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The Division of Domestic Labour: Twenty Years of Change?

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ABSTRACT This paper addresses two important questions in the area of the division of domestic labour. Firstly, what change is observable in the patterns of men and women's time spent in domestic labour over the past twenty years, when taking into account structural factors such as employment patterns and social class? Secondly, among which groups of the population of couples can change be identified? One of the problems of this area of research has been that relatively few studies have systematically analysed change over time using directly comparable large-scale data. Here I present a detailed examination of the nature and pattern of change in the domestic division of labour among couples in Britain based on nationally representative time-use diary data collected in 1975, 1987 and 1997. The data are drawn from a cross-national data archive held by the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex. Notwithstanding the fact that in 1997 women still performed the bulk of domestic work, it is found that, in relation to changes in time use in other areas of life, the increase in men's participation in domestic work (at least as measured in terms of time contributed) should be regarded as significant. In support of this, there had been (i) a reduction in gender inequality in the performance of some of the normatively feminine-associated tasks, (ii) a larger proportional increase in the time contributed to domestic work tasks by men from lower socio-economic strata, to a position of near equality with men from higher socio-economic positions, and (iii) a substantial increase in more 'egalitarian' couples.

KEYWORDS change, class, domestic labour, gender, time-use

The topic of this paper is a much debated and at times hotly contested issue: has there been any recent (over the last twenty years) discernible change in the division of domestic labour? This question is of course embedded within a wider argument over the extent of change that may be observed in women's status in both the public and private spheres since the beginnings of the second wave of feminism in the 1960s. This argument covers a range of issues and has, within each, a number of different facets; there are considerations about the *amount* of change (for example, the amount of change in the proportion of women employed in higher levels of management); about the *significance* or *meaning* of any observed change (the

meaning of a 5 per cent, or 10 per cent, increase in men's domestic participation in terms of gender relations within the home); and, last but not least as a sociological and political hot potato, what kind of change is actually *desired* (whether 'gender equality' is in fact a desired goal)?

Within this broad discussion, this paper seeks to address two smaller but important questions relating to the division of domestic labour. Firstly, what change is observable in the patterns of men and women's time spent in domestic labour over the past twenty years, when taking into account structural factors such as employment patterns and social class? Secondly, among which groups of the population of couples can change be identified? These two questions are addressed using data from successive time-use diary studies conducted in Britain and covering the period 1975 to 1997.

In the wider literature on the domestic division of labour both of these questions, the 'how much?' and 'who?', have been extensively discussed in relation to the cross-sectional associations between domestic division of labour and structural data such as employment status, family status etc. (This long tradition of research can be traced back to Vanek (1974), Oakley (1974) and beyond; see Warde and Hetherington 1993 for a review.) But statements about the nature of change in this framework have tended to be thought of in terms of changes in the structural variables which are observed to be cross-sectionally associated with specific patterns of division of domestic labour. For example, it is argued that, since employed women on average tend to do relatively less of the household work than their non-employed sisters, over a period in which more women move into employment the overall domestic division of labour will tend towards change in the direction of equality (see, for instance, Baxter 1992). Or alternatively, that changes in family status (in particular the presence of a young child in the household) may have a (temporary) impact on the way in which domestic labour is divided within the household, with male partners contributing more during these periods. Thus, while relatively few researchers still subscribe to the blanket assertion of 'no change', the argument has shifted to a discussion of to what extent observed changes constitute 'real' (both substantial and substantive) change. The general conclusion of the debate has so far been 'not much change', at least in terms of meaningful and lasting behavioural change (see Warde and Hetherington 1993; and Bittman and Lovejoy 1993 for approaches focusing on reasons for a relative absence of change). The argument has been convincingly made, for example, that men's contribution to domestic labour when women enter employment only partially and incompletely substitutes for the domestic labour of women, with the result that women end up doing more work overall than before. In addition, it is clear that when men do take on more of the domestic work, they may not be taking on an equivalent amount of domestic *responsibility*; study after study has shown that women retain responsibility for the management of domestic tasks even when men are (helping in) performing it. The phrases 'the dual burden', 'the

second shift', and 'the stalled revolution' represent concepts which have made an important contribution to our understanding of inequalities in the domestic division of labour and related issues of gender power within the household. As such they have entered every respectable text book. At the same time, while as shorthand terms they convey punchily an important message, they have also acted as potent symbols for a position ('no change') which, I argue, has had a negative impact on the development of research into the potential for and possibilities of change.

Moreover, examination of much of the literature which does refer to change over a longer time frame shows that conclusions tend to be drawn on an *ad hoc* rather than a systematic basis, drawing on the results of various other pieces of (not necessarily directly comparable) research conducted over the past thirty years and more. Aside from research utilising time-use data (see below), relatively few studies have systematically analysed change over time using directly comparable large-scale data. (This point is made in Warde and Hetherington 1993, although see Spitze 1986 and Scott *et al.* 1996 for exceptions, and Luxton 1986; Yeandle 1984; and Brannen and Moss 1991 for examples of smaller-scale research based on interviews with specific sub-groups.) The overall consequence has been that, with the exception of some research into attitudinal changes (for example, Baxter 1992; Crompton 1999) and the work of Benjamin (1998; Benjamin and Sullivan 1999) relatively few investigations have been made into the possible *determinants* of, and variation in, long-term change at the behavioural level.

In this context, research based on time-use diary data has recently been influential in the proposal of the argument that some change has indeed occurred. Analysis using comparable and successive time-use diary studies from many countries of Europe and North America from the 1960s to the 1990s shows an increase in the time that men devote to domestic labour, and a corresponding decrease for women, when controlling for relevant structural changes (see, for example, Gershuny and Robinson 1988; Robinson 1997; Sullivan and Gershuny forthcoming). These trends are referred to in a publication of the United Nations about women's use of time, and have thereby entered the world of knowledge of the international agencies (Niemi 1995). At the couple level of analysis Gershuny, using data on couple's use of time from Britain and Germany, has also demonstrated processes of change occurring within couples in the division of domestic labour in response to the woman changing her employment status. There is evidence for some degree of flexibility in domestic arrangements, whereby men take on more of the domestic work when women change their employment status either from non-employed into part-time employment, or from part-time to full-time employment (Gershuny 1995a). In addition, the average overall time trend over the past thirty years shows an *increase* in leisure time for full-time employed women (who should be those most vulnerable to the double burden), which includes components both of decreases in paid work time and in domestic work time. Various propositions are advanced in Sullivan and

Gershuny (forthcoming) about the seeming contradiction between the implications of this analysis and studies of time which argue that 'our' time (especially women's time) is increasingly pressured (see, for example, Hochschild 1996). At least one of these propositions is concerned with the issue of who exactly is involved in heavy burdens of housework. What are the characteristics of those for whom the double burden is most pronounced, and for which groups is it less so? And is the situation of either group changing, for the better or the worse? Proponents of the 'not much change' position have argued that the changes described in the analyses referred to above are both small and insignificant. What I hope to present in this paper is a detailed examination of the nature and pattern of change in the domestic division of labour in one country, which addresses the two central questions of how much change there has been and who has changed.

Time-use data

Data from time-use diaries are increasingly being used in the sociological analysis of micro-social and household processes (see Gershuny and Sullivan 1998). Their particular advantage for research into the domestic division of labour is that they are directly derived from the empirical recording of successive activities, rather than relying upon what people say that they do (or believe) in response to questionnaire items on domestic work. This issue has received much methodological attention in the context of justifying observational analysis, but is equally important in the justification of time-use diary studies (Juster 1985; Robinson 1985; Gershuny 1990), since this is an area where responses to questions about domestic participation are notoriously unreliable (for a recent analysis of husband's and wife's differential reporting see Bittman and Lovejoy 1993). In addition, the fact that diaries may be collected simultaneously from partners makes it possible to undertake analyses at the level of the couple, so that the proportion of domestic housework time contributed by a woman reflects the situation within a specific partnership, and is not simply based on some grand average calculated from overall time contributed by (all) married women as against (all) married men. More extended discussion of the reliability and usefulness of time-use diary data may be found in Robinson (1985) and Gershuny and Sullivan (1998).

The data used in these analyses are drawn from a cross-time data archive held by the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex. This archive comprises successive time-use diary surveys from a range of industrialised countries, which were collected from the 1960s to the 1990s. There were of course considerable variations in these surveys, and in the construction of the cross-national archive they have been standardised to a common format¹ with a single range of activities, so that they form a unique record of change in the use of time in different countries from the 1960s to the 1990s. In order to standardise as much as

possible for this analysis the three diary datasets from which couples were selected were all national-level studies conducted in Britain, and all were whole household, seven-day diary designs (so that design effects would not be expected to make a difference to the results). In addition, in all three datasets couples were selected on the basis of age (male aged under 66), and for being 'good diarists' – in other words only those couples in which both partners met the criterion of 30 minutes per day or less of missing diary data were included.²

The 1975 data come from the British Broadcasting Corporation's 'People's Activity and Daily Life' study. This formed part of a long sequence of 'viewer/listener availability studies' carried out periodically by the Audience Research Department of the BBC from the late 1930s on. The sample was a nationally representative one of 2,710 addresses, yielding 3,545 useable diaries and 690 couples for the purposes of this analysis.

The 1987 data are from the ESRC Social and Economic Life Initiative (SCELI), a large-scale study conducted in England and Scotland in 1986/87, the second stage of which included a time-use diary study providing diary materials for around 1,300 individuals in households, which was drawn from an initial random sample of working-age adults.³ This yields a sample size of 392 couples.

The 1997 data come from a smaller national random sample which constituted the pilot study for the sixth wave of the British Household Panel Study, a national longitudinal study of households in Britain (British Household Panel Study 1991). Diaries were kept by 202 couples, and these are included in the present analysis.

Findings

In order to examine patterns of change in the domestic division of labour using time-use diary data there are a number of different alternative measures; one can look at change in minutes per day spent by men and women in different domestic activities; or at changes in an index of the division of domestic labour for couples constructed by dividing the woman's (or the man's) contribution by the total time spent in domestic tasks by both partners; or one can look at changes in the proportion of couples in which the woman contributes 80 per cent (or 75 per cent, or 50 per cent) of the total time spent in domestic work. All of these measures have something interesting to tell us: the first, which is used in Sullivan and Gershuny (forthcoming) to chart trends over a range of industrialised countries, shows in which direction, if at all, change is occurring in the time devoted to different domestic tasks by men and women. The second, the index of domestic division of labour within couples, has the advantage of being a relative measure which shows how the overall burden of domestic work is divided between partners, but cannot distinguish between change due to trends in women's or in men's contribution. Both of these are measures that are commonly used in the analysis of the domestic

division of labour, and I initially present tables showing the change in these measures over time when controlling for important discriminatory variables such as employment status and socio-economic class. These are then combined into a multivariate analysis of variance, showing the effect of change over time in relation to both employment status and household structure (Table 5).

Another problem, though, with the use of the overall domestic division of labour index is that it is unable to show whether change is occurring across the whole range of values of the index, or whether it is concentrated in particular areas of the distribution of values of the index. For example, is the sub-group in which women perform 90 per cent or more of the domestic division of labour growing or shrinking in size over time relative to other sub-groups? Either possibility might be compatible with an overall index which showed a trend towards men performing relatively more of the domestic work. Therefore in the final tables of the paper I introduce a less utilised, but also illuminating third measure, in which the issue of 'who changes' is analysed in terms of trends in the distribution of couples between *sub-categories* of the domestic division of labour index.

To begin with, Table 1 shows the overall domestic division of labour (ddl) index for couples by survey year and employment status of partners. The index used here shows the proportion of couple's domestic work time contributed by the woman.⁴ The first point to draw attention to is that a clear decline can be seen in the average across all employment statuses from 0.77 in 1975 to 0.63 in 1997; a significant drop of 14 percentage points (or nearly one-fifth of the 1975 average). However, since it is already known that the domestic division of labour varies according to the employment status of partners, controlling for the different combinations of employment status for men and women in couples permits us to check whether this trend occurs across all employment status combinations. Looking, then, at the ddl index across the combinations of employment status a number of features are worth mentioning. Firstly, as is known from other cross-sectional research, the woman's contribution to domestic work is highest where her partner is working full time, and she is either non-employed or working part time. As expected, this holds true across the time span covered by the three surveys. The highest contribution by men is made in the 'residual' category, largely comprised of couples in which the man is either not employed or working only part time.⁵ This confirms a tendency observed, among others, by Morris (1990) and Wheelock (1990), in which (some) non-employed men show a greater tendency to help around the house. Secondly, although the change between 1987 and 1997 is less impressive than that between 1975 and 1987, it appears that the general declining trend observed in the overall average applies broadly across the categories (with the exception of the residual category which shows a U-shaped pattern of change). The implication is that the trend in the overall average cannot be attributed to change in the division of domestic labour within any specific combination of employment statuses – for instance, among full-time employed

Table 1
Division of domestic labour index by employment status of partners

	1975 *	1987 *	1997 *	1975 <i>n</i>	1987 <i>n</i>	1997 <i>n</i>
All	0.77	0.67	0.63	680	388	175
Both full time	0.68	0.62	0.60	158	104	57
Husb ft wife pt	0.80	0.70	0.69	199	120	34
Husb ft wife ne	0.82	0.73	0.73	294	118	23
Other	0.61	0.55	0.59	29	46	61

Source: An earlier version of this table appears in Gershuny (1997).

*Proportion of domestic work time contributed by women in couples.

Key: ft=full time, pt=part time, ne=not employed.

couples – but applies across all major categories of couples' joint employment statuses.

Table 2 shows the same ddl index by year of survey and couples' combined employment status, here controlling for a further measure of household social status. Unfortunately, the 1975 BBC survey only collected a social status indicator based on the interviewer's assessment of the household. Households were coded according to the Market Research Society classification of class, identified by letters from A through E (Market Research Society 1991). Despite the shortcomings of subjective assessment, this designation does at least circumvent the thorny issue of how to classify the social status of households comprised of different individuals. In the 1997 BHPS pilot survey the same measure was adopted precisely for the purposes of comparison with the 1975 data, and the outcome is shown in Table 2.⁶ In order to minimise the difficulties of interviewer assessment of class a familiar dual-class

Table 2
Division of domestic labour index by employment status of partners and socio-economic class of household

	Manual/clerical*		Professional/technical*	
	1975	1997	1975	1997
All	0.78	0.63	0.74	0.66
Both full time	0.69	0.60	0.62	0.62
Husb ft wife pt	0.80	0.68	0.74	0.71
Husb ft wife ne	0.82	0.73	0.80	0.73
Other	0.58	0.53	0.72	0.65

*Proportion of domestic work time contributed by women in couples.

Key: ft=full time, pt=part time, ne=not employed

classification was adopted for the purposes of these analyses, with social class groups C1, C2, D and E combined into a manual/clerical category, while groups A and B together make up a professional/technical category.

Looking first at the overall index by survey year and household social class, it can immediately be seen that the overall relative decline in women's contribution evident from Table 1 applies equally to both major social class groups. If anything, there may be evidence for a larger drop (from a slightly higher base) among the manual and clerical category. Again, controlling for couples' combined employment status, evidence for a decline over the period 1975–97 can be seen within most categories for both class groups; the only exception to this being for professional/technical class couples where both were employed full time. However, this category recorded the most equitable distribution of domestic labour in 1975 (at 0.62), and are surpassed in 1997 only by the comparable manual/clerical group (at 0.60). Indeed, there may be a suggestion that the manual/clerical group in which both members of the couple are employed have eliminated, if not reversed, the class/gender gap in the ddl index over the period between the surveys. In 1975 the manual/clerical groups in which both members of the couple were in employment had ddl indexes considerably higher than those for the professional/technical group of the same employment statuses (0.69 for couples where both were in full-time employment and 0.80 for those where the man was in full-time employment and the woman in part-time employment, as against 0.62 and 0.74 respectively). By 1997 this situation had equalised (perhaps even reversed), with slightly more equitable ddl indices for manual/clerical couples in employment than for their professional/technical equivalents (0.60 and 0.74 against 0.62 and 0.71). It appears that over the twenty-two year period between the surveys, manual/clerical couples in which both partners are employed had at the least 'caught up with' the more equal distribution of domestic labour evident among equivalent professional/technical couples in 1975.

The above two tables have given us a relative picture of change in the division of domestic labour over a twenty year period. However, the ddl index employed depends on *both* partner's levels of participation; the effect of a decrease in women's time spent in domestic work could be identical to that of an increase in men's time. In order to demonstrate some of the *absolute* changes that have occurred in both men and women's domestic work times two contrasting examples of domestic tasks are presented in terms of the minutes that men and women respectively devote to them. The two examples chosen are 'cooking and cleaning' – the routine domestic work tasks, which have always been heavily feminine-associated (shown in Table 3), and 'child care', which is also traditionally feminine-associated, but for which it is sometimes argued that fathers are likely to be taking more responsibility in a new age of concern about 'fatherhood' (shown in Table 4). Minutes per day spent in the above tasks are given for both men and women, broken down as before by household social class and combined employment status.

Table 3
Minutes per day in cooking and cleaning by sex, employment status of partners and socio-economic class of household

	Manual/Clerical		Professional/Technical	
	1975	1997	1975	1997
<i>Men</i>				
All	16	31	21	31
Both full time	19	29	30	43
Husb ft wife pt	15	28	18	24
Husb ft wife ne	12	18	18	37
Other	54	51	22	13
<i>Women</i>				
All	213	135	208	130
Both full time	141	93	135	98
Husb ft wife pt	208	167	218	146
Husb ft wife ne	256	182	235	162
Other	218	137	302	158

Key: ft=full time, pt=part time, ne=not employed.

Referring first to Table 3, showing minutes per day in cooking and cleaning tasks, the overall sums for women and men in the two social class groups tells the by-now-familiar story; while the time women spend in these tasks has dramatically declined over the period 1975 to 1997, the contribution of men has equally dramatically increased, from a much lower base. This trend is evident for both social class groups. From contributing between ten times as much (among professional/technical households) to thirteen times as much (manual/clerical households) as their male partners in 1975, by 1997 women were contributing on average only four times as much. In real terms the increases are between 10 (professional/technical) to 15 minutes (manual/clerical) a day for men to an overall average in 1997 of half an hour per day, compared to a decrease of about 1 hour 20 minutes for women to an overall average of about 2 hours 10 minutes per day. With respect to differences in the trend between the class groups it seems from Table 3 that the 'catching up' in the ddl index observed for manual/clerical households in Table 2 is mainly due to differences in the contribution of men. Men in manual/clerical households start from a lower base in 1975 than in professional/technical households, but by 1997 are contributing the same amount on average, while the class ratio remained the same for women across the two survey dates. Looking at the change across the couple employment status combinations we can see that the trend towards women spending less time on

Table 4
Minutes per day in child care by sex, employment status of partners and socio-economic class of household

	Manual/Clerical		Professional/Technical	
	1975	1997	1975	1997
<i>Men</i>				
All	7	14	7	18
Both full time	2	7	4	12
Husb ft wife pt	5	30	8	25
Husb ft wife ne	10	20	9	52
Other	3	2	0	7
<i>Women</i>				
All	28	41	32	60
Both full time	6	19	6	51
Husb ft wife pt	17	74	17	102
Husb ft wife ne	49	70	51	122
Other	4	15	0	11

Key: ft=full time, pt=part time, ne=not employed.

cooking and cleaning and men spending more is evident for all the main combinations (apart from the small and heterogeneous 'other' category). Moreover, the trend is roughly of the same order across the categories. The implication is that these changes are not attributable simply to changes in employment characteristics (men doing on average more because of a shift over time towards women's greater participation in employment). The men who consistently made the highest contribution (both absolutely and relatively) to time spent in cooking and cleaning across both surveys are those in professional/technical households where both partners were employed full time. In 1975 such men spent about 22 per cent of the time their female partners' spent in cooking and cleaning; by 1997 this had risen to 44 per cent (this change of course results from a combination of an increase in men's time spent in such tasks and a decrease in women's). I will return below to a discussion of the situation of this group, who are most likely to fit the criteria of 'dual-career' couples. For men in manual/clerical households where both partners were in full-time employment the trend was more dramatic, but, due to a lower starting point, the 1997 outcome was less equitable. The equivalent change was from 13 per cent to 31 per cent.

Table 4 shows minutes per day spent in child care for the same combination of variables.⁷ The main reason for presenting this table is that, in contrast to cooking

and cleaning time, both women and men show a marked increase in the time spent in child care between 1975 and 1997. This increase ranges from just under 50 per cent (women in manual/clerical class households) to around 160 per cent (men in professional/technical households). Secondly, women contribute substantially more time than men to child-care tasks, but the magnitude of the sex difference is not so great as for time spent in cooking and cleaning (shown in Table 3). The ratio of women to men's times decreases slightly over the period from roughly four times as much, down to about three times as much. The significance of the increase in child-care activities is discussed more fully in Sullivan and Gershuny (forthcoming). We argue there that there may be causative factors connected to changes in modes of travel, in leisure activities, and in how people both perceive and report time spent with their children.

In respect of between-couple employment status differences, it was clear that employment status would be strongly linked to the presence of children in the household. Consequently it was expected that greater amounts of time would be devoted to child care in employment status combinations where the woman is employed only part time or not at all. This feature is evident for both men and women in the table. Also evident, and for similar reasons, is that the greatest amounts of time in child-care tasks are found for women from professional/technical households who were in part-time employment, or not employed, in 1997. The difference between the averages for these groups and their equivalents from manual/clerical class households is due to a structural artefact: women from professional/technical households are more likely to be working full time. Therefore those from this group who are working only part time or not at all are more likely to be caring for young children than among their counterparts from manual/clerical households (Table 5 below shows the results of a multivariate analysis in which the effects of having children of different ages in the household are controlled for).

The main point to be made from Tables 3 and 4 is that there are differences between the domestic tasks in the changing contribution of men and women. For all the main groups of domestic tasks (cooking and cleaning, child care, shopping), men's contribution in terms of the amount of time devoted to these tasks has increased. However, while for some tasks (cooking and cleaning), women's contribution has decreased, for others it has increased (child care, shopping). The overall outcome, as indicated in Sullivan and Gershuny forthcoming, is that while women's overall time spent in domestic work has remained roughly constant over time, men's has increased. The trends in the *ddl* index shown in Tables 1 and 2 reflect these changes.

Lastly, since it is possible that there were also changes in the structural characteristics of households over the period covered by the three surveys, the main dependent variables (partners' domestic work time and the domestic division of labour index) are brought together into a multivariate analysis which includes

Table 5

Multiple classification analysis from analyses of variance: husband's domestic work time, wife's domestic work time and the domestic division of labour index (ddl) controlling for survey year, couple employment status and household structure

	N	Husband's domestic work time (mins/day)	Wife's domestic work time (mins/day)	Domestic division of labour index*
Grand mean		122	304	0.72
Adjusted Deviations				
Survey				
1975	675	-21.68	-3.44	0.04
1987	384	33.20	8.18	-0.04
1997	175	10.76	-4.69	-0.04
Statistical significance		$P < 0.01$	NS ($P = 0.12$)	$P < 0.01$
Employment status				
Both full time	313	-1.49	-79.83	-0.06
Husb ft, wife pt	351	-14.67	-10.77	0.03
Husb ft, wife ne	434	-10.90	68.34	0.06
Other	136	76.08	-6.58	-0.12
Statistical significance		$P < 0.01$	$P < 0.01$	$P < 0.01$
Household structure				
<40, no kids	151	-17.17	-81.17	-0.06
Kid <5	322	17.92	50.97	0.01
Kid 5-14	356	0.98	6.24	0.01
40+, no kids	405	-8.71	-15.75	0.01
Statistical significance		$P < 0.001$	$P < 0.01$	$P < 0.001$

*Proportion of domestic work time contributed by the wife.

employment status, the presence of children of different ages in the household and the date of the survey as independent variables. Table 5 shows the adjusted deviations from the grand mean for all the categories of the independent variables for: husband's time spent in domestic tasks; wife's time spent in domestic tasks; and the ddl index. The thing of interest here is whether, when controlling for both couples' employment status and household structure, the cross-time effects that were observed in the earlier analyses still apply. The main conclusion is that there *are* statistically significant differences according to survey date for both the ddl index and the man's domestic work time, but not for the woman's domestic work time. Referring to the adjusted deviations, there is for men in couples an overall increase in domestic work time from 1975 to 1997 (the inverted U-shape in the distribution of

deviations occurs for both male and female partners, and may be related to definitional differences in the surveys), while there is an overall decrease in the *proportion* of domestic work time contributed by the woman (ddl is between 0.76 and 0.72). The implication is that, even when controlling for changes in the structural characteristics of couple's employment status and household structure over time, there is support for the central findings that men are spending more time in domestic tasks (despite fluctuations between surveys), and that the domestic division of labour has shifted in the direction of greater participation from men.

So far, I have discussed changes over time in the ddl index and shown the relationship with the amounts of time spent in particular domestic tasks by men and women in couples. However, as referred to above, as well as asking about the overall ddl index, we might also want to know about change in the *distribution* of couples across the index. For example, has there been a change in the percentage of more egalitarian couples (in which the woman contributes less than 60 per cent, say, of the overall domestic work time) between 1975 and 1997? Or, in what percentage of couples, then and now, does the woman contribute more than 80 per cent of the domestic work time? While this may not be a particularly new way of framing the question concerning change in the domestic division of labour, it is relatively new in terms of analyses using large-scale datasets, and in the following tables some evidence is presented. Firstly, Table 6 shows percentage categories of overall domestic work time contributed by women in couples, analysed by couple employment status. The particular thing of note about this table is the surprisingly high percentage of couples, particularly among the full-time employed, in which the man is contributing more time to domestic work than the woman (shown in the first category,

Table 6
Percentage of couples in domestic division of labour categories by employment status of partners

% done by woman	Both full time			Husband ft, wife pt			Husband ft, wife ne		
	1975 %	1987 %	1997 %	1975 %	1987 %	1997 %	1975 %	1987 %	1997 %
0-49	15	20	32	3	6	15	2	6	4
50-59	20	23	26	6	18	9	5	9	17
60-69	17	24	14	13	25	32	10	21	22
70-79	23	22	12	28	33	18	24	26	30
80+	24	17	9	34	41	23	40	59	24
N=100%	158	104	57	199	120	34	294	118	23

Key: ft=full time, pt=part time, ne=not employed.

labelled 0–49). What we observe is that by 1997, in nearly one-third of couples in which both partners are employed full time, the man is contributing more time to domestic work (broadly defined) than the woman. The trend is both substantial and consistent, up from 15 per cent of such couples in 1975. Having said this, it is of course also the case in 1997 that for two-thirds of full-time employed couples the woman is contributing more to domestic work time than her partner.

Looking across the joint employment status categories from those couples where both are in full-time employment, through those where the man is full-time and the woman part-time employed, to those where the man is employed full time and the woman not employed, we see, as expected, higher percentages of couples in more inegalitarian partnerships. However, an inspection of the median or mode for each distribution also reveals an upwards trend within each joint employment status over time – indicating a general trend towards a more egalitarian domestic division of labour. For example, the modal category for *all* joint employment statuses in 1975 was 80 per cent plus (percentage of domestic work time contributed by the woman). But by 1997 it was 70–79 per cent for couples including a full-time employed man and a non-employed woman, 60–69 per cent for couples including a full-time employed man and a part-time employed woman, and 0–49 per cent for full-time employed couples. Looking at the extremes of the distribution an increase over time is evident among all employment status combinations in the first two categories of the distribution (in which the woman contributes only up to 60 per cent of the domestic work time). In the ‘both full time’ and ‘man full time, woman part time’ employment status combinations there is also a clear increase in the percentage of couples in which the man actually contributes more (the first category). In addition, there is a clear decrease over time in the percentage of highly inegalitarian couples; in all joint employment statuses there is a decline in the percentage of couples where the woman contributes 80 per cent or more of the domestic work. For full-time employed couples this decline is monotonic; from just under a quarter of such couples in 1975 to only 9 per cent in 1997. For the other two employment status categories the situation is slightly more complex; there appears to be an increase in the percentage of highly inegalitarian couples between 1975 and 1987, but a substantial fall by 1997 to around a quarter of couples (well below the 1975 average). The overall conclusion from this examination of the distribution of couple’s domestic work time is that over the twenty year period covered by the surveys there has been a general decline in the percentage of inegalitarian couples, and an increase in more egalitarian couples. The increase in the proportion of couples where the man contributes more domestic work time than the woman is particularly striking, despite the simultaneous and obvious support for the fact that, even among full-time employee couples, the burden of domestic work still falls more heavily on the woman. And for the majority of couples in 1997 in which the woman is not in full-time employment, the division of domestic work time is still weighted quite heavily against her; where she is in part-

Table 7

Women in couples' proportion of all work, by hours in paid work (per week: working age only)

	1975	1987	1997
All	0.49	0.49	0.51
Hours in paid work:			
0-5	0.47	0.47	0.47
5-30	0.50	0.50	0.52
30-36	0.50	0.52	0.53
36-40	0.52	0.51	0.52
40+	0.53	0.54	0.55

time employment 41 per cent of couples fall into the over 70 per cent categories, and where she is not employed the equivalent figure is 54 per cent of couples.

The last few points raise questions about the nature of the dual burden. For example, among couples where the woman is only employed part time or not at all, what is her contribution to the overall work time of the couple, taking paid and unpaid work together? And for full-time employed couples, do the respective hours of paid work of men and women make a difference to who contributes more to domestic work? These considerations suggest an examination of women's proportion of overall work time (paid and unpaid) in relation to their hours of employment (refer to Table 7). The first point to note is here that the contribution of women to the overall work time of the couple is roughly 50 per cent across the time span covered by the three surveys. And for women who are not employed, or whose hours of paid work per week are very low, the proportion of overall work time remains under parity, at 47 per cent. As hours of paid work increase, it seems that women, overall, are contributing somewhat more than their partners, and the clearest overload occurs for those women who are working full time for 40 hours or more per week. At this level of employment, women are working 3 to 5 per cent longer than men (taking paid and unpaid work together). There is suggestive evidence on a large scale for the existence of the double burden here, although the overload is perhaps not as high as some researchers (such as Hochschild 1989) have suggested (see also Pleck 1985).

Discussion

I return here to discuss again the questions raised in the introduction: how much change, who changes, and whether change is meaningful. I argue that the change which is observed is clearly slow, and the outcome is still highly unequal.

However, a growing body of evidence, to which this paper makes a small contribution, suggests that some change *is* occurring.

Tables 1 and 2 show that there are discernable increases in the relative contribution of men to the household work time of couples over the period 1975 to 1997. These increases are evident across the major couple employment status and household social class categories, and are supported in multivariate analysis controlling for structural changes across time in employment statuses and household structure (Table 5). Tables 3 and 4 also show substantial changes in the time spent by both men and women in cooking and cleaning tasks on the one hand and child-care tasks on the other. In the first the ratio of time contributed by men and women has become more equal (time spent by men has increased; time spent by women has decreased), in the second it has not (time spent by both partners has increased). Despite substantial reductions in the *ratio* of female to male participation in cooking and cleaning both sets of tasks none the less remain highly gendered, with women contributing several times more time than men. The question here is, as Warde and Hetherington have suggested (1993), is it possible to talk about *meaningful* change in a context where task performance remains highly gender-specific?

On the general issue of whether or not change has been substantial, a couple of observations seem relevant. Firstly, the increase in the relative importance of men's contribution to domestic work time is reflected in an overall 8 per cent drop in the *ddl* index over a twenty-two year period, when controlling for changes in household structure and employment statuses (Table 5). This represents a decline of less than 0.5 per cent a year. Similarly, the increase in men's contribution to cooking and cleaning looks insignificant if thought of simply in terms of a (less than) 15 minute increase between surveys, and even ridiculous in terms of less than one minute per year over a twenty-two year period. But rather than focusing simply on the rate of change, the *consistency* of the trend towards men's greater participation in domestic work, and women's decreasing participation in routine housework, also deserves consideration. In addition, the fact that greater proportional changes are observed among manual/clerical class households is also worthy of note. This 'catching up' effect (to a situation in 1997 of near equality) may contain elements similar to those described in accounts of behavioural social changes originating in the upper strata of society and penetrating over time across the socio-economic spectrum (cf. Veblen 1967; Bourdieu 1984 for examples). Here these trends are shown for social class and joint employment categories for British data. In another paper we also show that the same long-term trends are observable within most employment and family status categories over a range of industrialised countries (Sullivan and Gershuny, forthcoming). Characteristically, they survive analysis controlling for the major socio-economic and demographic variables. Moreover, the magnitude of the overall trend is comparable to that of the average decrease in paid work time for full-time employees discernable in many Western industrialised societies over the past thirty

years; a change which is widely acknowledged and referred to (for example, in Crouch and Streeck 1997).

The second issue posed above asks: is meaningful change compatible with a sustained gender-specific pattern of domestic task performance and management? I can only submit that, on the basis of time spent in these tasks (with all the inadequacies of this measure in relation to the content of that time), there appears to have been a substantial reduction in gender inequality in the performance of some of the normatively feminine-associated tasks. Having said that, they remain, however, strongly gendered. And so we return to one of the most difficult of questions: how much change is meaningful? Or, as posed by Benjamin and Sullivan (1996): to what extent does change really mean change? Proponents of the 'not much change' position have argued that the changes described in analyses of time use are both small and insignificant. However, in relation to changes in time use in other areas of life, such as in paid work times, the increase in men's participation in domestic work as reflected in time diaries is as substantial. And, since the analyses presented above relate to change occurring within couples, it was also possible to identify within what sub-groups of couples change has been most pronounced. For example, the finding that in 1997 in one-third of full-time employed couples the man actually spends *longer* overall than the woman in domestic work tasks is certainly surprising. Despite the fact that in the corresponding two-thirds of such couples women contribute more of the domestic work time, and even where tasks remain strongly gender specific, this still represents a substantial change from the 1975 situation. Observing this kind of change at the upper and lower end of the distribution of couples according to egalitarian orientation in the division of domestic work time underlines the importance of looking in detail at change within sub-groups of couples as well as at the overall average picture.

To summarise, it is argued that, in relation to changes in time use in other areas of life, and notwithstanding the continuing inequality in the gender division of domestic work, the increase in men's participation (at least as measured in terms of time contributed) should be regarded as significant. Over the time period covered by these analyses there has been (i) a clear reduction in gender inequality in the performance of some of the normatively feminine-associated tasks, (ii) a larger proportional increase in the time contributed by men from lower socio-economic strata, to a position of near equality with those from higher socio-economic strata, and (iii) a substantial increase in more 'egalitarian' couples, especially among the full-time employed.

Of course, what these analyses cannot tell us about is *how* or *why* these changes are occurring, or about changes in the relative gender power within couples which they may reflect (cf. Bittman and Lovejoy 1993; Benjamin 1998). How to theorise the meaning and implication of these changes is perhaps the most challenging task, since most theoretical analysis to date in this area has started from the assumption of no

change. However, there is some research which seems promising, which focuses on a different level of analysis; in particular on possibilities of change in gender ideologies (e.g. Gerson and Peiss 1985) and in gender role flexibility within and between couples (Benjamin 1998; Benjamin and Sullivan, 1999; Crompton 1999).

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NOTES

1. It has been shown from methodological research on the archive that the data collection methodology in fact makes little difference to the broad picture of changes in time use that emerges (Gershuny 1995b).
2. I am indebted to Jonathan Gershuny for the provision of this dataset.
3. This represented a response rate of 44 per cent of eligible adults. However, a comparison of responses to 'shadow' questions in a simultaneous survey of the same population (response rate 76 per cent) indicated very little difference between the responses of those who did and who did not complete their diaries. For more information consult Gallie (1994).
4. The activities used throughout the paper to define domestic tasks as a whole include: cooking and cleaning, odd jobs around the house, shopping and child care (including child-related travel).
5. It should also be noted that sample numbers are lowest in this category.
6. There was no equivalent measure recorded for the 1987 data.
7. Child care as defined here includes times in which the *main* activity was reported as child related (i.e. including feeding of children, washing children, playing with children, and helping children with homework).

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