence. They have shown that, in non-conventional marriages, in which women spend more time outside the home or earn more than their husbands, the spouses are keen to undertake the share of family work which is consistent with their gender role in order to compensate for their deviation from traditional roles (GREENSTEIN, 2000).

Within the perspective of social representations, we have shown that the best predictor of spouses’ participation in domestic chores was their perception of the way in which peers split up the tasks (POESCHL, 2000). Thus, we assume that the division of family work between husbands and wives is regulated by social norms, which, in association

with a set of beliefs about men's and women's personality traits or desirable family roles, form representations that define the correct way for husbands and wives to behave (POESCHL; SILVA, 2001; POESCHL; SILVA; MÚRIAS, 2004).

This perspective is consistent with Bourdieu's (1998) approach, in which men's and women's *habitus* present the sexes as two separate worlds. In these separated worlds, and in line with Kranichfeld (1987), the power is considered to be divided between the sexes: women would hold the power in the private sphere (an empire within an empire) and men in the public sphere. The motivation to retain the power in the family would therefore explain that women are eager to maintain traditional family practices (POESCHL, 2007, 2010).

## **RELATIONS BETWEEN THE SEXES, REPRESENTATIONS OF THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE SEXES AND FAMILY PRACTICES**

To illustrate the convergence between the perspectives of Doise and Bourdieu, and how social relations, social representations and social practices reinforce each other, hereafter we briefly describe some of the studies conducted in Portugal on family practices which also highlight different phases of the model proposed by the School of Geneva.

### **REPRESENTATIONS OF FAMILY TASKS**

Because changes may progressively take place in the family organization, in a first study we began by identifying the tasks that people consider to currently constitute family work and to examine whether they are distributed in large domains of activity which might constitute areas of competence of husbands and wives (POESCHL et al., 2001-2). For this purpose, we asked 120 adults, half men, half women, half unmarried, half married, to fill in a questionnaire in which they had to indicate up to 18 tasks that come to mind when thinking about family work, and then to list up to 18 tasks that come to mind when they think either about domestic work (first half of the questionnaires) or about parental work (second half of the questionnaires). We also asked the respondents to evaluate on a 7-point scale (1 = little; 7 = a lot) each of the tasks mentioned, in terms of: (a) time required to perform it; (b) pleasure provided by doing it; (c) importance it has for the family organization.

Altogether we obtained 2141 responses, among which there were 237 different tasks, evoked with a frequency varying from 1 to 129. There were 190 different tasks mentioned for family work, 139 associated to parental work and 90 different tasks mentioned for domestic work. *Ellegard R<sub>n</sub>* statistics revealed a fair similarity between

men's and women's responses and between unmarried and married participants' responses (more than half of the tasks were identical).

The 54 tasks evoked by at least 10% of the respondents confirmed the typologies proposed in the literature (HERLA, 1987; TOUZARD, 1967): the 12 tasks predominantly belonging to family work mainly referred to taking care of family property, such as the garden, the pets and the cars, doing repairs, paying the bills, or going shopping. For the most part, they correspond to the traditional masculine activities of "maintenance". The 23 tasks predominantly belonging to domestic work mainly referred to cooking, doing the washing, tidying the house, dusting, in other words, tasks usually regarded as women's work.

Finally, the 19 tasks predominantly constituting parental work were related to raising children, activities such as conversing, sharing free time, helping with school work, transporting the children, caring for their health, showing affection, tasks which are generally viewed as being mainly performed by women, and also working outside the home to feed the family, which is generally considered to belong to the traditional masculine role.

We reduced the total number of the 237 different tasks mentioned by the respondents, by including the specific answers in more generic ones (cleaning up rooms was included in tidying the house; putting away clothes into taking care of clothes, etc.), and thus obtained 41 types of tasks: 7 maintenance tasks, 20 domestic tasks and 14 parental tasks. The evaluation of the three types of tasks in terms of the time they require, the pleasure they provide, and their importance for the family organization is presented in Table 1.

**TABLE 1**  
**EVALUATION OF THE PARENTAL, MAINTENANCE AND DOMESTIC TASKS IN TERMS OF TIME REQUIRED TO PERFORM THEM, PLEASURE PROVIDED BY DOING THEM AND THEIR IMPORTANCE FOR THE FAMILY ORGANIZATION (1 = LITTLE; 7 = A LOT)**

	TASKS		
	PARENTAL	MAINTENANCE	DOMESTIC
Time required	4.66a	4.07b	3.49c
Pleasure provided	5.74a	4.35b	3.17c
Importance	6.44a	5.32b	5.22b

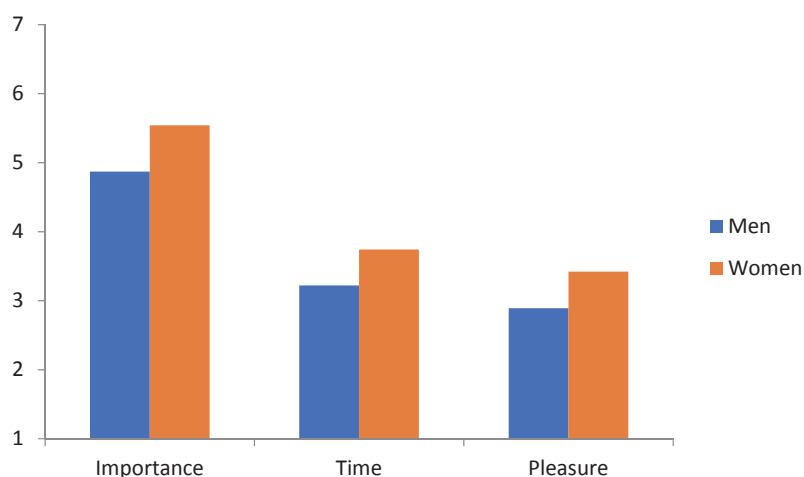
Source: Poeschl et al. (2001-2).

Note: On each line, different letters indicate significantly different means.

As it may be seen on Table 1, parental tasks were perceived as the most time-consuming and the most rewarding, followed by maintenance tasks and then by domestic tasks (all differences significant,  $p < .001$ ). Parental tasks were also considered more important ( $p < .001$ ) than both the maintenance and the domestic tasks.

The analyses of variance performed on the three types of tasks to test the effect of respondents' sex and marital status did not reveal any effect of marital status. There was, however, an effect of respondents' sex on the three evaluations of the domestic tasks. As may be seen in Chart 1, compared with men, women evaluated these tasks not only as more important,  $F(1, 106) = 5.80$ ;  $p = .018$ , and more time-consuming,  $F(1, 106) = 5.72$ ,  $p = .018$ , which is consistent with their involvement in these types of tasks, but they also considered that they provide more pleasure,  $F(1, 106) = 4.27$ ,  $p = .041$ .

**CHART 1**  
DOMESTIC TASKS. EVALUATION OF THEIR IMPORTANCE FOR THE FAMILY ORGANIZATION, THE TIME THEY REQUIRE AND THE PLEASURE THEY PROVIDE, ACCORDING TO MEN AND WOMEN



Source: Poeschl *et al.* (2001-2).

Globally, these results suggest that men and women agree that there are different types of family work, in which spouses probably play a more or less active part. Unmarried people have a representation of the family tasks which is not different from that of married people, which means that they are socialized to complete them. Interestingly, unmarried women share with married women a more positive representation of domestic chores, which makes it possible to predict that they are more likely to undertake them than unmarried and married men. In terms of the social representations theory, we may conclude that there exist shared opinions about what constitutes family work.

#### **DISTRIBUTION OF TASKS BETWEEN SPOUSES, FEELINGS OF JUSTICE AND SATISFACTION AND BELIEF IN THE EXISTENCE OF NATURAL SEX DIFFERENCES**

We continued the analysis of the representations of family practices in a more extensive study (POESCHL *et al.*, 2006; see also POESCHL, 2008) in which, among other things, we examined how people think that the different types of family tasks are divided between

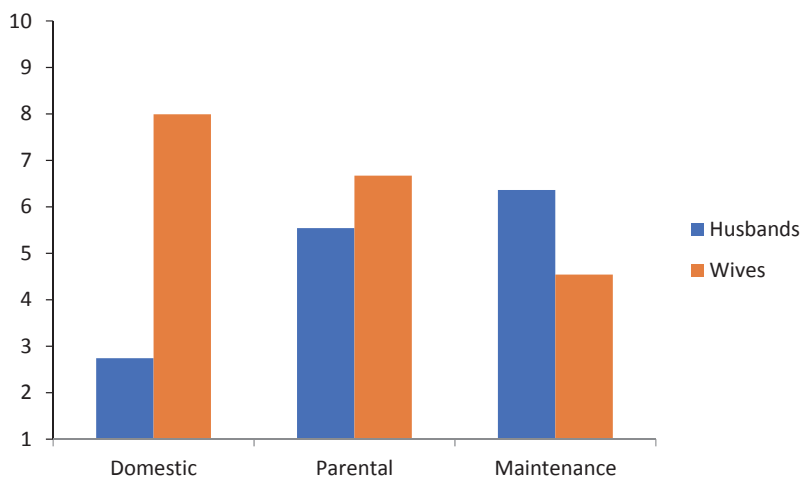
men and women nowadays, whether they view this division as fair and satisfactory, and whether they believe that the existence of differences between the sexes justifies the division of family work.

In this study, 221 respondents filled in a questionnaire of which there were three versions. In the version which we present here, 71 respondents of both sexes, unmarried, married and divorced, were asked to indicate on a 10-point scale (1 = 0 - 10%; 10 = 90 - 100%) the percentage of participation of husbands and wives in the performance of 30 tasks chosen from among the most frequent domestic, parental and maintenance tasks mentioned in the previous study (POESCHL et al., 2001-2). They were also asked to indicate to what extent they considered the participation of each member of the couple fair (1 = totally unfair; 7 = totally fair) and satisfactory (1 = totally unsatisfactory; 7 = totally satisfactory) and to express their opinion (1 = I totally disagree; 7 = I totally agree) on four statements concerning “natural” differences between the sexes (competencies, activities, interests, and psycho-physiological differences).

The results indicated that respondents considered that husbands globally execute less family work than wives (husbands: 4.89; wives: 6.38) and that, globally, spouses participate to a greater extent in parental tasks than in maintenance or domestic tasks (parental tasks: 6.09; maintenance tasks: 5.45; domestic tasks: 5.37). Moreover, as may be seen in Chart 2, husbands were perceived to participate more in maintenance tasks than in parental tasks, and more in parental tasks than in domestic tasks. Inversely, wives were perceived to participate more in domestic tasks than in parental tasks and to participate still less in maintenance tasks (see POESCHL, 2008). Thus, supporting our interpretation of the results of the previous study, people consider that wives participate more than husbands in domestic and parental tasks, whereas husbands contribute more than wives to maintenance tasks (all differences significant,  $p < .001$ ).

CHART 2

MEAN PARTICIPATION OF HUSBANDS AND WIVES IN THE THREE TYPES OF TASKS IN A CONTEXT OF A COMPARISON BETWEEN HUSBANDS AND WIVES (1 = 0 - 10%; 10 = 90 - 100%)



Source: Poeschl *et al.* (2006).

With regard to maintenance tasks, results still revealed that, unlike unmarried respondents, married and divorced women did not see a difference between the contribution of husbands and wives to those tasks. Indeed, divorced women judged the participation of wives in maintenance tasks to be much greater than divorced men did (women: 5.33; men: 3.67),  $t(15) = 2.35$ ,  $p = .033$ , and married women considered the participation of husbands to be smaller than married men did (women: 5.02; men: 6.76),  $t(22) = 2.24$ ,  $p = .036$ .

With respect to domestic tasks, married men differed from the other men by judging husbands' participation in domestic tasks to be particularly weak (married: 1.69; unmarried: 2.89; divorced: 2.79),  $F(2, 33) = 5.04$ ,  $p = .012$ , and wives' participation particularly strong (married: 9.18; unmarried: 7.83; divorced: 7.52),  $F(2, 31) = 5.20$ ,  $p = .011$ . In this regard, married men also differed from married women, who judged husbands' participation to be stronger (3.55),  $t(22) = 2.33$ ,  $p = .029$ , and wives' participation to be weaker (6.77),  $t(22) = 2.52$ ,  $p = .020$ .

Greater consensus characterized the assessment of parental tasks, wives being considered to do more than husbands. There was, however, one exception to this rule: divorced men did not consider that there is a significant difference between spouses with regard to these tasks (husbands: 5.15; wives: 6.08),  $t(7) = 1.36$ , *ns*.

We may thus observe that: (a) divorced men are motivated to enhance husbands' contribution to parental tasks, making no difference between the spouses in this regard; (b) married and divorced women are reluctant to acknowledge a uniquely masculine area in family work, judging the contribution of husbands and wives to maintenance tasks to be similar; (c) married men, in line with studies carried out by other

researchers (MÜLLER, 1998), seem willing to show that they conform to the social norm, according to which domestic work is not men's work.

Fairness and satisfaction with the unequal distribution of family work

When comparing the participation of husbands and wives in family work, respondents considered the distribution of tasks relatively fair (4.79). There was no significant difference between men and women, but unmarried respondents viewed this participation as more unfair than the other respondents did (unmarried: 4.04, married: 5.16; divorced: 5.44),  $F(2, 65) = 3.55, p = .034$ , both differences significant,  $p < .05$ .

With regard to the feeling of satisfaction, the global mean also revealed respondents' satisfaction with the way spouses share family work (4.50). There was no significant difference according to marital status, but men found spouses' contributions more satisfactory than women did (men: 5.03; women: 3.96),  $F(1, 65) = 6.93, p = .011$ .

Thus, in accordance with the conclusions of other authors (BAXTER; WESTERN, 1998; MIKULA, 1998; MÜLLER, 1998; ROUX, 1999; see also POESCHL, 2010), women find the unequal distribution of tasks less satisfactory but not less fair than men do. Moreover, an experience of marriage leads women, as well as men, to consider the inequalities between spouses to be fairer.

Belief in the existence of natural differences between the sexes

When assessing whether the differences in spouses' participation in family work might be justified by the belief that there are all kinds of differences between the sexes, in accordance with the results obtained in previous studies (POESCHL; SILVA, 2001, for example), we observed that both men and women declared a strong belief in the existence of such differences (5.24 on a 7-point scale). Moreover, when husbands and wives were compared, there was no difference in respondents' degree of belief according to marital status, but men said more than women that they believe in sex differences (men: 5.74; women: 4.72),  $F(1, 65) = 16.28, p < .001$ . It is thus likely that the belief in the existence of "natural" sex differences works efficiently to justify traditional family practices.

If women find the division of family work as fair as men do, it may be because they have internalized spouses' differentiated family roles and think that it is their function to perform the traditional feminine role, as Bourdieu (1998) also proposed. However, if they find this division less satisfactory, it may be because they view the result of this differentiation as more favorable to men than to women, and view the "natural" differences between men and women as smaller than men do. The representations of the desirable family roles were thus object of further analysis.



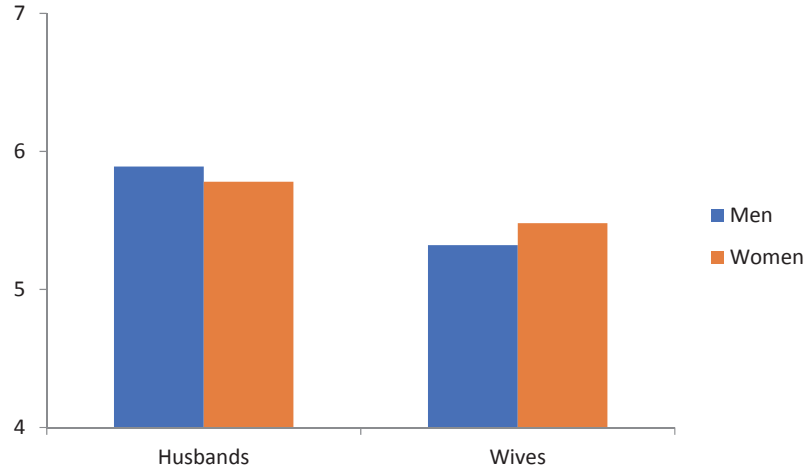
## DESIRABLE FAMILY ROLES

In order to test our interpretation of the pertinence of differentiated family roles for husbands and wives, we asked 205 unmarried, married or divorced adults, half men and half women, to express their opinions on eight statements about the appropriate functions of men and women in the family, among other things (POESCHL; SILVA; MÚRIAS, 2004).

The principal component factor analysis performed on the responses about the desirability that men and women adopt the proposed behaviors extracted two factors. The first factor grouped behaviors traditionally associated to the feminine communal role, such as showing dedication to the family, giving children all the care they need, or caring for the home and the family well-being. The second factor grouped behaviors traditionally associated to the masculine agentic role, such as being the family leader whom the children obey, taking the important decisions with regard to the members of the family, or working to feed the family.

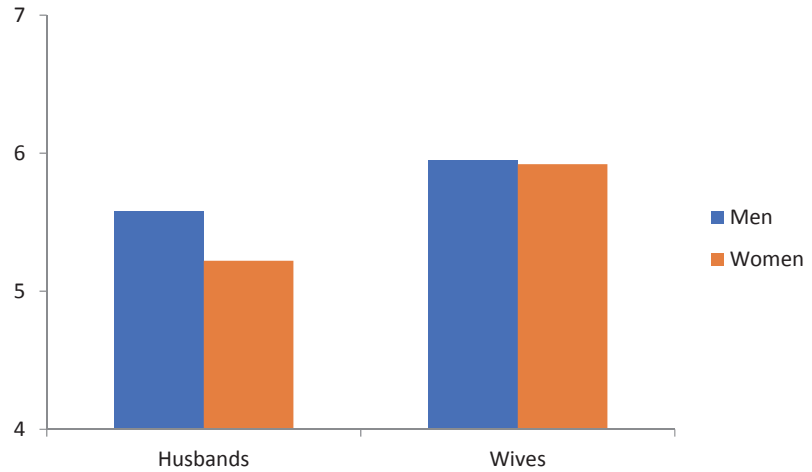
The results showed that the agentic family role was considered more appropriate for husbands than for wives (husbands: 5.83; wives: 5.40) and the communal family role more appropriate for wives than for husbands (husbands: 5.39; wives: 5.93). A comparison of the responses according to sex and marital status did not reveal any effect of marital status, but the interaction between the sex of the respondents and the sex of the spouse described indicated that men, more than women, viewed the agentic role as appropriate for husbands, whereas women, more than men, viewed this role as appropriate for wives (see Chart 3). With respect to the communal family role, the same interaction revealed that women considered the communal role less appropriate for husbands than men did (see Chart 4).

**CHART 3**  
**DESIRABILITY OF THE AGENTIC FAMILY ROLE FOR BOTH SPOUSES**  
 (1 = TOTALLY UNDESIRABLE; 7 = TOTALLY DESIRABLE), ACCORDING  
 TO MEN AND WOMEN



Source: Poeschl, Silva, and Múrias (2004).

**CHART 4**  
**DESIRABILITY OF THE COMMUNAL FAMILY ROLE FOR BOTH SPOUSES**  
 (1 = TOTALLY UNDESIRABLE; 7 = TOTALLY DESIRABLE), ACCORDING  
 TO MEN AND WOMEN



Source: Poeschl, Silva, and Múrias (2004).

Altogether, these results show that women agree with a desirable differentiation of family roles between the spouses, and consider namely the traditionally feminine communal role to be less appropriate for husbands. Thus, women seem to have internalized spouses' differentiated family roles, and neither the experience of marriage nor the enactment of the traditional feminine role modifies their support

for a clear division of the roles in the family, which justifies the spouses' unequal contribution to family work.

This finding gives some support to the perspective of authors who argue that women do not have the same motivation to establish equality in the family as in the professional world (LARSON; RICHARDS; PERRY-JENKINS, 1994; FERREE, 1991), and this, in line with Kranichfeld (1987), might be because performing the traditional family role gives women the feeling that they hold the power in the private sphere.

We may conclude, therefore, that the beliefs associated to the normative behaviors of men and women organize people's perceptions and orientate their practices (see also POESCHL, 2007) or, drawing on Bourdieu's view, that men's and women's biological differences are socially interpreted to justify the sexual division of work and, consequently, to legitimate the asymmetrical positions of men and women in society. However, according to Doise's (1992) positional perspective of social representations, there should be variations in individuals' beliefs, which are anchored in different collective realities, and which should produce variations in the adopted practices.

#### **EFFECT OF THE BELIEFS IN SEX DIFFERENCES ON FAMILY PRACTICES**

Because of the observation that many women do not feel motivated to equally share family work, Allen and Hawkins (1999) proposed that wives' resistance to husbands' participation in family work comes from a set of beliefs and behaviors that inhibit spouses' collaborative family work, namely from three types of factors: (a) women's reluctance to abandon the responsibility of family work, which leads them to control and choose the tasks that their husbands may or may not do, invoking poor masculine competence; (b) the importance for women of validating their femininity by executing family work and the perception that masculine involvement is a threat to the validation of the feminine identity; (c) traditional conceptions about the division of family roles that should be adopted by the spouses, which reflect distinct tasks and spheres of influence within the family (see also FAGAN; BARNETT, 2003; POESCHL, 2007).

To illustrate the importance of the inter-individual variations within social groups highlighted by the positional perspective, we reanalyzed the data collected by Oliveira (2010) by means of a questionnaire, and assessed the impact on family practices of variations in the beliefs in natural sex differences and the desirability of family roles.

#### **Respondents**

In this study, respondents were a subsample of 148 Portuguese married adults, 76 men and 72 women, aged from 24 to 71 years (46 years on average), all having children and having been married from one to 49 years (22 years on average). There were 29 unemployed,

44 senior or intermediate executives and 75 employees or workers, who spent on average 35 hours per week at work. Twenty-three respondents had completed higher education, 34 secondary education, 35 primary education, and 56 the fourth grade of primary education. Most of the respondents (134) were catholic. Politically, 45 declared themselves to be left-wing, 20 center-oriented, 28 right-wing, and the others declared having no political orientation.

The respondents, who had been recruited by the researcher, completed the questionnaire individually or in small groups after giving consent to participate in the study.

#### Questionnaire

Two versions of the same questionnaire were used in the study: one for male respondents and the other for female respondents. First, respondents were asked to indicate in percentage their own participation and the participation of their spouses in eight domestic tasks, eight parental tasks, and eight maintenance tasks, chosen from those frequently mentioned in previous studies. Then the items proposed by the first dimension – standards and responsibility – and the second dimension – maternal identity confirmation – of the maternal gatekeeping scale (ALLEN; HAWKINS, 1999) were presented. Female respondents were asked to indicate to what extent the items applied to them (1 = not at all like me; 5 = totally like me), whereas male respondents were asked to indicate to what extent the items applied to their wives (1 = not at all like her; 5 = totally like her). Finally, respondents had to express their opinion (1 = I totally disagree; 7 = I totally agree) on the items of the third dimension – differentiated family role – of the maternal gatekeeping scale, on four statements concerning “natural” differences between the sexes (POESCHL; SILVA, 2001), and on six items aiming at assessing the fairness of and the satisfaction with their division of family tasks (POESCHL et al., 2006).

#### Data analysis

First, we looked for different positions with regard to the beliefs in the existence of natural sex differences and the desirability of differentiated family roles. Then we examined whether these positions were related to: (a) specific sociodemographic variables (sex, age, number of years of marriage, number of children, profession, number of hours spent in job activities, education, religion, political orientation); (b) variations in women’s reluctance to abandon the responsibility for family tasks and the importance for women of validating their femininity by executing the family work; (c) differences in the amount of family work actually executed by the two spouses; (d) variations in the feelings of fairness and satisfaction with the division of family work.

## Results

To identify different positions with regard to the beliefs in the existence of natural sex differences and the desirability of differentiated family roles, we performed an automatic classification analysis of the responses given to the third factor of the maternal gatekeeping scale, differentiated family roles (*Cronbach's alpha*: .59), and to the scale of belief in the existence of natural sex differences (*Cronbach' alpha*: .61).

We found three *clusters*, which correspond to three different positions (see Table 2).

**TABLE 2**  
AUTOMATIC CLASSIFICATION ANALYSIS OF THE BELIEFS IN THE EXISTENCE OF NATURAL SEX DIFFERENCES AND THE DESIRABILITY OF DIFFERENTIATED FAMILY ROLES (1 = I TOTALLY DISAGREE; 7 = I TOTALLY AGREE)

	CLUSTER1	CLUSTER2	CLUSTER3
	(N = 51)	(N = 40)	(N = 57)
Differentiated family roles	2.49c	4.75b	5.60a
Natural sex differences	4.07b	4.07b	5.72a

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Note: On each line, different letters indicate significantly different means.

It may be observed from Table 2 that the third cluster groups the respondents who believe that men and women are very different and should have very differentiated roles. The first cluster gathers respondents who do not have a clear position about the existence of sex differences but reject differentiated family roles, whereas the respondents included in the second cluster do not differ from the respondents of the first cluster with regard to sex differences, but accept to a greater extent the idea of a differentiation of family roles.

### Sociodemographic characteristics

The analysis of the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents who share the three positions did not reveal significant differences according to their sex,  $\chi^2 (2) = 4.48$ , *ns*, or to the other variables in test, except for education,  $\chi^2 (6) = 19.06$ ,  $p = .004$ . Thus, the 56 respondents with low education (until the 6th grade) were more numerous than expected in the third cluster ( $n = 32$ ) and less numerous in the first cluster ( $n = 10$ ). On the other hand, the 23 respondents with higher education were more numerous than expected in the first cluster ( $n = 12$ ) and almost absent from the third cluster ( $n = 4$ ). We may therefore infer that the level of education influences the beliefs that underlie the sexual division of the functions in the family.

### Responsibility and femininity

The responses given by the respondents of the three clusters to the first two factors of the maternal gatekeeping scale, i.e., standards and

responsibility (*Cronbach's alpha*: .79) and maternal identity confirmation (*alfa de Cronbach*: .73), were compared.

As it may be observed on Table 3, variations in the representations of the two sexes were related to variations in the degree of control wives had over family work and in the importance of this work for the validation of their femininity.

**TABLE 3**  
**STANDARDS AND RESPONSIBILITY AND MATERNAL IDENTITY CONFIRMATION.**  
**MEAN LEVEL OF AGREEMENT ACCORDING TO THE THREE CLUSTERS**  
**(1 = I TOTALLY DISAGREE; 5 = I TOTALLY AGREE)**

	CLUSTER1	CLUSTER2	CLUSTER3
Standards and responsibility	2.45c	3.08b	3.67a
Maternal identity confirmation	2.87b	3.60a	3.78a

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Note: On each line, different letters indicate significantly different means.

As it may be seen in Table 3, in the families of the respondents included in the third cluster (high perception of sex dissimilarities), wives were more likely to control family work (redoing the household tasks done by their husbands or preferring to do them themselves),  $F(2, 145) = 22.73, p < .001$ , than in the families of the other respondents, whereas in the families of the respondents included in the first cluster (low perception of sex dissimilarities), wives were less eager to validate their femininity through the performance of family work,  $F(2, 145) = 12.14, p < .001$ , than in the families of the other respondents. According to the respondents included in the second cluster, wives did not have such a strong need to control family work, but were somewhat inclined to validate their femininity through the performance of family work, as proposed by the “gender construction” perspective (WEST; ZIMMERMAN, 1987).

Degree of participation in family tasks according to the three clusters

We examined spouses' actual participation in the three types of family tasks according to the respondents of the three clusters. The percentage of participation is registered in Table 4.

**TABLE 4**  
**DEGREE OF PARTICIPATION (IN PERCENTAGE) OF BOTH SPOUSES IN THE**  
**THREE TYPES OF FAMILY TASKS ACCORDING TO THE THREE CLUSTERS**

		CLUSTER1	CLUSTER2	CLUSTER3
Husbands	Domestic tasks	19.51a	14.71ab	11.37b
	Parental tasks	40.23a	38.76ab	32.87b
	Maintenance tasks	63.65	63.67	60.10
Wives	Domestic tasks	69.35b	83.35a	83.29a
	Parental tasks	58.51b	62.60ab	67.17a
	Maintenance tasks	29.59	28.17	29.72

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Note: On each line, different letters indicate significantly different means.

As expected, in the families of the respondents included in the first cluster, husbands participated more in domestic tasks,  $F(2, 145) = 5.61$ ,  $p = .004$ , and contributed more to parental tasks,  $F(2, 145) = 3.71$ ,  $p = .027$ , than the husbands from the families of the respondents of the third cluster. Moreover, in the families of the respondents grouped in the first cluster, wives participated less in domestic tasks,  $F(2, 145) = 9.84$ ,  $p < .001$ , than the wives from the families of the respondents of the other two clusters, and contributed less to parental tasks,  $F(2, 145) = 4.39$ ,  $p = .014$ , than the wives from the families of the respondents of the third cluster.

We may note, however, that husbands' participation in domestic tasks was low in all cases and inferior to 50% in parental tasks. Husbands contributed more than women only to the masculine maintenance tasks, and there were no differences in the degree of participation in these tasks according to the three clusters, all  $F_s < 1$ .

Feelings of fairness and satisfaction with the division of family work

The analysis performed to uncover whether there were variations in the feelings of fairness and satisfaction with the division of family work adopted by the respondents did not reveal significant differences according to the three clusters, all  $F_s < 1$ . Moreover, data registered in Table 5 indicate that all types of division of family work were considered fair and satisfactory by the spouses who adopted them.

**TABLE 5**  
**FEELINGS OF FAIRNESS AND SATISFACTION ACCORDING TO THE THREE**  
**CLUSTERS (1 = I TOTALLY DISAGREE; 7 = I TOTALLY AGREE)**

	CLUSTER1	CLUSTER2	CLUSTER3
Fairness	5.27	5.10	5.13
Satisfaction	5.03	4.88	4.99

Source: Authors' elaboration.

In conformity with the positional perspective of social representations, these findings indicate that inter-individual variations in the beliefs in the existence of natural sex differences and the desirability of differentiated family roles are linked to differences in the positions on family work and actual family practices. However, they also show that little progress toward an equal division of family work between husbands and wives has been achieved, as women continue to undertake the greater part of domestic and parental work. An internalization of the social structures does indeed seem to produce, as Bourdieu argued, perceptions and practices that justify these structures, even if education triggers some changes in the representations formed and, consequently, in the unequal division of family work.

### CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

In line with the three-phase model of the positional perspective, studies show that there are common reference points in the representations of family practices. Indeed, people agree about the composition of family work and the traditional division of tasks between men and women: wives have to take care of the domestic and parental tasks and husbands of the maintenance tasks. Young unmarried people share the representation of married people, which suggests that they are likely to reproduce traditional family practices, and the slight differences observed between married men and married women point to a willingness to show conformity with traditional practices: married men consider husbands' participation in domestic chores to be more reduced than women do, and married women consider wives' contribution to all components of the family work to be larger than men do.

In line with Bourdieu, spouses find a meaning in traditional family practices, in spite of the acknowledged inequality in the division of family tasks between husbands and wives: women consider more than men that domestic tasks provide pleasure and, once they are married, agree with men on the relative fairness of the distribution of family work. Women also agree with men on the desirability of the traditional division of family roles, which justifies the unequal distribution of family work, and even consider the feminine communal role less appropriate for husbands than men do. On the other hand, men are more likely than women to justify wives' role in the family on the basis of the existence of natural differences between the sexes.

Thus, results about the representation of family practices support Doise's perspective, according to which shared social insertions introduce variations in some dimensions of a generally shared social representation. Because of the interactions that take place both among men and among women, and because of their respective experience of



family life, women support wives' communal role and men justify the inequalities in family organization invoking "natural" sex differences. Both points of view legitimate and orientate the practices of the groups, reflect their positions in society and contribute to their maintenance.

Results may similarly be interpreted in terms of Bourdieu's conceptual framework according to which people hold different points of view on the social space according to their position in this space. Social structures seem indeed to be incorporated into men and women's *habitus*, and to function as schemes of perception, thought and action. The classification of dispositions and practices opposing what is masculine and what is feminine orientates behavior in the family, justifies the division of family tasks, and legitimates the social order.

Finally, an analysis of the variations in the level of adherence to the beliefs in the existence of sex differences and the desirability of differentiated family roles reveals the effect of these beliefs on men and women's views on family practices and on their effective contribution to family work. A lower level of belief in the desirability of differentiated family roles was indeed associated with wives' lower level of control over family work, lower identification with family work, and lower effective participation in the domestic tasks.

These findings illustrate why, from the perspective of the School of Geneva, it is important to analyze not only the representations formed by the groups but also the inter-individual variations stemming from the different beliefs and experiences of their members. In addition to the impact that the beliefs in the existence of sex differences and the desirability of differentiated family roles may have on family organization, this analysis also suggests that people's level of education has an impact on their adherence to these beliefs. Yet, the progress toward equality appears too small to invalidate Bourdieu's view: it does not reflect a change in the asymmetrical positions of men and women in society and does not constitute a threat to the maintenance and justification of the social order.

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