Socialized choices: Labour market behaviour of Dutch mothers

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Chapter 7

Exploring the social biographical patterns of Dutch mothers’ diverse gender and work attitudes

7.1 Introduction

Most contemporary researchers recognise the importance of incorporating gender and work attitudes in studies on female employment behaviour (Beets et al., 1997; Cunningham et al., 2005; Hakim, 2000; Hoffnung, 2004; Hooghiemstra, 2000; Marks and Houston, 2002a; Portegijs, Cloîn, Keuzenkamp, Merens and Steenvoorden, 2008; Risman et al., 1999). In particular, personal gender and work attitudes appear relevant in women’s labour market decisions. These primarily include women’s ideal division of labour with her spouse, and her subjective motivation to work. Women’s general gender values, which are their more remote moral views about the lives of men and women in general, seem to have little or no effect on female employment (Hakim, 2003; Marks and Houston, 2002a, 2002b; Risman et al., 1999; Smithson and Stoke, 2005).

The majority of studies on the attitudinal/behavioural relationship acknowledge its reciprocal character, although the emphasis on which causal direction prevails varies. Do gender and work attitudes develop and primarily affect behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Hakim, 2003c; Bolzendahl and Meyers, 2004), or do individuals mostly adapt their attitudes to the actual situations they face, in order to facilitate their needs and interests (Kraaykamp, 2012; Kroska and Elman, 2009; Steiber and Haas, 2012)? A way to investigate the consistency of people’s attitudes is to look at the origins of their attitudes. Nonetheless, few studies go beyond current attitudes to address the socializing factors formed prior to women’s experience of motherhood, and their current combination of care and work commitments (Blair-Loy, 2003). With a qualitative in-depth research of 39 interviews (conducted in 2010) with mothers living in the vicinity of Amsterdam, The Netherlands, the main contributitional aim of this study is to achieve a better understanding of differences in the social origins of mothers’ attitudes and the continuity of these attitudes. These insights also shed light on the subject of why institutional factors and cultural standards do not have the same effect for all women within one country, in particular in relation to their labour market behaviour (Steiber and Haas, 2012).

The aim of this study is to explore prior influences of significant others on mothers’ current personal gender and work attitudes (her ideal division of labour

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47 This chapter is based on a paper that is submitted to a blind peer reviewed journal.
with her own spouse and her own motivation to work). Central to socialization theory are the issues of connectedness with other people, the view that individual action and attitudes are always formed and developed within a person’s social environment (Bandura, 1977; Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Handel, 2006). The central research question of this chapter reads: *Do different micro socialization processes reveal the origins of Dutch mothers’ diverse personal gender and work attitudes?*

Some considerations of the qualitative analysis are in place, and the study must be characterised as an explorative investigation. Mothers were interviewed in their adult-life, and were asked retrospectively to look back at their parental background when they were 12 years old, and to their professional ideas before they started their careers, including other supportive relationships in the past. This way of questioning recognises a risk of the selectiveness of memory, and the fact that mothers’ current situations and attitudes may have influenced their answers. It is possible that people may adjust their memories to justify their present behaviour (Kroska and Elman, 2009). A longitudinal qualitative study, at different points in the course of one’s life, allows this risk to be avoided.

Moreover, this study is certainly not aimed at denying the interplay between cause and effect of attitudes and behaviour. Various studies have convincingly shown that women are able to shift their attitudes through work and life experiences, such as changes in employment status, and deviations in marital status, such divorce or the unemployment of the spouse) (Cunningham et al., 2005; Kan, 2007; Steiber and Haas, 2009). Nonetheless, the focus of this study is to reveal the part of continuity within their attitudes.

### 7.2 Macro background: the specific case of the Netherlands

The Netherlands is conceived as a suitable case to study the sources of mothers’ diverse gender and work attitudes and subsequent labour market decisions. Historically, Dutch female labour market activity, especially among married women, has been particularly low due to numerous factors: the strong cultural tradition of housewives (Kloek, 2009), late industrialisation and introduction of wage labour, Dutch neutrality during the First World War when women were not needed in the labour market, specific religious characteristics, high birth rates and prosperity (Kremer, 2007). In 1960, 7 per cent of married women were employed, compared to 30 per cent of English and 33 per cent of French married women (Kloek, 2009).

Since the 1960s, as in many other Western countries, Dutch society has changed radically through processes of secularization, increasing economic welfare, individualization and the erosion of (some) traditions, such as the male-breadwinner family model. As a result, the female participation level has increased, and this rise continued over the following decades, resulting in one of the highest levels of female participation among the Western countries, of almost 70 per cent in 2009 (OECD, 2013). Nevertheless, Dutch women, and especially
mothers with at least one child younger than 18 years old living at home, display very diverse labour market patterns. In 2010, 32.4 per cent of Dutch mothers were not in paid work, 42.5 per cent worked between 12 and 24 hours a week, 13.8 per cent worked 25 to 35 hours a week, and 11.3 percent worked 36 hours or more (CBS-Statline, 2011).

Specific national characteristics may explain the heterogeneous employment pattern of Dutch women, since various social laws and institutions enable and protect part-time work, potentially creating more opportunities for Dutch women to translate their preferences into behaviour than in other affluent societies (Plantenga, 2002; Tijdens, 2006; Van Doorne-Huiskes and Schippers, 2010). Research has shown that also in other Western countries, mothers prefer to work part-time where their jobs allow it (Fagan, 2001; Jacob, 2008). Nevertheless, national characteristics do not explain why Dutch women vary so much in their ‘choice’ of work hours. Various empirical studies have shown that the diversity of Dutch mothers’ gender and work attitudes play an important role in explaining their heterogeneous employment patterns (Beets et al., 1997; Cloïn, 2010; Hooghiemstra, 2000; Kraaykamp, 2012). The focus of this chapter is on the impact of heterogeneous socialization processes on these diverse attitudes.

7.3 Socialization theory

Socialization theory focuses on the social relational context in which specific normative standards and expectations are socially transmitted. According to Parsons (1951), socialization is the process whereby people make societal norms and values their own – internalizing them – by learning what is expected of them in the social system from other people (in Wallace and Wolf, 2006, p.28; also Berger and Luckmann, 1967). Internalization occurs over a long period of time, and is only possible through identification with significant others, first and foremost their parents, and later through teachers, peers, colleagues, etc. (Handel, 2006, p.16). If full internalization has occurred, the presented norms and values exist, and are easily accessible, within the person themself, so that they no longer need be presented by the socializing agents. Subsequently, one produces imitative behaviour without considering the underlying processes (Bandura, 1977, p.40). It is for this reason that socialization theory assumes that even if people are conscious of the pressures of the dominant beliefs and codes in their cultural system, and so start acting against this normative standard, they can never escape it (Risman, 2004; Ridgeway and Correl, 2004). For example, men and women may say that they reject the idea that mothers have the prime responsibility for looking after their children, yet this idea may still automatically shape their actual behaviour (Mason, 2000, p.241). Berger and Luckmann (1967) make a distinction between primary socialization (or internalization) during childhood and secondary socialization, also referred to as adult socialization, which occurs throughout life. “Secondary socialization is any subsequent process that inducts...
an already socialized individual into new sectors of the objective world of his society” (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p.150).

7.4 Primary socialization

Childhood is viewed as the most important formative period in life, in which the basic structure of the individual’s social world (base-world) is built, with which it will compare all later situations (Berger and Luckmann 1967; Mannheim (1959) in Everingham, Stevenson and Warner-Smith 2007). Berger and Luckmann (1967) explain how primary socialization continues to influence people’s life and how it takes biographical shocks to disintegrate the individual perspective of social reality which is internalized in early childhood (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p.154). They argue that during the process of primary socialization there is no problem of identification, because there are no significant others apart from the parents. It is the parents (or caretakers) who set the rules of the game. “The child can play the game with enthusiasm or with sullen resistance. But, alas, there is no other game around. [...] He internalizes it as the world, the only existent and only conceivable world, the world tout court[...]By comparison with it, all later realities are ‘artificial’” (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p.154).

Primary socialization is only possible due to the fact that parents and significant others have interests in the child’s development. Language is imperative in bringing about this process, like ‘good child’ or ‘good behaviour’ and ‘bad child’. As the child grows older, these communications, together with appraisals from significant others (especially parents, but also siblings, playmates, teachers and relatives) become increasingly ingrained in the self. Individuals develop self-consciousness when they are able to see themselves as others see them (Berger and Luckmann 1967, p.152; Handel, 2006, p.15; Giddens, 2009, p.285; Mead, 1934). The ability to empathise the role of the ‘generalized other’ has lifelong importance, since the same ability is necessary in order to be able to behave appropriately as a member of a group (also referred to as ‘role playing’), whether this is the family work group, friendship group, or any other group or organization to which they will belong (Handel, 2006, p.15).

According to Bandura (1977) it is important to understand that much ‘appropriate’ behaviour is learned observationally and symbolically, since often it cannot be readily established by overt enactment, since children may face social prohibitions, lack of opportunity or physical ability. Therefore, most modelled behaviour is acquired and retained through the medium of either imaginable (in the form of visual imagery or mental associations with for example the person who was modelling the behaviour) or verbal coding, referred to as mental and verbal symbols (Bandura, 1977, p.33). After modelled activities have been transformed into images, becoming easily assessable and functioning mental and verbal symbols, these memory codes will serve as guides for performance, arising automatically and outside of the individual’s own awareness (Bandura, 1977). Labour market behaviour is pre-eminently behaviour that children learn, visualise
and rehearse with symbols. Possible mental and verbal symbols associated with attitudes towards paid work that parents have intentionally or unintentionally ‘taught’ their children include, for example, money, joy, obligation, status, independence, social life, creativity, boredom, fatigue or paternity.

Not many studies have addressed the influence of parental socialization on adults’ attitudes. Nonetheless, intrafamilial continuity is likely to become more apparent as the younger generation moves into full adult status, which includes major life transitions such as marriage, parenthood and employment (Inman-Amos, Hendrick and Hendrick 1994, p.460; also Ryan 2001). Once people become parents, they tend to act in the way in which their own parents divided responsibilities (Biddle et al., 1980, p.1072; Denuwelaere, 2003; De Valk, 2008; Van Putten, 2009). Yet, as already described, children do not automatically mimic parental behaviour; it is a much more subtle affair, and in particular attitudes are transmitted (Mason, 2000, p.240; Moen et al., 1997; Thornton, Alwin and Camburn, 1983). Parents’ implicit messages, attitudes and feelings concerning their own division of labour are also picked up by their offspring, such as feelings of unfairness about the actual division of labour or regrets about missed opportunities.

Various empirical studies, mainly employed in Western societies, have demonstrated processes of primary gender socialization. Children of parents with ‘modern’ values have a more egalitarian perspective on work and family roles than children of parents with more traditional values, who are expected to stick to the ‘breadwinner model’ (Barret and White, 2002; De Valk, 2008; Trent and South, 1992; Van Wel and Knijn, 2006). Higher rates of parental religious participation lead to more traditional attitudes regarding gender specialisation in the family (Cunningham, 2001; De Valk, 2008; Thompson, 1991). Other studies have shown that women work more hours if their parents attach positive value to paid work (Hooghiemstra, 2000). Several studies have also shown that the transmission of values and attitudes occurs primarily via the parent of the same gender (Bandura, 1977; Moen et al., 1997; Tuck et al., 1994; Weinshenker, 2006). For example, having a working mother has a stimulating effect on the employment behaviour of the daughter (Marks and Houston, 2002b; Sanders, 1997; Van Putten, 2009). Moen et al. (1997) concluded that socialization processes for women operate mainly through verbal persuasion from their mothers, rather than through role modelling (p.291).

This study builds on such scientific work, and examines whether the diversity of Dutch mothers’ gender and work attitudes can be explained by differences in parental implicit and explicit behaviour (gender roles), norms, values and attitudes. The first research question of this chapter is:

**Can the origins of a mother’s personal gender and work attitudes be found in the conduct and attitudes of her parents?**
7.5 Secondary socialization

As a person lives on, they must learn to function in any new group or organisation (sub-world) that they enter. She or he learns not only new practices, but also new values and norms, new vocabulary, and new ways of interacting with others. Secondary socialization agents serve as instructors, inhibitors, dis-inhibitors, facilitators, stimulus enhancers and emotional arousers (Bandura, 1977, p.50). The formal processes of secondary socialization persist with an essential problem: they are always determined by an earlier process of primary socialization. As such, they must deal with a pre-formed self and an already internalized world (Handel, 2006; Wallace and Wolf, 2006, p.290). Additionally, while primary socialization cannot take place without an emotionally charged identification of the child with her significant others, most secondary socialization can occur with a minimum of identification that is necessary for any communication between human beings. The individual keeps a subjective distance from the sub-worlds, only adopting them deliberately and purposefully (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p.163). This artificial aspect of secondary socialization makes the internalization of discrepant worlds in secondary socialization an entirely different arrangement - they can be useful pragmatically, and can have much less subjective inevitability compared to the contents of primary socialization.

Compared to the internalized base-world, there will be differences and disagreements about values, norms, vocabulary and ways of interacting within and among the different sub-worlds. At many levels, contradictions between and within the disparate settings exist (Bandura, 1977, p.44; Handel, 2006, p.17). The different perspectives of significant others are fraught with possibilities of internal conflict and guilt (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p.190). People cannot simply accept each set of roles for themselves (Eagle, 1988). The individual is therefore often confronted with a dilemma of consistency, which she can typically solve either by modifying her reality or by clinging to reality-maintaining relationships (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p.170). Berger and Luckmanns' principle assumption is that the individual likes their identity being confirmed, and significant others are vital for this ongoing substantiation of their identity (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p.170). Within the social process of reality-maintenance, people tend to avoid less important others who have deviant practices, norms and values compared to their own (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p.169). Other scholars have argued that throughout their lives people establish an acceptable position for themselves out of all these contradictions (Eagle, 1988; Handel, 2006).

Also Berger and Luckmann (1967) acknowledged that partial transformations of identity are common, especially in relation to individuals’ social mobility and occupational training (p.181). However, it has also been emphasised that even within partial transformations there is a continuing association with symbols, persons and groups who were previously significant. Due to the fact that prior associations continue to linger in people’s minds (often also physically in their
lives), they are likely to protest at overly fanciful re-interpretations of people’s new identities. Even within partial transformational processes, individuals must convince themselves that the personal changes that have taken place are plausible (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p.181). Bandura (1977) also recognised that people are initially reluctant to embark upon new undertakings. People willingly take up what they (and their significant others) regard as praiseworthy, but resist new ways of behaviour that violate their social and moral convictions (Bandura, 1977, p.53).

The last research question of this study concerns whether mothers tend to sustain their (acquired) attitudes through secondary social relations, by creating and recreating the familiar, or whether they are able to reset their attitudes if confronted with new models of behaviour or supportive others. In this study, I specifically explore the previously perceived support of secondary others towards mothers’ professional choices and career ambitions. The theoretical choice to focus on the perceived support is also induced by the socialization theory of Berger and Luckmann (1967), the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen 1991; Ajzen and Fishbein 1973, 2005) and social learning theory of Bandura (1977). These theories agree in their view that the perceived approval of significant others towards specific behaviour will have a positive impact on people’s own values and attitudes related to the specific behaviour. This theoretical notion also corresponds with the contingent consistency theory, which suggests that the effect of attitudes on behaviour grows stronger when a person perceives there to be social support for her intended behaviour (Grube and Morgan, 1990). The theoretical expectation is that mothers who have received professional and career support from significant others have developed more egalitarian gender views, and are more motivated to seek paid employment.

A concise overview of relevant literature concerning the influence of important ‘others’ is given below, respectively addressing the possible influences of teachers, partners, friends and people at work. Nevertheless, empirical studies on the influence of these significant others on mother’s gender and work attitudes, and subsequent behaviour, appeared scarce. Studies that do address these social influences mostly reveal a lack of encouragement of women’s career ambitions as a result of stereotypical gender expectations.

The educational period is seen as an important phase for socializing young people in particular skills and values in society (Nagel and Ganzooboom, 2002). Research has demonstrated that teachers who communicate high expectations can bring positive changes in the behaviour and interests of their pupils and students, both in the classroom and the wider context of the school (Grusec and Hastings, 2007, p.391; Wentzel, Battle, Russell and Looney, 2010). Nevertheless, teachers can also reinforce stereotypical gender roles with their different expectations for the boys and girls in their classes (Allana et al., 2010; Sâńnz et al., 2012).

Next, the influence of a husband or partner on the wife’s gender attitudes appears important, although its influence must be perceived as two-directional, based on homogamy in mate selections (Inman-Amos et al., 1994). Regarding
employment decisions of mothers, Vlasblom and Schippers (2005) showed that these are made within the family, and that the views of both partners concerning the division of care play an important role (also Geist, 2005). Dutch empirical research has demonstrated that wives’ employment decisions generally are a subject that partners hardly talk about Portegijs et al. (2008, p.105), and when they do, mothers are more often encouraged by their partners to work less, rather than to work more (also Keuzenkamp et al., 2009, p.76).

Socialization among peers is conceptualised by Ryan (2001) as a process that occurs through frequent interactions, shared experiences and exchanged information among a relatively intimate group of friends who interact with each other on a regular basis (p.1138). Much relevant research has been done on adolescents peer groups (e.g. Biddle, Bank and Marlin, 1980; Grusec and Hastings, 2007), and it is widely recognised that adolescent peer relationships or peer group pressures have consequences for emotional adjustment, school achievement, and risk-taking behaviours (Biddle et al., 1980; Carter et al., 2003; Windle, 1994). Concerning employment behaviour among adults, several studies have shown that labour market behaviour can be modified by the behavioural example of other people in the environment, and that other people can act as role models (Kapteyn and Woittiez, 1986; Sealy and Singh, 2009). Nevertheless, people do not haphazardly fall into one crowd or another; similarities are prevalent a priori to relationships (Brown et al., 1993).

Finally, supervisors and colleagues can encourage or discourage a woman’s work attitude and ambitions (Estes, 2005; Karatepe and Kilic, 2007; Moen and Yu, 2000). Women’s ambitions, especially those of mothers, seem however, to be often neglected or underestimated by their supervisors (King, 2008, p.1703). For example, women receive smaller investments in training than men do (Ostroff and Atwater, 2003).

Based on the concise overview of empirical literature above, the second research question is:

**What is the influence of significant others, like teachers, partners, friends, supervisors and colleagues at work, on mothers’ personal gender and work attitudes?**

### 7.6 Research method

In order to answer the research questions, semi-structured face-to-face interviews have been conducted with 39 mothers, all of whom having at least one child younger than twelve years old living at home, and all living in the vicinity of Amsterdam, The Netherlands. The age at which most parents deem their children old enough to be left on their own is eleven (Duncan, 2005).

The interviews took place between April 2010 and November 2010. The interviews took on average one and a half hours to complete, and full transcripts
of the interviews were made. In order to select the interviewees, four categories of mothers were differentiated according to their employment patterns: mothers who work 0 hours (referred to as stay-at-home mothers or full-time homemakers), 12 to 24 hours a week (mothers with a small part-time job), 25 to 35 hours (mothers with a large part-time job) and 36 hours or more (full-time working mothers).

As is well known, higher educational levels lead to higher levels of labour participation, especially among mothers (Merens et al., 2011). Sufficient education is then understood as a precondition for labour market participation. For example, higher educated women work more, because their higher wage allows them to pay for child-care facilities. They may also have been exposed more to critical ideas and formed career-oriented networks (Cunningham et al., 2005; Doorewaard et al., 2004, p.11). In 2009, 37 per cent of Dutch higher-educated mothers worked more than 35 hours per week, compared to only 18 per cent of lower-educated mothers. 52 per cent of lower-educated mothers did not participate in the labour market at all, as compared to 12 per cent of higher-educated mothers (Central Bureau of Statistics, Statline, 2011). In each of the four employment categories, there were approximately equal numbers of lower-(intermediate vocational level and lower) and higher-educated mothers (higher vocational level and university).

For theoretical reasons, the sample of interviewed mothers was drawn largely within one urban area, Amsterdam. In this way, differences in employment behaviour and attitudes among respondents do not differ with respect to the influence of structural and cultural factors that may diverge between urban and rural areas, such as the availability of childcare provisions, jobs and religiousness, which could also affect potential differences in gender and work attitudes.

In order to achieve good correspondence between research questions and sampling, a strategy of purposeful sampling had to be followed (Bryman, 2008, p.458-459). To be able to fill all eight categories (four along employment patterns and two along educational levels) of mothers within one area equally, the respondents were found using the snowball method. The collection of material ended when theoretical saturation was reached, and new interviewees did not bring more diversity. Quite clearly this research method cannot produce a statistically representative sample, since it relies upon the social contacts between individuals to trace additional contacts. The research method, however, does permit revealing the reciprocal character between primary and secondary socialization, and is able to highlight what mothers consider as being relevant when describing their childhood and further social relational contexts.

Firstly, a small group of mothers in the social environment of the researcher, the so-called weak ties (Granovetter, 1973), was approached, especially at a primary school in Amsterdam (Old West Quarter). Subsequently, the other respondents were approached on the advice of the first group of respondents.
Research group

The interviewed mothers were born between 1962 and 1980. Their average age was 39.3 years. Seven interviewees (18 per cent) had a non-Dutch background (at least one parent born outside the Netherlands). Of the total female population of Amsterdam, 50 per cent has a non-Dutch background, so non-native women are underrepresented in the research group (Vrouwenemancipatie in Amsterdam 2011). This also holds for single mothers, in that only four of the interviewed mothers had been divorced. Religious mothers were also underrepresented. However, as mentioned, ethnicity, religiousness and the presence of a spouse were not discriminating factors in selecting the research group, and the aim and character of the research is not statistical representativeness.

Within the research group, 23 mothers were highly educated (higher vocational education and university), and 16 lower educated (intermediate vocational education and lower). Ten mothers were full-time homemakers, eight mothers had a small part-time job (12 to 24 hours), eleven mothers had a large part-time job (25 to 35 hours) and ten mothers worked full-time.

Interview questions

The interviews can be characterised as oral life history interviews (Bryman, 2008). The interviewees were invited to look back at specific moments in their lives, especially during childhood, while also concentrating on the behavioural steps of later social life, from finishing high school, choosing a continuation course, entering their first job and giving birth to their first child. While focusing on these specific life moments, mothers were especially encouraged to consider the presence of supportive ‘others’ who had possibly encouraged them in developing their professional lives.

The interviews were built on several central themes: gender attitudes, work attitudes, parental socialization, and the influence of significant others. Several open questions were asked in order to discover how and with which words women refer to these themes themselves. Iterative cycles formed the base of the research.

Personal gender attitudes refer to a mother’s desired division of labour with her own spouse. This personal ideal was more closely examined by mother’s satisfaction with her current division of labour. A traditional personal gender attitude means a desire to have the main responsibility at home, while her partner is in paid work. An egalitarian personal gender attitude implies a wish to share paid and unpaid work equally. Adaptive attitudes are here defined as the personal desires to combine paid work and family tasks, with consent to the idea that mothers have more responsibilities at home and fathers may work full-time. (Do you have ideas about the ideal division of labour with your spouse? Are you satisfied with your own current division of labour? What would you like to change?). Also some questions were asked about her general ideas about the ideal
division of labour between men and women. Questions towards a mother’s general gender attitude were: How do you perceive differences between men and women? Do you have an opinion about full-time working mothers or mothers who are not employed?

*Personal work attitudes* are defined as mother’s personal motivations to pursue paid work. (What are the most important reasons for you to work? Did you have ideas about your future profession at a young age?). A strong personal work attitude means that someone was already as a young adult strongly oriented to pursue paid work and is intrinsically motivated to work.

Following this, the mothers were asked several questions about their family backgrounds, looking back to when they were 12 years old. In particular, this included questions addressing the gender division of labour of their parents (Did your parents work? Did your father help with household chores and childcare? Were your parents happy about their division of tasks?), parental attitudes (What were the important norms, values, and (implicit and explicit) messages that were transmitted by your parents?). In addition, several questions were asked on upbringing matters, like whether the parents were strict or encouraged their daughters to fulfil their full potential at school or at work.

Finally, several questions were asked about how mothers perceived their attitudes and behaviours to have been influenced by teachers, partners, close friends, people at work, specific role models or others, in fulfilling their full professional potential.

*Interview analysis* 

The research was specifically sensitive to perceiving the lives of the respondents in terms of continuity and process, especially referring to the theoretically assumed continuity throughout the course of life between primary and secondary socialization processes (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Bandura, 1977). Therefore, the interview transcripts of each respondent were not cut into different codes, but kept as close as possible to each story told by the respondents.

The main part of the analysis consisted of searching for sensitizing concepts that could be used as pegs to describe the central narratives of, and the similarities within, the different groups. The sensitizing concepts were: ideals and acceptance towards the marital division of labour, importance of economic independence, parental roles, positions, messages and attitudes, presence or absence of stimulating parents and significant others towards mother’s professional life. Following this, the transcripts were reread while focusing on these sensitizing concepts, and memos were written throughout the process.

Below, the findings are described along the two research questions, while attention is given to the sensitizing concepts. The narratives of mothers’ attitudes could be patterned along two groups: traditional-adaptive attitudes versus egalitarian attitudes. The differences between these groups are specifically addressed. When this study refers to a “majority of women”, “most”, or “women
in general”, as a rule of thumb this means that the observation applies to at least three quarters of the interviewed women within one group. There were also exceptions in each group, which are described where relevant.

7.7 Findings

Can the origins of a mother’s personal gender and work attitudes be found in the conduct and attitudes of her parents?

The findings indicate that the origins of Dutch mothers’ current gender and work attitudes can be found in the way they have been brought up. In particular, the associated mental symbols – intentionally and unintentionally – transmitted by the mothers’ mother, seem to have a differentiating effect on mother’s current attitudes. In this study, mothers with traditional or adaptive attitudes often have no job, or else work small part-time jobs. They tend to perceive it as their natural role to execute most of the unpaid family tasks, and do not put much value on their economic independence. They also appear mostly satisfied about the division of the work at home with their partners, which is often around 80 per cent of the tasks for the mothers and 20 per cent for the fathers. Mothers with more egalitarian gender attitudes, who often have large part-time or full-time jobs, cannot imagine not working themselves; moreover they consider it as unwise, citing the necessity of economic independence. They also expect a more equal share from their husbands in the unpaid tasks at home, which full-time working mothers have greater success in achieving.

Mothers with traditional or adaptive gender attitudes generally emphasise that they come from warm families, and often have many happy memories from youth. Consistently, the relationship with their parents often is still close. On the question of who is a shoulder to lean on when they must make a difficult decision, traditional or adaptive mothers most often recall their parents.

The parental division of work used to be traditional, not because their mothers did not work, but especially in the sense that their mothers unquestioningly did most of the unpaid family work. The presence of a caring mother, who carried out her unpaid duties without complaint, is recollected as a natural and self-evident situation by their traditional or adaptive adult daughters. Sometimes, the interviewees have no clear memories of their mother during primary school. Yet, mostly they presume that their mothers liked their role of child carer and housewife, although they admit they never really asked their mother. Respondents recall that their fathers pursued full-time jobs, and often also at home were also the boss.

“My mother did everything. I found that normal. I cannot remember her complaining about it, or that she found it too much work or too busy. I think she enjoyed it, I have never asked her, to be honest. My father was just an
authority.” (Astrid, 42 years old, 3 children, stay-at-home mother, adaptive gender attitude and higher polytechnic school).

“I actually don’t know. I don’t have the impression that she missed anything.” (Tineke, 38 years old, 2 children, 24 hours, traditional/adaptive gender attitude, intermediate educational level).

Almost half of the mothers of traditional or adaptive daughters worked jobs, mostly part-time, often to assist their husbands in their store or family company. Sometimes these mothers’ return to work meant an essential change of family life, which was not always liked by their daughters. Especially if their mothers became too occupied with their jobs, their daughters could come to feel neglected. As a consequence, two daughters tend to show the opposite behaviour of their mothers, now they are mothers themselves. This is illustrated by Nora (40 years old, 4 children, temporarily stay-at-home mother, adaptive gender attitude, university degree):

“I thought it’s constantly about you and it’s constantly about your job. And for her, it was a huge part of her confidence; she got a lot of self-esteem from her work. I found that really stupid.”

The parental work ethic received by daughters with now traditional or adaptive gender attitudes was: follow a good education to be able to contribute to society. The narratives of stay-at-home mothers in particular reveal that after they finished high school, their parents were not particularly helpful in assisting their daughter’s choice of continuation course or profession. “They never asked me, ‘what do you want to be, what is important for you?’” (Leontien, 42 years old, four children, stay-at-home mother, traditional/adaptive, university degree).

The family backgrounds of the interviewed mothers with egalitarian attitudes appear more diverse. Remarkably, the interviewees were often raised in non-standard families. Roughly one third of the mothers with egalitarian attitudes were solely raised by their mothers, as a result of divorce or through alcoholism, disability or death of the father. Sophie describes her youth with her alcoholic father.

“He read nothing, didn’t have one friend, no contact with the neighbours, or anything. When we came home, he just sat there, sloshed in his chair, and every day a lot of fuss, you know, shouting in the house.” (Sophie, 48 years, one child, 32 hours, egalitarian, intermediate educational level).

Yvette describes her childhood after her father had deceased when she was 8 years old:

“It was just natural that everyone did something. You saw that mom did everything and that was not right, so we helped. We got the groceries; my mother was not a very domestic mother. So we actually grew up like this: we had to take care of ourselves and of mom.” (Yvette, 42 years old, 2 children, 30 hours, adaptive/egalitarian, intermediate polytechnic).

Other stories of egalitarian mothers reveal that their parents did not give them much attention when they were young. One daughter went to a boarding school in England, another daughter experienced traumatic family happenings at a young age, which preoccupied her parents, and there were parents who always fought. Additionally, the mothers describe upbringing matters that made them
independent women, sometimes reluctantly. For example, some mothers were only eleven or twelve years old when they were made responsible for taking care of their parents’ shop while they were away on vacation, or for baby-sitting much younger brothers and sisters. One respondent was ‘pushed’ onto the train to Amsterdam alone (while living in Groningen, 220 km away) so that she could go and purchase her desired rucksack.

Also discerned from the narratives is the role of respondents’ own mothers, who generally were not described as self-evident and consenting mother-figures, as is the picture that emerged in the chronicles of traditional/adaptive mothers. Regularly, their respondents asserted that if their mothers had lived in the present, they certainly would have worked, or would have had a different job. The daughters often describe their mothers as being clever, assertive, full of initiative and reluctant to fulfill the mother role. Two egalitarian mothers saw their mothers as anti-examples as well, in the sense that their mothers behaved as victims of their era and complained about not having had the chance to do the profession they would have liked. It seems that such mothers’ reluctant attitudes towards the traditional mother role, and subsequent feelings of regret, have stimulated their daughters to fulfill their own work potential.

What also stands out is that among mothers with the most egalitarian attitudes (often full-time working mothers), there are some examples of fathers who were not the traditional (dominant) father figures, but who helped with household chores and raising the children. “My mother was the boss, still is actually. I have a very sweet, quiet father. He’s not dominant or so [...] My father brought us to school and made food for us. And my dad did the dishes, vacuum cleaned, etc.” (Ebru, 40 years, 2 children, 40 hours, egalitarian, university degree).

“My father always did the dishes all by himself. And still, when I have dinner at my parents place, my father says, ‘Sit down and chat. I want to hear your conversations, and I’ll do the dishes.’ He cleans the whole kitchen on his own. Then he will ask ‘Who cares for tea or coffee?’” (Alisha, 43 years old, one child, 36 hours, egalitarian, secondary school. Alisha grew up with 7 brothers and 1 sister).

Another pattern among mothers with egalitarian attitudes is that they have explicitly or implicitly received the message (verbal symbol): “Make sure you can stand on your own two feet”, or “You must not rely on a man”. As mentioned before, it was not always necessary to spell out the message, but obvious because their mothers were sole providers.

“Particularly my mother used to encourage me a lot, and I feel it is nice to have a lot of encouragement. Yet, maybe my mother encouraged me a little bit too much.” (Michelle, 47 years old, 2 children, 40 hours, egalitarian, university degree).

“Straight after finishing high school, I went to university, and that was really because my mother was pushing me, like ‘you should not spill a year, then you
will never start studying”. Later, I have regretted the fact that I went along with her, because it was not my own feeling.” (Olga, 30 years old, 2 children, 28 hours, egalitarian, university degree).

What is the influence of significant others, such as teachers, partners, friends, supervisors and colleagues at work, on mothers’ personal gender and work attitudes?

Firstly, a notable similarity among all mothers is that in general they cannot remember any teachers who stimulated or supported them to choose a certain professional direction. Moreover, mothers who do remember, especially full-time home-makers, appear rather negative about their guidance at (high) school. One full-time mother, for example, tells how she unexpectedly had a very low score in her entrance exam for secondary school, because her father had just fallen very ill. But her low score was not questioned by her teachers. The narratives of these mothers also reveal that they actually missed a helping hand from teachers, because they had found it difficult to choose a continuation course or profession. They would have liked assistance in their educational choices, or to be influenced or inspired to pursue a certain direction by people close to them, but they were never encouraged to consider their professional lives.

“They never asked me what do you want be in later life... it was just, you have to do school.” (Mireille, 35 years old, 3 children, stay-at-home mother, egalitarian, secondary school).

There are only two positive examples of egalitarian mothers among the respondents who were encouraged to consider their working life at high school, revealing the potential positive influence of teachers on the work aspirations of mothers.

“It was also because of our school[...] It was an experimental school with all very passionate teachers who felt that the child should stand central, that you talked to each other about things[...] that was very important in my decision to study psychology” (Diana, 42 years old, 2 children, works 30 hours, egalitarian, university degree).

The influence of a mother’s partner must be viewed as two-directional. People seek marital partners with similar (gender) attitudes, and it is possible that the partners’ attitudes will have become similar over the years, as their relationship matures. Consequently, the findings indicate that generally there is agreement among the partners about their marital division of labour. Nonetheless, the findings also reveal that among mothers with rather traditional/adaptive gender attitudes, the number of hours they work and kin care responsibilities is not a key subject of marital discussion, but rather something often taken-for granted. For example, a mother’s decision about how much she works, and subsequently how
the children are taken care of, appears to be mainly her own decision, with partners tending to ‘leave it’ up to their wives. This is illustrated by Leontien, a 42-year-old stay-at-home mother with four children, of traditional/adaptive gender attitudes and university educated:

And what did your husband think about the fact that you wanted to give up your job?
I think for him it was easy.
He was quite happy with it?
I think he thought it was comfortable, yet, he always left it to me.
Did you talk about it together?
Yes, I think so.
Did it feel like a mutual decision or like your decision?
It was my decision, but shared or agreed by him. He said: If that is what you want, it’s fine. If I had said: I want to bring our son three days to the crèche, then he would also have said: that’s fine.

However, the stories of stay-at-home mothers disclose that their decisions to give up work was not always such a pre-planned or positive choice for motherhood, but often the result of a sequence of unfavourable happenings. In this light, partners’ tolerant or phlegmatic attitudes allow a mother to slip into a non-working situation that does not necessarily make her life easier or happier. In addition, there are examples of husbands or partners who did not comply with earlier plans that they would work less. However, this has not led to an apparent conflict between the partners, but rather mothers dealt with and adapted to the situation.

Egalitarian mothers, especially those in full-time work, seem to have ‘found’ partners who are more encouraging towards their wife’s work ambitions. Moreover, often they are proud of their wife’s career and would not appreciate if she wasn’t working. These partners take up a share of the unpaid, domestic work more automatically and without much resistance, which is illustrated by the following quote.

“I talk a lot with my husband about work and about my aspirations. And he encourages me, for example with my idea to go back to university [...] He is also someone who always says, ‘hey, if you need to work longer, then I’ll take the kids home today.’” (Annemiek, 37 years old, 2 children, 34 hours, egalitarian, university degree).

There is also Michelle, who always worked full-time because her ex-husband had left her with a large debt:

“I always felt responsible to ensure there was enough money.” (Michelle, 47 years old, 2 children, 40 hours, egalitarian, university degree).
Nonetheless, the story of Michelle’s youth already revealed that her parents’ somewhat “ruthless” upbringing style almost inevitably encouraged her to become a very independent woman.

In the stories of the interviewees, it emerges that the influence of close friends on the gender attitudes of mothers seems less than expected. Mothers even hesitate to describe the gender attitudes of their best friends. Sometimes, this was because they were reluctant to speak for other people, but other times this was because they simply did not know. This is revealed through the following quote from Sheila:

“I suspect that sometimes they think ‘gee, why does she work so much?’ I think that, yes.” (Sheila, 37 years old, 2 children, 36 hours, egalitarian, intermediate education).

A reason for this lack of knowledge is that most women identify their best friends as the ones they have known since high school or later educational years. Since their youth, mothers and their close friends have experienced a great deal together, such as graduations, weddings, funerals, and the birth of their children. At present, these old and dearest friends often do not pursue the same lifestyles as the mothers themselves, for example because these friends are without partners or children. In addition, most mothers confess that they do not see their best friends much, due to the time commitments of work and children, and sometimes because their friends live in other areas of the country or abroad. And when they do meet up, it is mainly to catch up, so the marital division of labour or concrete work schedules are then not main topics of their conversations.

Often mothers have also made new friends, for example those they have met at their child’s school, or else at work. Although mothers are careful when describing these new friends as ‘close’, these new friends tend to have more similarities with their own current lifestyles, and ‘everyday’ contact makes it easier to discuss more everyday subjects, such as household quarrels and grievances. As a consequence, it seems that mothers have a more mutual influential relationship with these new friends.

The social pressure of other people in their social environment, other mothers in particular, is also discussed by the respondents. It appears that if mothers behave in line with the current Dutch norm, which implies a working week of about three days (Portegijs et al., 2008b), then mothers’ narratives reveal how much their lifestyle is socially accepted.

“My sister in law says that I have it perfect, because I still develop myself, I am not completely out of the labour market, and at home I can also be very much present too.” (Nel, 32 years old, 1 child, 16 hours, traditional/adaptive, university degree).

However, in the case of mothers who do not suit the current Dutch norm – either due to being a stay-at-home mother or working full-time – the social atmosphere is less accepting. This affects in particular mothers who do not work.
“The general hip and trendy working women, you know, I feel they have their opinion ready. I often want to shout: ‘You don’t know what it’s like, woman, to have twins!’” (Janne, 38 years old, 3 children, stay-at-home mother, traditional/adaptive, higher polytechnic).

“Sometimes it is very difficult because you feel the pressure from outside. People ask me: ‘So what do you do all day?’ They think I drink coffee the whole day.” (Mireille, 35 years old, 3 children, stay-at-home mother, adaptive, secondary school).

Mothers with egalitarian gender attitudes seem to be less affected by the weaker social circle:

“You know when you work, you are not concerned with the mothers in the schoolyard. What people think of me there has never interested me at all, really. I don’t care. No, I even refuse to be sensitive to that.” (Claire, 47 years old, 2 children, 36 hours, egalitarian, university degree).

Nonetheless, also among egalitarian mothers one can perceive a pattern that they rather live in social environments that match their own norms and attitudes. If norms and values of the neighbourhood differ too much from their own, mothers (and their families) seem impelled to move away, because they did not feel at ease, of which Cathy (44 years old, 2 children, 32 hours, egalitarian, university degree) gives an example:

“Yes, when we had our son, we decided to live outside Amsterdam. But there, I felt the worst mother ever. He was the only one from school who went to after-school care. He was picked up in a little van and went to another village. All the kids went home for lunch… lunch! Drama - I felt terrible.” (Cathy and her partner subsequently decided to move back to Amsterdam).

Hence, mothers do seem sensitive to real and supposed expectations, and to the approval of other people. It is difficult however to perceive whether and to what extent these social influences and subsequent feelings affect mothers’ attitudes. Nonetheless, the narratives reveal that people do not haphazardly end up in matching social environments.

The influence of supervisors does seem to have a discerning relationship with the gender attitudes of mothers. In particular, higher-educated mothers with egalitarian attitudes tend to recall positive experiences with supervisors who had a re-enforcing and stimulating influence on their career aspirations, above all because they got the chance to show the best of themselves.

“I am always stimulated by my supervisors. Once they even offered me a job when I was pregnant.” (Ilse, 43 years old, 3 children, 40 hours, egalitarian, university degree).

“My former publisher, he is no longer at our company, but we still have contact. He always gives me a lot of energy when I talk to him about my
work.” (Juul, 40 years old, 2 children, 32 hours, egalitarian, university degree).

Thus, although mothers’ egalitarian attitudes often have origins in their youth, at least at one point in their career they also have been stimulated by their bosses and colleagues, which re-enforced their support to equal gender roles and attachment to the labour market.

Traditional/adaptive women have fewer examples or stories of supervisors or colleagues who have been particularly stimulating towards their performances. This is expected to be as a consequence of the fact that they have spent fewer hours in paid labour. However, previous research has demonstrated that mothers’ job ambitions generally are often neglected (Heilman and Okimoto, 2008; King, 2006).

7.8 Conclusions

Various empirical Dutch studies have shown that the diversity of female employment in the Netherlands is related to women’s diverse gender and work attitudes (Beets et al., 1997; Cloïn, 2010; Hooghiemstra, 2000; Kraaykamp, 2012; Portegijs et al., 2008). This qualitative and explorative study sheds light on the question of whether an explanation for this diversity lies in different (prior) micro socialization processes. Do different micro socialization processes reveal the origins of Dutch mothers’ diverse personal gender and work attitudes?

The findings show how differences in primary socialization are relevant to an understanding of Dutch mothers’ current diverse gender and work attitudes. Various mechanisms and patterns that emerged seem to have had discerning effects. Firstly, it appeared that intergenerational influence mainly occurs via the transmission of mental symbols, both intentionally and unintentionally, and especially diffused by the respondent’s own mother, as demonstrated by earlier research (Moen et al., 1997; Thornton et al., 1983). Examples of these maternal mental codes are the respondents’ mothers’ own attitudes towards the traditional mother role, like their being satisfied or unsatisfied, and their being consenting or reluctant. The interviewees with traditional/adaptive gender attitudes seemed almost unquestionably familiarized with the silent presence and consenting performance of unpaid tasks by their own mothers. Now being mothers themselves, they naturally and automatically identify with the traditional ‘mother role’. The narratives of mothers with egalitarian attitudes stood out due to their strong memories of their own mother’s presence. She could be the dominant sole provider, or else could be unsatisfied with the mother-role. There were also few examples where the maternal codes were too penetrating and in cases even irritated their daughters. Subsequently such mothers functioned as anti-examples, unintentionally causing their daughters to go on and develop opposite attitudes. In addition, the maternal message that one should achieve economic independence
appeared to be a strong verbal code in relation to mothers’ current gender and work attitudes.

The findings further illustrate that it is relevant to notice those things that were absent from the narratives of mothers’ childhoods. For example, there may have lacked a specific message relating to their daughter’s future profession. When mothers have not been stimulated (either verbally or mentally) to consider their professional life seriously, it seemed difficult to overcome this arrearage later in life. The unfavourable consequences of an absence of professional support seemed prevalent in mothers’ secondary socialization processes. A significant parental message towards work and financial autonomy appeared more present in the childhood stories of mothers with egalitarian attitudes, and more absent in the recollections of traditional/adaptive mothers. Additionally, some specific and unusual family situations called upon daughters to become responsible at a very young age. The interviewees who now support symmetrical gender roles often seemed in different ways more or less ‘forced’ to grow up as independent young women very quickly – a childhood characteristic resulting in the appearance that they are well-equipped for the labour market.

With respect to processes of secondary socialization, it seems unlikely that the part of personal gender and work attitudes with origins in childhood may easily adjust to changing circumstances. On the contrary, mothers’ narratives revealed that some parental mental and verbal symbols still affect whether or not they put themselves into new social settings (Mason, 2000; Ridgeway and Correl, 2004; Risman, 2004). Such a process can otherwise be referred to as that of self-selection (Bandura, 1977; Berger and Luckmann, 1967). This study confirms, for example, that in general, people seek and marry partners with a similar sex-role ideology as their own (Hoffnung and Willimans, 2013; Inman-Amos et al., 1994; Uunk, 1996). Egalitarian mothers often have found ‘fitting’ partners who are stimulating towards their career ambitions. This is contrary to the conjugal discussions within traditional/adaptive couples, where it is not evident that mothers work (also Moen and Dempster-McClain, 1987, p.587).

Furthermore, the study revealed a mechanism of intensifying egalitarian attitudes by encouraging supervisors. This result is interesting because previous research demonstrated that mothers’ ambitions are mostly neglected by supervisors, contributing to the withdrawal of mothers from the labour market (Estes, 2005; Karatepe and Kilic, 2007; King 2008; Moen and Yu, 2000). Furthermore, a glimpse of the potential positive influence of teachers as helping hands in mothers’ professional choices showed how mother’s career intentions can be intensified by people’s encouragement, but also left undeveloped or weakened by a lack of social support.

The impact of peer groups on mothers’ gender and work attitudes remained undetermined. The interviewed mothers generally did not belong to homogenous peer groups. Nonetheless, anonymous people ‘out there’ seemed, at least in the mind of some interviewees, able to pressurise mothers’ feelings. Stay-at-home mothers in particular appeared to be sensitive to the critical gaze and comments
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of other people, since “they receive little validation from society for the work they are doing” (Zimmerman, 2000, p.349). Some stories of egalitarian mothers also disclosed that ‘traditional’ social environments were reasons for them to move to other neighbourhoods, where they were more surrounded by people with similar gender attitudes. This mechanism illustrates that people do not easily adjust their attitudes, but rather find ways to reconcile them.

Recollecting the central question of this chapter, the findings revealed that Dutch mothers’ diverse current gender and work attitudes did not arise from nowhere, but are grounded in childhood experience. Later situations and social interactions can modify the intensity of these attitudes, yet the aspects of attitudes that are originated in childhood seem resistant to change, and rather appear to be re-enforced.