

GENDER AND CHILDREN'S TIME USE¹

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Abstract: Gender is a symbolic differentiation which affects the time use by girls and boys, favouring the boys in girls detriment. This research focuses on time use by children. In order to obtain the timing of children activities we carried out a research based on the daily time use of 150 working class children, in the age group from 9 to 11. All of them studied in public schools and many of them had four or more years of schooling. They registered all the daily activities for two days: a week and a weekend day. The analytical strategy compared the budget of time use between girls and boys from three main categories: household, personal care, and the leisure time. The first step of the study consisted in the elaboration of the system of activities relevant to the population under study. To obtain a description of everyday life activities, a sample of it came from focus groups, where they were asked to report all activities (and time) they had done in the day before. The registered activities were then coded. The research focused on a pre-defined activities list and the unit of analysis was the event. Drawings and schedules were presented to the respondents, and they were asked to fill out the beginning and ending time for each activity. All students were given a digital watch. For each group of 25 students two of them were selected (a female and male) and trained to help others. This study have departed from focus groups till the use of diaries, although difficulties were found. An expressive number of children did not fill out the accomplishment of domestic activities. The reason for it was that the working class domestic group is organised around the reciprocal expectation of each member. The girls spend much time accomplishing domestic activities and they have less time for their personal care and leisure. The boys have much spare time as a result of their less domestic activities time use. The symbolic differentiation of gender, in a given social reality, informs the working class families' dispositions and, consequently, the time uses by girls and boys.

Key words: Time use, gender, working class children

Introduction

Everyday activities of the ones who live in a highly industrialised society is affected by time rhythms developed in it. The time use has its own marks, which come from everyday impositions of such a society. It regulates relationships within domestic groups. It regulates also the cultural understanding about what is due to each one. The attributions to boys and girls, to women and men are a result of the way society institutes gender relationships. At the same time it constitutes places, attitudes, tasks, distinct ways of being and understandings that turn to constrain the time use possibilities to some and expands it to others.

The time use studies have been done mainly in developed countries, where large scale sample have been carried out, allowing international comparative analyses among these countries.² In

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² SZALAI, 1972, HARALDSEN, VAAGE e ASI, 2000, Government of India e UN-ESCAP, 2000, HIRWAY, 2000 e INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON TIME USE STUDIES, 1999.

Brazil due to researches budget restrictions, these sort of studies are limited. They are done through interviews or direct observations. It makes hard attainable to compare different areas within.³ The population time use evaluation allows the assessment of subjective and cultural transformations as well as structural changes that come from production modes. Generally such studies are done among adults – urban workers - because their educational qualifications allow much more detailed registrations about their daily activities. Creative researches among illiterate people were carried out to make attainable the apprehension of another way of life and their organisations concerning structural conditions.⁴

Time studies, with its own methodology, show some macro structural regularities that reveal themselves when time allocation is seen within several human activities. Among them the most important one to understand gender relationships, and the unequal allocation of time use, are: estimating time spent by men and women on domestic tasks, including caring for children; giving information about childhood work; giving insights about family work distribution which can explain the burden of work and leisure time enjoyed by women and men; foreseeing women mobility out of home; analysing regularities among more vulnerable social groups which includes children.⁵

Gender symbolisms are apprehended, the subjective and social dispositions are mixed up, and the effects are socially longer lasting for women. There are many ways to constitute categorical differentiation, sometimes, its presence is taken for granted in daily activities, in a way it causes very little or no reaction. The gender differentiation in time use is one of these. Women, much more than men, are required to do more house holding and take care of children, that means they have very little time for themselves.

The gender symbolisms are built since cultural, historical and social patterns crossed by patriarchal particularisms. Gender is “a kind of categorical differentiation which assumes specific

⁶ Its particular subject is activated in between women and women, men and men, and in between women and men relationships. Its symbolisms and particularities inform and shape subjective and collective ways of being. As an effect of this, social dispositions limit women freedom as agents of their own lives turn out to be greater.

The dramatic consequence of it is the deprivation of women’s individual capabilities

³ AGUIAR, 1999 e MADEIRA, 1997

⁴ AGUIAR, 1998 e CEBOTAREV, 1985.

⁵ HIRWAY, idem e GOVERNMENT OF INDIA e UN-ESCAP, idem.

development.⁷ It is the nature of these dispositions that reflects itself in every day life and updates families and society attitudes. There is a network activation within social agents, public policies and social structures, informing one another mutually.

Schooling is among the factors that improve these dispositions as changing possibilities. Here we are not concerned if this is done or not, and not even what would be its accomplishment conditions. We call attention to, on the one hand, the educational's entitlement that empowers individuals. On the other, education in general (done by any institution), which promotes social informed discussion and new values formation, is able to strengthen social agents. Schooling can turn a young woman decision power greater in her family through this education effect on her social prestige, her potential to be independent, her expressing herself power, her knowledge about the world out of home, her ability to influence the group decisions, etc. As we will see next, education has positive effects on the time uses distribution between women and men, even though its changes are subtle along time.

Understanding gender differences extensions appears to us as something that might turn possible the building of much more effective interventions which propitiate women's agent conditions since childhood. Education in general, and schooling specifically, can contribute to redesign gender social arrangements. Time distribution is one of the elements that help to make gender configurations understandable in a certain social formation.

This work contribution goes in the sense of expressing the time use transgressing the analytic categories: gender, education, social class and domestic work. Following and unfolding some aspects we offer a comparative analyses about time uses among women and men interrelating factors that are able to improve the alternatives for time use.

Gender, Education and Time Use

O conceito de tempo, no uso que fazemos dele, situa-se num alto nível de generalização e de síntese, que pressupõe um riquíssimo patrimônio social de saber no que concerne aos métodos de mensuração das seqüências temporais e às regularidades que elas apresentam. Norbert Elias, 1998⁸

⁶ PISTICELLI, 1997, p.60.

⁷ "The individual freedom is essentially a social product, and it exists a two way relationship between (1) the social dispositions that aim to expand individual liberties and (2) the individual liberties use not only to improve every one's life, but also to turn the social dispositions more suitable and effective" (SEN,2000, p 46).

⁸ The concept of time, in the use we do, is situated in a generalization and synthesis level, which presupposes a very rich social knowledge patrimony concerning to the temporal sequences measure methods and to the regularities that they present (ELIAS, 1998).

Time and space are specific types of social activities, institutional and conceptual symbols, and they need to be apprehended in a high synthesis degree.⁹ Time refers itself to positional relations at a evaluative *continuum*, while space refers itself to positional relations between mobile facts.¹⁰ All of us have the same number of hours day, but the way we spend it is different. A population time uses analyses observes which activities this population is involved with and the time given to each of them.

Children and adults have on them an urban and industrialised strong influence which is seen in contemporary cities. Industrialised societies' demands impose time control, dislocations and rhythms to the whole family. To Norbert Elias "a child that grows in one of these XX century national industrialised societies, submitted to a very intense time regulation, needs seven or nine years to learn how to say the time; it means to learn how to read and interpret the clock and calendar symbolic systems, beyond adapting her/his sensibility and behaviour to it."¹¹ The time uses complexity crosses gender social arrangements and because of this, the attribution understandings touched by particularisms and identity's attributes.

The authors say that the daily activities division between adult workers has a strong gender component. Mostly, besides a country's industrialisation conditions, women spend much more time at the domestic tasks and mainly taking care of the children together with paid working activities.¹² The educational level and social class have a positive influence in time sharing between men and women concerning children care. The higher the education level, the longer men spend time taking care of the children and doing domestic tasks.¹³ Even though, this does not change the persistent patriarchal particularisms which make possible for men to have in their disposition much more spare time, because they are less involved with domestic tasks. Generally, the amount of time spent

⁹ The social human language knowledge and experience makes possible "an orientation referring to positions, or to the intervals between this positions, occupied by happenings of any nature, relating themselves one to the other or relating some to others within one and unique sequence, as well as relating to homologue positions inside one sequence and inside another sequence, taken as pattern measure scale. The perception and the determination of spatial and temporal positions only turn to be possible as such, therefore, at an social evolution stage where men had learnt to deal with the facts and to reflect about them with the help of generalization and synthesis relatively high level orientation tools" (ELIAS, 1998, p. 80).

¹⁰ ELIAS, idem.

¹¹ ELIAS, idem, p.112.

¹² AGUIAR, 1998, CEBOTAREV, idem, e SOUZA, 1972.

¹³ "Men of the highest education status spend more time at home - 13 hours e 24 minutes while those with secondary or primary education spend 12 hours and 53 minutes, and those with incomplete primary education spend one hour less than the latter figure. The most educated men probably know how to find attractive pastimes at home." (STRZEMINSKA, 1972, p. 390).

at domestic tasks by men is about 30 to 40% lesser than it is by women.¹⁴

On the other hand, higher educated women are professionally busy, consequently spend less time taking care of the children. Generally, professional middle class women have higher educational levels while working class mothers have complete or incomplete primary education.¹⁵ The reasons to less or greater time spent on household activities and on children care is not found only at the availability's work/job schedules. If we control the same involvement time (work schedules) to both groups we will have middle class women spending a lesser time at the domestic tasks than the working class women. The higher the women educational level is, the better her free time is managed, organised and negotiated with her partner. The explanation of it is found in the optimisation of time done by the first ones, at the employment of someone else to help and in the use of available social equipment (nursery, for instance) to reduce the domestic work journey. This allows these women to enjoy more free time and time for themselves. Even though, if the educational level together with some other factors contributes to reduce time spent in domestic activities, the same is not true concerning the time requested for caring of children, which remains, practically, unchanged throughout the years.

The time spent caring for children is constant no matter what is the subject's schooling level. Everyday, women spend an average time of one hour and thirty minutes taking care of the children. This shows that only some activities are up to change coming from social equipment's availability. In this case a reduction in the amount of time needed to do domestic work occurs. An important conclusion is related to the fact that the higher a woman's educational level is, the greater amount of free time is spent on personal improvement through educational investment. This is done both through courses investments, readings or improvement of leisure's activities diversity.¹⁶

A society that does not have places for women where they could leave their children, leave them with limited possibilities to work or to search for instruction. At the same time it permits other social agents to realise that women are restrict to the domestic place, maintaining low expectations related to what they can do. This is translated into a lack of social investment and in difficulties to open job places to them or in just opening to them less qualified jobs. This can be justified both

¹⁴ "A comparison of the free time within the group without primary education shows that women's free time equals only 60 percent of men's free time; within the group with secondary education to 77.3 percent, and within the highest educational groups to 93.1 percent " (STRZEMINSKA, idem, p. 391).

¹⁵ CEBOTAREV, idem, CARVALHO, 1999, AGUIAR, 1994, e FUNDAÇÃO DE ECONOMIA E ESTATÍSTICA, 2001.

¹⁶ Following STRZEMINSKA (idem), women with better educational level read books twice than the ones with lower educational level. This is an indicator that reflects the scholarship degree at a person life quality and in the chooses to be displayed and done.

ways: by the lack of qualification and by a cultural disposition that is reserved to women, reconfirming the domestic space, and children care, as a feminine one.

Justice or juridical organisation creates symbolic perceptions too, because it builds a material perception of women's role. At the moment the National Brazilian Constitution, for instance, guarantees mothers one hundred and twenty days maternity leave and only five days for fathers. It remains as a subtext that children belong to the mothers and not to the fathers and even less to society as whole.

There are tendencies that show educational level is one of the main factors that run into qualitative alteration of people's time use. The advance of educational levels is closely connected with an intensification of the life's people, and their growing participation in cultural and social life which leads to a more active use of their free time. Still more variable are taste preferences concerning secondary activities that reveal people's lifestyle specially if they are related to human talents and personality development.¹⁷ Meanwhile, Amaury de Souza says that an important amount of free time follows the less effort tendency.¹⁸ Time is spent in passive activities. We are not to evaluate here time quality, specially because free time of any demand is desirable to welfare since there is always a great amount of time spent at work and at travelling to work. These waste about nine, ten or more hours a day. We can notice a restricted relationship among educational level, quality and lifestyle that are not just concerned to economic issues. Nowadays, there are deep social changes that point to subjective and cultural ways of being related to a tendency to equalise the time use between men and women.

Education is an important factor to cultural changes in traditional roles acceptance, which say what is due to men and women.¹⁹ Time involvement with children during twenty four hours a day is mainly a basic product of a culture and is not due to an adult's working schedule.²⁰ Actually, there is a tendency in every country saying that women are experts in taking care and men nowadays spend more time talking and playing with children.²¹ The higher is a man's educational and social level the larger is the amount of time they spend doing domestic tasks and caring for

¹⁷ "A 'primary' activity was defined as any act that was determined by a person's location, and/or his interaction partner plus the common sense notion for the beginning and the end of an activity. In practice, a primary activity was the activity mentioned first by the respondent (...). A 'secondary' activity was defined as an activity performed concurrently with primary activities (...) a secondary activity rather represents the preferences of an individual." See SCHEUCH, 1972, p. 77.

¹⁸ SOUZA, idem.

¹⁹ CARVALHO, idem.

²⁰ STONE, 1972.

children, even if we consider these changes in behaviour subtle along the years; such changes are found in the time-budget of people with the highest educational levels.²²

Concerning working class children and adolescents, in Brazil, the research has shown they do many domestic activities mainly assuming their mothers' place. Following Maria Luiza Heilborn "gender logic seems to limit girls' opportunities related to work and choosing possibilities".²³ In the same way, Suzana Duque-Arrazola points out that "gender relations assume an exacerbated pattern in association with poverty, through traditional heritage and also through the lack of alternative to women aiming to get free of the burden of household duties".²⁴ The constraints are not smaller to boys, because it puts them since early in their lives as families providers. Poor families and poor communities conditions together with gender and cultural aspects put the girls in a reclusive situation, assuming domestic tasks when mothers absence. The girls are pressed to drop-out school to substitute their mother at home or to collaborate with small earnings from paid work. In the case where the girls failure at school the alternative way is the reclusion at the poor family's limits.²⁵ The last experience and one of the consequences to where poverty can arrive to is that "economically and psychologically unattended girls go to streets and became early young mothers".²⁶ Within poverty, school is sometimes one of the few really enjoyable places for girls and for working class children.²⁷ It is the place where the authors notice that the girls obtain educational success, therefore they are found in greater numbers at high school.²⁸ School also legitimates a social life for girls and a less sexist place than the family.²⁹

What concerns the middle class to education, the authors find that "spatial segregation reflects itself also at school functions, so as at the middle class urbanised areas there are multiple educational functions and an opener and diversified formation is done. This is of relevant incidence at the individual and subjective constitution."³⁰ Wealth families tend to assert relations and

²¹ GOVERNMENT OF INDIA e UN-ESCAP, idem, INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON TIME USE STUDIES, idem, e STONE, idem.

²² STRZEMINSKA, idem.

²³ HEILBORN, 1997,p.335. The author researched in two communities in Rio de Janeiro, Nova Holanda and Morro do Chapéu da Mangueira, taking as a base interviews with children and teens from 9 to 11 years old, from both sex taking into account gender dimension as social experiences that organize in different ways the temporalities for women and men.

²⁴ DUQUE-ARRAZOLA,1997, p.57.

²⁵ DAUSTER,1992

²⁶ MADEIRA, idem,p.57.

²⁷ CARVALHO, idem and ENGUITA,1989.

²⁸ MADEIRA, idem and ROSEMBERG,1994.

²⁹ DUQUE-ARRAZOLA, idem.

³⁰ LAVINAS,1997,p. 29.

perspectives in more equalised bases to the their children. Considering middle class families, they have more equalitarian perspectives concerning their children's education, although the adolescents' answers show traditional gender divisions. At Lena Lavinás research shoes data: 1/3 of middle class boys say that men are not suppose to do feminine specific jobs, while 96% of the girls think that there are not exclusive feminine or masculine activities.³¹ To the boys the market is one way. Even though, they both admit men and women do not have the same chance in the working market, the girls mainly say "society is deeply sexual hierarchical."³²

Time does not distinguish itself only through compulsory activities and through impositions of an industrialised society. Workers historical conquers, as journey reduction, allowed them to enjoy more leisure time. Beyond our daily duties, leisure is a time dedicated to ourselves that allows choices, but what seems to be choices is in great extend a matter of social class and gender understanding, possibilities and constraints.

Engendered Temporalities

A research done with one hundred and fifty children at a suburban school in Porto Alegre (more than 80% of the children were between 9 and 11 years old) has shown important differences among boys and girls in what concerns time use.³³ Besides three boys (11, 14 and 15 years old) who have registered to work between one to three hours a day to earn money, none of the other children have registered for any direct paying working involvement. This does not mean they do not do a lot of activities inside and outside the house, helping adults.

The family's social class conditions; the school and the Conselho Tutelar (official tutor counsellor) pressings for the children's effective presence in school; the flexible and more interesting pedagogical school proposition in the last years; together with availability of social equipment in the community (even if it is not equally distributed) are differentiation factors to these urban working class children, propitiating them to live better than others.³⁴ The differences

³¹ LAVINAS, idem.

³² LAVINAS, idem.

³³ CARVALHO, MACHADO, and ROSA, 2001.

³⁴ Social demographic data, from the research, show that most of the families have unfinished fundamental studies up to fifth level. Families get a salary equivalent to one or hundred dollars. Mothers declare to be, mainly, house wives or domestic employees ; fathers work at formal traditional sector as builders. There are poverty areas at Vila Nova neighborhood because some families were transferred from a risk place to there. Even though the organization efforts of these families got a recycle house for them to work in it. A considerable part of the families is their own houses owners. Vila Nova has basic hygienist structure but there is a lack of leisure public spaces. The families have strong participation at the meeting's shared budget (Orçamento Participativo) at Porto Alegre city, getting improvements at

that mark investments and constraints to boys and girls out of school schedule are mainly of gender and class. The gender symbolisms are present to the families and its effects can be seen at the greater amount of time girls are involved with house holding and domestic group care.

Registrations in the diaries done by girls and boys show us that girls more than boys have less time for leisure and less time for personal care.³⁵ The amount of events related to personal care are almost the same to both, the difference is its duration: we find more girls than boys spend until 13 hours on it no matters whether it is a week or weekend day. It is the opposite when the duration is equal or superior to 13 hours when the boys are the majority on both week and weekend day.

Concerning leisure time we can see that the longer is the duration the bigger the percentage are boys rather than girls. Up to one hour spent on it girls predominate; from 2 to 4 hours the difference goes to favour the boys; from 4 hours or more on the relations of leisure time is significantly favouring boys. Leisure time for playing shows that most of the girls are involved up to one hour with this activity, talking about 2 to 4 hours at a week day relations are practically the same (32,4% to the boys against 31% for the girls), but on weekend day the relation favours the boys (31,3% to boys against 25% for girls). In what concerns 4 hours or more the difference in leisure time for playing favours boys even more: still concerning leisure time for playing during weekdays there are 8% of girls against 17,2% of boys. On weekend day there are 7,7% of girls against 13,4% of boys. As far as watching TV on both days (up to 1 hour and between 2 and 4 hours) girls predominate; whereas when time is equal or superior to 4 hours the boys predominate.

A greater proportion of girls time is spent on house holding and with domestic group care. A smaller proportion of time is spent than by boys in personal care and leisure. With regards to boys the opposite occurs: less time duration involving house holding and that is something that allows them to have time to sleep and for playing. The family demands to each one contribution towards domestic tasks fill up much more the girls' time and turn to affect quantitative and qualitatively sleeping and leisure time for them. As we can see gender is a symbolic, and a categorical, differentiation with effects at the time use among girls and boys, favouring the boys.

Conclusion

Temporalities are organised in an unequal and sexual way, because of social and gender

the place. These are some characteristics that distinguish the community as urban popular class. See CAR VALHO, MACHADO and ROSA, *idem*.

³⁵ We used a diary about time uses specially designed to be employed with children and teens. See CARVALHO,

dispositions and they are constituted by interdependent factors: urbanisation, industrialisation, education, work, social class and gender. Time is a complex concept rebuilt internally by the subject in his / her individual and social history connections. The time notion building demands the mediation of processes that occur within subjects and culture. Schooling is one of the elements that improve the incorporation of this notion by children.

The distribution of time use through gender is a result of patriarchal particularities on time allocation to women and men. Parents occupy girls time on domestic tasks much more than boys and so they have much more free time. Because gender social dispositions the boys suffer less demanding to do repetitive tasks. They can use their time in interesting and leisure's activities. The community social specificity in offering services and leisure, in addition to family economic poor conditions, limit the range of choices in time use by working class girls and boys.

Gender as a symbolic differentiation is built since cultural understandings historically and socially marked by patriarchal particularisms that diminish women. Therefore the social and subjective dispositions limit the women agency freedom and inform boys and girls, women and men time use. Time distribution is unequal, assuming gendered characteristics activated in everyday life.

The cultural aspects, the gender symbolisms, and the working necessities of poor families, dictate the allocation of time that girls spend doing more domestic tasks compare to boys.

Education is one of the factors that increases a woman's time optimisation, hence the domestic tasks and caring of others (children and olds) is shared between men and women. Household and children care need a lot of time and they have been almost always a woman's tasks, even though there are subtle changes trough the decades pointing out to more equitable tendencies.

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