



Socialized Choices. Labour Market Behaviour of Dutch Mothers

J.F. Ruitenberg

Socialized Choices

Labour Market Behaviour of Dutch Mothers

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus
prof. dr. D.C. van den Boom
ten overstaan van een door het college voor promoties
ingestelde commissie,
in het openbaar te verdedigen in de Agnietenkapel
op woensdag 15 januari 2014, te 14:00 uur
door

Justine Friederike Ruitenberg

geboren te Utrecht

Chapter 8

Synthesis: overview and discussion

Embedded choices, invisible constraints

8.1 Introduction

This research is about Dutch mothers and the origins of their labour market behaviour at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The study is conducted against the backdrop of the present narrative of choice, which is a prominent element in contemporary public discourse on female employment (Beagan et al. 2008, p.666). If formal equality is achieved, and childcare facilities and family-friendly policies are widely provided, and if this is accompanied by processes of secularisation, individualization, and the greater acceptance of non-familial roles for women and more familial roles for men (Sullivan, 2004), then people would tend to believe that women have equal employment opportunities with men, and are free to do as they choose. This line of reasoning fits into post-modern theories of individualization, which claim that within Western societies, individuals are increasingly released from traditional forms and ascribed roles, and are freer than ever to choose their own identity (Bauman, 2005; Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2003). In addition, if the prevailing opinion is that women's decisions regarding care and work are their own choices, then they will also be held responsible for their achievements and failures accordingly (Everingham et al., 2007). The narrative of choice seems especially applicable in the Netherlands. Dutch laws, policies and collective agreements at industry level enable women to balance families and careers, by taking advantage of parental work-family arrangements and childcare facilities (Hakim, 2003d; Plantenga, 2002; Tjldens, 2006; Van Doorne-Huiskes and Schippers, 2010). Presumably, women can choose whether they want to stay at home with their children, to work at a small or large part-time job, or to continue working full-time.

The principle argument of this study is that the perception that different employment choices are based on "free" choices tends to neglect the effect of normative beliefs about gender as part of culture at different societal levels (micro, meso and macro) on job-relevant aspirations of women (Duncan, 2005; Everingham et al., 2007; Ridgeway and Correl, 2004). People's practices are intimately linked to their social biographies and the institutionalised features of social systems.

The picture of the socio-economic historical background of the Netherlands, with respect to women's employment patterns, reveals that Dutch mothers nowadays are predominantly employed in part-time work. They also provide the majority of unpaid domestic care work, which in that past was something that their own mothers typically took charge of (Bucx, 2011; Haas, 2005; Kloek, 2009). It is also notable that Dutch institutional care arrangements (such as parental leave systems, school opening hours and child-care facilities) combined with a moral standard to work part-time, hamper both the stay-at-home *and* full-time work options for Dutch mothers (Kremer, 2007; Merens et al., 2012; Plantenga, 2002, 2008). The availability of relatively 'sophisticated' part-time work is mainly perceived as a privilege by Dutch mothers (Tjldens, 2006; Van Doorne-Huiskes and Schippers, 2010; Wiesmann et al., 2010), possibly because most Western mothers prefer part-time work in order to achieve a work-life balance (Jacob, 2008; Fagan, 2001; Reynolds 2003). However, the negative consequences of part-time work in terms of salary and career progression are the same in the Netherlands as in other affluent countries (Keuzenkamp et al., 2008, p.10). The ambiguity of the moral part-time standard for Dutch mothers seems to have led to a situation whereby on the surface society portrays there being 'a free choice' to work part-time, but there also exists an underlying moral expectation to work part-time and to only moderately outsource childcare. These implicit norms potentially constrain mothers' career options and their ability to be full-time, stay-at-home mothers.

Of special interest is the question as to why Dutch social institutions have not led to a homogenous labour market pattern among women with children. Although clearly part-time work is the most popular option, a varied pattern is visible. The supposed binding morality on a macro level has not led to similar attitudes and behaviours for all mothers. It is argued in this study that mothers respond differently in comparable situations, because they have a different appreciation and evaluation of similar situations. This study aims to explore the social origins of the different values and attitudes that lie underneath these diverse perceptions, and so affecting mothers' decisions.

The focus of this research is on the social relational backgrounds of mothers' decision-making processes regarding work. The central assumption is that the outcome of the decision-making process is not primarily based on current conditions, but is more solidly grounded in mothers' personal social biographies, extending as far back as their childhoods.

The first underlying theoretical assumption is that work preference acts as a mediating factor between attitudes and behaviour, and is based on the social psychological theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen and Fishbein, 2005). This theory assumes that most behaviour of interest from a social psychological perspective occurs because, in a given situation, a person holds or forms a specific intention towards this specific behaviour, which influences her subsequent behaviour (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1973; Ajzen, 1991). Secondly, intention is, in turn, affected by attitudes toward behaviour¹, the subjective norm² and perceived behavioural control³ (Ajzen and Fishbein, 2005, p.194). Sociological empirical researchers have demonstrated the value of including women's gender and work attitudes in explaining their labour market behaviour (Beets et al., 1997; Hakim, 2000; Hooghiemstra, 2000; Marks and Houston 2002a; Portegijs et al., 2008b; Risman et al., 1999) and yet generally these studies have not included the possible intermediating effect of intentions (defined in this study as work preferences) between attitudes and employment decisions.⁴ In this study, it is argued that gender and work attitudes are closer (but not identical) to work preferences than to behaviour. The first aim of this study is therefore to disentangle the separate roles of attitudes and work preferences in the employment decision-making process.

The second theoretical notion of this study is the assumption that the employment decision-making process is socially formed and embedded. Labour market activity is understood as an outcome of a process that consists of consecutive decision-making moments, like dependent paths: each successive step depends on previously taken decisions. Attending school, whether as a high achiever or not, taking erroneously or correctly chosen continuation courses, and then the ensuing steps taking into professional work, are all not facts that can easily be adjusted or reversed. Most people experience the consequences of each educational and occupational step taken throughout their life. Besides being based on personal characteristics and structural circumstances, like the availability of financial support, studies and jobs, these important steps forward are all partly based on people's values and attitudes, and their subsequent work preferences. People have developed these values and attitudes through the exposure to and internalization of parental behaviour, norms, values and attitudes, especially during childhood (Bandura, 1977; Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Handel, 2006). Experiences and social interactions in later life can change the intensity of these values and attitudes, however the underlying assumption is that values and attitudes are not easily modified in opposite directions, because individuals generally like their identity to be confirmed, and significant others are salient for this ongoing substantiation of their identity (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p.170).

Nevertheless, it is not only important to understand *that* values and attitudes have been formed, developed and sustained within different social relational contexts. The motivation for this study is also to understand *how* social backgrounds and networks have influenced the career-relevant attitudes and preferences of mothers, and *which* values and attitudes, that have been transmitted and sustained, are important in understanding mother's labour market behaviour. Put differently, more needs to be known about the nature of micro socialization processes that may have mediated or regulated Dutch mothers' diverse work preferences.

The central question of this research is:

Can specific (micro) socialization processes explain the current differences among Dutch mothers' gender and work values, attitudes and work preferences, and how, in turn, do work preferences affect mothers' labour market behaviour?

The answers to this question are elaborated in this chapter through the four hypotheses of the study. The aim of the synthesis, besides summarising the most important findings of the study, is also to confront the similarities and differences of the qualitative findings and the quantitative results, while addressing the merits and limits of both research methods. The four hypotheses tested in this study are:

1. *A mother's labour market behaviour is based on her preferred number of work hours.*

¹ A person's favourable or unfavourable evaluation or appraisal of the specific behaviour.

² A person's expectation of social approval or disapproval of the specific behaviour.

³ A person's feeling of being able to enact the specific behaviour, which is related to the supposed ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour

⁴ Work preferences are in this study measured as the number of hours a mother wants to work.

2. *A mother's preferred number of work hours is influenced by her general gender values and personal gender and work attitudes.*
3. *A mother's general gender values and gender and personal work attitudes are influenced by parental socialization during childhood.*
4. *A mother endorses more egalitarian values and attitudes if she has perceived the professional and career support of significant others.*

8.2 A mother's labour market behaviour is based on her preferred number of work hours

The first aim of this study was to disentangle the separate role of diverse work preferences (preferred number of work hours) in explaining mothers' heterogeneous employment decisions. The labour market behaviour of mothers can be divided into the number of hours that mothers work and the participation decision of whether to work or to stay at home. The expected relationship between work preferences and labour market behaviour has similarities with the theory of planned behaviour of Ajzen (1991) and Ajzen and Fishbein (1973, 2005). This theory assumes intention to be an aim that guides action to perform a particular behaviour, and that intentions are based on a person's attitudes, expected approval of significant others, and perceived ability to perform the behaviour. The stronger the intention to engage in particular behaviour, the more likely a person is to show that behaviour. Ajzen (1991) recognised that most behaviour also depends, at least to some degree, on other factors which are not related to motivation, such as the availability of necessary opportunities and resources, such as time, money, skills and the cooperation of others (Ajzen, 1991, p.182). This observation is especially pertinent when looking at behaviour through the lens of the number of hours worked per week by mothers. The acknowledgement that behaviour can be determined by external factors, such as people's earning capacity and their professional and care networks, corresponds with micro-economic and sociological theories that emphasised the contexts and constraints wherein action takes place (e.g. Becker, 1965; Cunningham et al., 2005; Reynolds, 2003; Tomlinson, 2006).

Firstly, the quantitative findings show that the preferred number of work hours was the only factor that related significantly to a mother's participation decision. None of the background characteristics of a mother had any direct effect on her employment decision; they were all mediated by her preferred number of hours. This outcome underlined the expectation within this study that a mother's work preference is a good predictor of labour market behaviour, based on the assumption that this variable covers what mothers like, what they conceive as possible, and what they perceive that others expect them to do.

For the number of hours worked, most background characteristics did play a role, like a mother's age, her partner's income, and her levels of educational and religiousness. Yet, the number of preferred work hours also had by far the strongest relationship with the number of hours a mother actually works. These findings are in line with research that empirically examined the theory of planned behaviour and also reported strong correlations between intention and behaviour (beta 0.5 -0,8) (Ajzen and Fishbein, 2005; Irvine and Evans, 1995; Sheeran, 2002; Swanborn, 1996).

Nonetheless, the qualitative research demonstrate how work preferences can be overruled by a mother's personal constraints, for example by relatively low perceived behavioural control or sense of self-agency (Ajzen, 1991; Bandura, 2001). The stay-at-home mothers who were interviewed generally preferred small part-time jobs, but they were not able to put their work preferences into practice. This was mainly influenced by previous tiresome work experiences, their having a large number of children or hard-working spouses, and their insecurity about whether they would be able to overcome these constraints. In addition, their work histories could be characterised as ad hoc or haphazard, lacking significant recognisable motivation or consistency with their earlier educational and professional choices. The mismatch between the preferences and behaviour of stay-at-home mothers is interesting, and could not be revealed with the quantitative research analysis, since in the linear model, there was (high) correspondence with mothers work preferences and behaviour. Nonetheless, the findings confirm earlier research on this subject (Portegijs et al., 2008b; Risman et al., 1999; Thompson, 1989). "*Women who face blocked mobility or other problems, are 'pushed' toward domesticity*" (Risman, 1999, p.323).

Most previous research that addressed the mismatch between preferred and actual number of hours worked demonstrated that the preferred number of hours are often not realised due to, for example, a lack of (affordable) childcare, parental leave schemes, standardised work weeks, or insufficient supply of suitable jobs (Charles and Harris, 2007; Crompton and Harris, 1998; Drago et al., 2009; Jacob, 2008; Reynolds, 2003; Stone, 2007). These mostly large-scale survey studies did not generally include how an individual's *perception* of these institutional and personal constraints influence one's work preferences and subsequent behaviour. Additionally, the

qualitative findings of this study revealed that the preferred number of work hours is partly based on personal values and attitudes that existed a priori of people's entrance into the labour market. This conclusion is further explored in describing the main findings and outcomes of testing the second hypothesis.

8.3 A mother's preferred number of work hours is influenced by her general gender values and personal gender and work attitudes

The second aim of the study was to reveal the relationship between a mother's general values and personal attitudes on the one hand, and her work preference on the other. For this purpose, the theory of Ajzen and Fishbein (1973, 1991, 2005) appeared again relevant, since they argued that intention (or preferences) is affected by attitude toward behaviour, the subjective norm and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen and Fishbein, 2005, p.194). Nonetheless, the hypothesis is primarily based on previous sociological studies, which have demonstrated that in understanding female employment behaviour we must include women's relevant attitudes towards work and their ideal family roles for men and women (Beets et al., 1997; Hakim, 2000, 2003a-d; Hooghiemstra, 2000; Marks and Houston, 2002a; Portegijs, 2008b; Risman et al., 1999).

Personal gender attitudes and general gender values

In this study, *general* gender values refer to what people consider to be appropriate for other people regarding the division of tasks between spouses, while *personal* gender attitudes refer to a person's ideal or preferred division of labour within their own family life (Hakim, 2000, 2003a and 2003b). Personal gender attitudes appear to be more strongly related to labour market behaviour than general gender values (Hakim, 2003a; Marks and Houston, 2002a; Risman et al., 1999). By including both types of attitude in the analysis of Dutch mothers' labour market preferences, their relative impact can be compared. A personal work attitude is in this study termed as the personal motivation to pursue paid work.

The qualitative and quantitative findings confirmed the expected relationship between work preferences and *personal* gender and work attitudes. In cases when a mother's ideal was to be a full-time homemaker, her preferred number of work hours appeared considerably smaller than if her ideal was an equal division of paid and unpaid work with her partner. A mother's preferred number of hours was to a lesser extent related to her general gender values. These results confirmed earlier research. What is considered appropriate for others appears not always ideal for oneself. General gender values can be vague and inconsistent with peoples' own personal plans, and people's answers on questions about their general values can be prone to social desirability (Ajzen and Fishbein, 2005, p.176; Hakim, 2003c, p.63; Marks and Houston 2002b, p.322; Smithson and Stoke, 2005).

The study also showed that work preferences do not easily adapt to actual circumstances, since neither the presence nor the income of a partner did exert an effect on a mothers work preferences, whereas a higher income of her partner did diminish her actual number of hours worked. It was further found that a mother's age, the number of children she has, and the presence of a partner all directly relate to a mother's work preference. Remarkably, a mother's age had an opposite relation to work preferences, compared to the relationship between her age and her actual work hours. An older mother wishes to have more hours in paid work compared to younger mothers, presumably because if her children are now grown up, she gains more time to work. Yet, her actual hours in paid work are less compared to younger mothers. Besides the cohort effect, where younger generations of mothers seem more likely to stay in paid work after the birth of their first child than older generations (Lut, Van Galen and Latten, 2010), the result possibly reveals that a mother's older age makes it more difficult for her to put her preference into practice, due to an actual or perceived (by employers) reduction of her productivity level.

Whether or not a respondent's mother was in paid work when the respondent was a 12-year-old child also directly affected her subsequent work preferences years later. Other studies have also demonstrated that the presence of a working mother during childhood positively affects the number of work hours of her adult daughter (Lut, Van Galen and Latten, 2010; Van Putten et al., 2008) and their participation decision (Sanders, 1997; Cloin, 2010). The analysis of this study, however, showed that the effect of a mother in paid work is also mediated by her daughter's work preferences. Moreover, the results suggest that the effect of the presence of a working mother in childhood seems larger than previous studies have shown, since there is also a relationship between a working mother and a daughter's general and personal gender and work attitude. These results are not only interesting in themselves, but also reveal that at least part of a mother's attitudes and preferences arose prior to her labour market behaviour.

Furthermore, the qualitative findings revealed that those mothers who prefer a relatively small number of work hours often perceive it as their natural role to execute most of the unpaid family tasks, which is sensed as a

self-evident situation. The traditional/adaptive interviewees appeared mostly satisfied with the division of domestic work with their partners, which often meant approximately 80 per cent of the tasks for the mothers and 20 per cent for the fathers.

Unexpectedly, the qualitative study also disclosed that, despite similar work preferences, full-time homemakers appear slightly more egalitarian than mothers with small part-time jobs. The negative experience of running a household fully by themselves, combined with missing work and being exposed to the often disconcerting comments from those in their social environment on their 'choice' to be full-time homemakers, seemed to render full-time home-makers' general gender values more egalitarian. Moreover, they appeared reluctant to judge other mothers' employment choices, concluding that everybody should do what they want. This finding exemplifies the dynamic and reciprocal character of attitudes and behavioural experiences. Yet, stay-at-home mothers did not adapt their gender attitudes in a direction that could justify their current lifestyle, as would be argued by (cognitive) dissonant theorists (Festinger et al., 1956; Kroska and Elman, 2009). Quite the opposite is observed: full-time homemakers seem to have become almost more egalitarian, rubbing against the grain so to speak, and possibly expressing signs of aversion to the judgement of other mothers' choices, as a reaction to the commentaries they received on their own lifestyle.

The qualitative findings of this study also showed that despite disparities among mothers' attitudes, there were also many similarities between mothers' histories. Almost all interviewees appeared remarkably satisfied with the division of labour with their husbands and were reluctant to express dissatisfaction. Possibly this is due to them not wishing to criticise the men in their lives, which might feel like a 'betrayal' and running contrary to the Western ideology of romantic love (Beagon et al., 2008, p.656; Kane and Sanchez, 1994, p.1081). It may also be a consequence of the contemporary notion of free choice wherein people are made responsible for their own choices and are assumed to be able to write down their own biographies (Everingham et al., 2007). The narrative of personal responsibility can lead to internal dialogues like: 'I am not satisfied, but I am the one to blame' and 'I'd better remain silent'. Such mechanisms, which are sensed as personal, may involve latent conflicts among the spouses, meaning there is absence of manifest conflict, although the situation is perceived as undesirable by at least one of them. Nonetheless, more frequently the narratives of the interviewees revealed 'invisible power', whereby the conjugal relationship is characterised by accepted norms and common-sense ideas about men and women, which are seen as 'natural' and therefore unquestioned, despite inequality being present (Komter, 1990a).⁵

In addition, there is some evidence that the 'acceptance' of inequalities is sustained by collective or joint memories from their own fathers, functioning as 'mental codes'. The findings of the qualitative study revealed that in the back of their minds, mothers have vivid pictures of their fathers sitting on the couch with a newspaper, compared to which the contributions of their own husband seem a big improvement. Smart (2007) previously demonstrated the salient effect of collective memories that influence individuals' behaviour and bind people who belong to the same generation.

In brief, among the interviewed mothers there seems to be a general absence of gender consciousness, and it appears that societal expectations, which shape gender norms, have indeed 'gone underground' (Beagon et al., 2007). A consensus of accepting the 'natural' differences between men and women seems present in the Netherlands (Van Doorne-Huiskes and Schippers, 2010; Wiesmann et al., 2010). Nonetheless, mothers do have varying perceptions of these inequalities, and therefore their 'acceptance' has a diverse character. Mothers with traditional or adaptive attitudes do not see inequalities, but rather perceive the situation of mothers having small part-time jobs as natural, or else do not consider it their right to complain, since as stay-at-home mothers they have no paid work themselves. Egalitarian mothers find it more or less normal that their husbands take on a large part of the unpaid work, but seem to surrender to the remaining inequalities, such as having to be the one to pick up the telephone to call a baby-sitter or buy presents for their children's friends.

Personal work attitudes

Only two of the respondents' work attitudes exerted a positive effect on mothers' work preference: "I like to work" and "I work in order to be economically independent of others". This result may be a consequence of the fact that in the questionnaire mothers were forced to choose their most relevant attitudes, since they could only select three answers out of eleven propositions regarding their work life attitudes. Consequently, in the survey, only 30 percent chose the possibility "I work in order to be economically independent", whereas if respondents could choose all possible work ethics, 74 per cent of mothers confirmed that they find it important to be

⁵ Komter (1990a) distinguished three forms of power: manifest, latent and invisible power. Within manifest power, there are open attempts to change the existing inequalities within power relations, which often result in conflict. Within latent power, there is absence of conflict although the unequal situation is perceived as undesirable. Invisible power is characterised by accepted norms and common-sense ideas, which are seen as natural (self-evident) facts and therefore unquestioned, although unequal power relations are present.

economically independent (Merens et al., 2011, p.99). Hakim claimed that most types of public opinion surveys reveal apparently contradictory general attitudes, especially in highly tolerant societies such as the Netherlands, “as if all behaviours are regarded as acceptable” (Hakim, 2003, p.341). Additionally, as a consequence of the specific questionnaire used, mothers probably only chose their strongest personal attitudes, since Ajzen and Fishbein (2005) assume that the more positive and robust (i.e. consistent and easily accessible in memory) the attitude, the stronger will be the effect of the person’s intention to perform the behaviour of interest. Consequently, the gradient of work preferences could only be explained by a few personal (strong) work attitudes. Most work life attitudes had no additional effect.

Also in the qualitative study, work attitudes did not come up as differentiating in explaining mothers’ diverse work preferences. Almost all Dutch mothers endorsed the intrinsic values of work as doing something useful for society, self-development, and social contacts, and there appeared to be a common absence of career ambitions. Previous research has already revealed that men, as opposed to women, cling more to instrumental work values, like salaries and careers (Merens et al., 2011). These instrumental values have no priority in mothers’ work ambitions, in line with the reasoning of this study, presumably because few significant others have ‘taught’ mothers to aspire towards these aspects. Mothers’ intrinsic work attitudes, as well as fathers’ instrumental views, can be perceived as socially engendered attitudes, since they are shaped in the context of earlier prevailing assumptions about women’s and men’s appropriate roles at home and in the labour market (Charles and Harris, 2007; Duncan, 2005; Everingham et al., 2007; Halrynjo and Lyng, 2009; Komter, 1990a, 1990b; McDonald et al., 2006).

Interestingly, the interviewed mothers differed clearly on one aspect of their work attitudes, largely corresponding to the quantitative results. Mothers with egalitarian attitudes recited that they (also) work for their economic independence. For women who cling to their economic independence, it seems – as with men - very unlikely that ‘bad’ jobs will push them towards domesticity.

The qualitative study allowed us to construct a typology of the Dutch mothers included in the research group, which is shown in table 22.

Table 22. Typology of interviewed Dutch mothers based on their employment narratives.

	<i>Drifters</i>	<i>Privilegeds</i>	<i>Balancers</i>	<i>Ambitious</i>
Average actual work hours	0	16-24 hours	25-35 hours	>35 hours
Narrative of choice ‘Self agency towards their work life	-	++	+	++
Preferred work hours	16-24 hours	16-24 hours	25-35 hours	>35 hours
Work attitude	+	+	++	++
Attachment to economic independence	-	-	++	++
Gender attitude	Traditional/ adaptive	Traditional/ adaptive	Adaptive/ Egalitarian	Egalitarian
Satisfaction current gender division of labour	+/-	++	+/-	+
Early adult attitude towards motherhood	++	++	+/-	+/-

-=absent, +/-=ambivalent or variable, +=positive, ++= very positive

Stay-at-home mothers’ work histories could be characterised as ad hoc and random, lacking significant motivation to achieve their earlier educational or professional choices. Therefore they were identified as ‘drifters’. Their stories reveal that the ‘false’ starts they made as young adults seemed hard to restore later in life. Yet, this classification does not do justice to their aspirations as mothers, which were often clear, decisive, and frequently appeared successful. Mothers who have a small part-time job (16-24 hours) while also suiting the Dutch gender norm of parental self-care, were referred to as the ‘privileged’, most importantly because they considered themselves privileged. Mothers with a large part-time job and also trying to fulfil the parental norm of self-care to the very best of their abilities, could be characterised as ‘balancers’. Mothers with full-time jobs, with the most perceived behavioural control, and (almost) symmetrical gender roles with their partners, were called the ‘ambitious’.

Within a cross-sectional study it is impossible to find out how easy and often mothers are able to switch from one category into another. Their narratives disclosed that mothers do sometimes move from one category to another, but such a move often seemed temporary, and they later returned to their original paths relatively quickly. For example, some ambitious mothers could in the spirit of the moment give up their job, because they

were so 'fed up' with work. Yet, this decision does actually suit an individual with much perceived self-control. And, as their narratives continued, it became clear that they were just as able to pick up their full-time career paths again.

The extent to which mothers' different employment choices are released from society's ties, as is argued by post-modernist theories, seems open to debate. Stay-at-home mothers described how they were for various reasons not able to work their preferred number of hours: they were led by negative (work) experiences and by their partners' 'neutral' attitudes towards their work ambitions, which seemed decisive in directing them towards their role as full-time homemakers. Stay-at-home mothers also experienced a tension between their own ambivalent decision to give up work and societal expectations to work part-time. "*Stay-at-home parents expressed feeling society's disappointment for not doing more challenging and interesting work*" (Zimmerman, 2000, p.343).

In addition, we should also question the extent to which it really is a free choice when mothers 'choose' a life that fits society's moral standards perfectly, while working a small number of hours and being a good and present mother as well, such as is the situation for the class of privileged mothers. And how do we perceive the choice when mothers try to combine motherhood and work to the maximum, and thereby sacrifice leisure time and sleep, while they still carry the main responsibility for the domestic unpaid tasks, and evidence of movement towards equal role sharing at the home is limited to only a small group of mothers? The findings lead to the conclusion that Dutch mothers' heterogeneous labour market behaviour cannot be understood as simple and varied expressions of free choice, but rather as the mostly intentional, but also unintentional, outcomes of mothers' diverse – though always engendered – perceptions of dominant norms, possibilities and constraints.

8.4 A mother's general gender values and personal gender and work attitudes are influenced by parental socialization during childhood

The second important theoretical starting point of this study is socialization theory, of which main components will be recalled here briefly. Socialization theory focuses on the social relational context in which specific normative standards and expectations are socially transmitted. People make societal norms and values their own, internalizing them, by learning from others what is to be expected of them in the social system (Wallace and Wolf, 2006, p.28; also Berger and Luckmann, 1967). When full internalization has occurred, the presented norms and values exist, and are easily accessible within the person herself, so that they no longer need to be presented by the socializing agents. According to Bandura (1977), most modelled behaviour is learned through the medium of imaginable (visual imagery or mental associations with, for example, the person who was modelling the behaviour) and verbal coding, referred to as mental and verbal symbols (Bandura, 1977, p.33). If the association with specific symbols to behaviour is firmly built and stored in memory, observing the association will be strong enough to recall the 'learned' behaviour, which will happen automatically and outside of their awareness. Subsequently, one exhibits imitative behaviour without considering the underlying processes (Bandura, 1977).

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; Everingham et al., 2007). Socialization is only possible when the parents or others who take care of the new-born, have an interest - whether automatically or enthusiastically - in developing the child. This interest can be expressed through various kinds of emotional appraisals, like 'good child' or 'good behaviour' and 'bad child'. These initial appraisals construct the beginning of the self: the ideas a person has of himself are, at first, ideas an individual gains from others about himself (Handel, 2006, p.15). Primary socialization is a particularly influential process, because a child experiences no problem of emotional identification, necessary for internalization, since the parents are the only significant others in the world of a child and the parental daily practices are taken-for-granted and feel 'natural' (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p.154).

The concern of the study was to disclose which, if any, parental norms, values, attitudes and modelling behaviour have shaped mothers' present personal gender and work attitudes and general values. Firstly, the quantitative findings demonstrated a significant relationship between parental transmission of work life attitudes, like "work is a means to earn money" and "caring for others is important" and Dutch mothers' current traditional/adaptive gender values and ideal family life, respectively. Interestingly, the qualitative findings revealed that mothers with traditional/adaptive gender values and attitudes actually did not clearly remember their parents transmitting any of these values. What is remarkable in their narratives is the very absence of explicit parental norms and values regarding an ideal gender division of labour, accompanied by the memory of a self-evident and consenting 'caring' mother. To be more precise, daughters mostly assumed that their mothers enjoyed their caring and household tasks, but often they admit they never really discussed the issue with their mothers.

These differences between the qualitative findings and quantitative results might actually exemplify different processes. Firstly, the traditional division of labour could have felt so natural and self-evident for all family members that there were no reasons to discuss or talk about it explicitly. With quantitative questionnaires people may feel more or less forced to fill in specific answer categories, even if they do not really know the answer. Nonetheless, based on the theory of Ajzen and Fishbein (2005) we can also expect that mothers only choose answers with strong and positive associations easily accessible in memory, and that they automatically pick the 'right' answer ('right' here in the sense that these parental normative values or attitudes *do* affect their own attitudes). Put differently, and to paraphrase the well-known Thomas theorem, "*if people perceive their stories as real, they are real in their consequences*" (Merton, 1995). Yet, the quantitative results might also be explained by a process of cognitive dissonance – people make justifications for their current behaviour (Festinger et al., 1956). If a mother's present main task and responsibility is to care for her children and do the household chores, she might – perhaps incorrectly – assume that her parents, and her mother in particular, found caring for others an important value as well: Why would she otherwise do so herself? Bem (1965) calls this the process of self-persuasion which is also a product of social interaction. People justify their own behaviour with answers that they think other people expect them to answer, based on their behaviour (e.g. "Do you like bread?"; "I guess I do, because I am always eating it").

Due to the retrospective nature of many questions within this study, and the cross-sectional research methods, it is impossible to verify the real parental norms and values that have been transmitted. However, the aim of the study was to detect possible discerning patterns between the answers of mothers with different employment behaviour, based on their various values and attitudes. Therefore, I compared the answers of relative traditional mothers with the answers of more egalitarian mothers.

Indeed, mothers with more egalitarian attitudes responded differently than their traditional/adaptive counterparts. Their narratives stood out due to the memories of the strong presence of their mothers, who were often the sole provider, and could play a dominant role at home, or else were unsatisfied with their traditional mother role. In addition, their stories included relatively many examples of sudden and/or unwanted family happenings. For example, for various reasons one third of the mothers were raised by single mothers, who often were the main provider of their family income. Other stories of mothers with egalitarian attitudes revealed rather out of the ordinary family situations – such as going to boarding school, having an alcoholic father or a mentally-ill mother, and other dramatic occurrences with family members. This meant that these women were more or less 'forced' to grow up as independent young women very quickly. This is directly opposed to mothers with traditional/adaptive gender attitudes, who regularly emphasised that they come from warm families, and often recounted many happy and pleasant childhood memories.

The quantitative results revealed some more discrepancies between the primary socialization processes of mothers with traditional/adaptive attitudes and those of mothers with egalitarian gender attitudes. For example, egalitarian values and attitudes were related to the presence of a mother with a positive work orientation (she worked with pleasure or would have liked to have worked), which confirms earlier research on this subject (Barret and White, 2002; De Valk, 2008; Trent and South, 1992; Van Wel and Knijn, 2006). And in support of social stratification theory, a more objective background characteristic – the educational level of the respondent's mother – is also significantly related to a mother's general gender values: the higher educated her mother, the more egalitarian the respondent's own general gender values. This effect adds up to that of the respondent's own educational level. Sanders (1997) previously showed that a higher-educated mother directly affected her daughter's own employment (also Cloin, 2010). In this study I could not trace this direct effect, so therefore it is interesting to find that the effect still persists indirectly in her daughters' labour market behaviour, since it is assumed in this study that values can be viewed as elements behind personal attitudes and preferences (Ajzen, 1991; Becker et al., 1983; Van Deth and Scarbrough, 1995). Moreover, the results indicate that (at least) part of mothers' general gender values (and thus their ideal family lives) have a robust source in childhood.

In relation to mothers' current work attitudes, it appeared relevant again to observe what is absent in mothers' childhood chronicles. A significant parental message in relation to their daughter's economic independence and professional perspective appeared present in the youth stories of mothers with egalitarian attitudes, and was remarkably lacking in the youth stories of most traditional/adaptive mothers. If mothers have not been stimulated (verbally or mentally) to consider their professional lives, it appears difficult to overcome this later in life. The effect of the parental message of economic independence on mothers' own adherence to financial autonomy was also found in the quantitative analysis; undoubtedly the message serves as a guide for life.

Overall, the findings indicate that intergenerational influence mainly occurs via the transmission (both intentional and unintentional) of mental and verbal symbols, especially diffused by the mother. These associations could come from a satisfied and consenting traditional mother figure, or else from the completely opposite associations of a reluctant and dissatisfied mother, or else from independent mothers who went their own way. These different origins between mothers with traditional/adaptive gender attitudes and egalitarian

attitudes, enhance our understanding of contemporary diverse gender and work attitudes among Dutch mothers. Mothers' gender values and attitudes have not developed freely from social structures, but often have subtle and complex origins in childhood.

Moreover, in the qualitative study, there were only few parental anti-examples – it appears relatively rare that mothers feel they needed to resist parental expectations, values and norms, both implicit and explicit. This is interesting in itself, and might express a relatively stable culture within the Netherlands since the 1970s and 1980s, where despite the obvious increase in the employment activity of current mothers, there seems to exist continuity and conformity between generations of current mothers and their parents. Presumably the parents (especially the mothers) of the respondents of this study already paved the way for their daughters, which then opened alternative scripts of behaviour to the traditional stay-at-home option once their daughter became a mother herself. This clearly differed from their own upbringings during the 1950s and 1960s, which were deeply implicated within the figuration ideal of "harmonious inequality", since the ideal of women as housewives and men as breadwinners had by then reached its most glorious days. For the mothers of the respondents who themselves were raised during this period, the withering away of the ideal of being a housewife had not yet led to new ideals or guidance for behaviour. And thus their trials of new behaviour would have been automatically and more often acting against their parents' norms, values and attitudes. Nonetheless, there might also be a selection effect. Daughters who have 'chosen' the opposite behaviour of their own parents might have not become parents at all, and therefore they were not included in this research. Whatever the reason may be, the association with several parental verbal and mental codes shows that part of mothers' gender values and ideal family lives maintains some stability throughout the course of their life, and that these do not easily adapt to changing circumstances. Part of the individual has become what is transmitted by significant others (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p.152; Handel, 2006, p.15; Mead, 1934).

8.5 A mother endorses more egalitarian values and attitudes if she has perceived the professional and career support of significant others

Mothers do not continue to live in one normative social system. As their lives go on, they interact with different social settings or circles, and each circle has its own normative and cultural system, with its own specific rules, norms and values. This study's particular interest is the character of transitions from primary to secondary socialization. Is this process characterised by reproduction and re-enforcement, or by recreation? Handel (2006) concluded that there is still no satisfactory explanation for the transitional process of primary socialization to adult socialization (p.18). According to Berger and Luckmann (1967), within secondary socialization, there is always a problem of consistency between the original and new internalizations when individuals are confronted with new alternative realities and potential identities that appear as subjective options (p.160). People tend to re-enforce their values and attitudes by clinging to self-affirming relationships (referring to the process of self-selection) rather than subject themselves to new subjective normative realities. Others scholars instead argue that people try to establish throughout their lives a new acceptable position for themselves, expressing a less deterministic view of the effect of primary socialization (Bandura, 1977, p.48; Eagle, 1988; Handel, 2006).

This study aims at revealing whether mothers tend to sustain their (acquired) attitudes through secondary social relations by creating and recreating the familiar, or whether they adapt their attitudes when confronted with new models of behaviour or supportive others. Nonetheless, clearly a limiting frame of this examination is the cross-sectional research design of this study. Mothers were invited to look back upon their lives, while I tried to reconstruct, using qualitative and quantitative research methods, patterns in the possible influences of significant others on their diverse values and attitudes. For this reason, I have chosen to focus on mothers' own perceived support of significant others towards their professional choices and career ambitions. This theoretical choice is also induced by the socialization theory of Berger and Luckmann (1967), the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1991, 2005) and the social learning theory of Bandura (1977), as well as by different partial theoretical notions (Grube and Morgan, 1990; Tiemeijer et al., 2009, p.142). These theories all emphasise that the perceived approval of significant others towards specific behaviour will have a positive impact on people's own values and attitudes towards the behaviour of interest.

Before I elaborate and compare the qualitative findings and quantitative results with respect to the process of secondary socialization, some initial remarks can be made here. A disadvantage of the qualitative study is that it is impossible to draw representative conclusions about the strength of social influential processes. We can only detect some indications of mechanisms or patterns that emerge from the research material. Yet, an advantage of the qualitative study is that we can listen to mothers' labour market biographies and try to disclose consistent and contradictory patterns within their narratives especially in relation to their social relational contexts and job relevant choices. In this way I could display something about the supposed continuity between primary and

secondary socialization (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). Whereas, with the quantitative analysis, I could shed some light on the statistical representativeness of the disclosed mechanisms.

Teachers

The qualitative findings revealed that in general, mothers could not remember any teachers who stimulated or supported them in choosing a certain professional direction. Full-time home-makers in particular appeared rather negative about their received guidance at (high) school. Only a few interviewees described how teachers at school had encouraged them to consider their working life – stories which revealed the potential positive influence of teachers on the work aspirations of mothers. The obvious advantage of quantitative analyses is that larger respondent groups are addressed and relationships can be observed in a statistical manner. The quantitative analysis did reveal that teachers being encouraging towards mothers' professional choice related significantly to mothers' egalitarian personal gender attitudes (i.e. her ideal family life).

Partners

Previous research has shown that sex-role attitudes between partners are often similar, and both partners' attitudes are important in a mother's employment decision (Inman-Amos et al., 1994; Geist, 2005; Philliber and Vannoy-Hiller, 1990; Uunk, 1996; Vlasblom and Schippers, 2005). This conclusion was confirmed by both the qualitative and quantitative findings of this study. Firstly, the quantitative analysis showed that more egalitarian general gender values related to the perceived presence of a partner who is stimulating towards mother's work ambitions. Because of the relatively limited information that comes from the quantitative analysis, it is particularly interesting to compare this result with the qualitative findings.

Mothers' life path narratives revealed that mothers are inclined to look for relationships that sustain rather than reject their self-identities formed in childhood. The egalitarian interviewees often shared their lives with partners who were stimulating towards their career ambitions, who were willing to take up an (almost) equal share of the unpaid tasks at home; consequently these mothers did not need to work less if their husband had demanding jobs. Narratives of traditional/adaptive mothers revealed opposite patterns: their job ambitions, especially concerning the weekly work hours, were seldom explicitly discussed with their partners, as is also shown by the previous Dutch research of Portegijs et al. (2008b, also Keuzenkamp et al., 2009). Moreover, these mothers cited the demanding jobs of their partners as one of the reasons they had 'chosen' the stay-at-home option. However the study demonstrates that the justification mechanism among women who say they do not work or work less because their husbands have such demanding jobs, is indeed troubled, as is previously argued by Van Doorne-Huiskes and Schippers (2010). Their earlier employment decisions often entailed scaling back their number of hours worked, and were based – at least partly, and often unintentionally – on their own adaptive/traditional gender attitudes, making it possible for their partners to continue their demanding jobs.

Nonetheless, apparently the selection process among some traditional/ adaptive mothers unintentionally had unfavourable consequences on their own lives. They continued to live in social relational contexts wherein their professional life was neglected. Moreover both partners were most likely unaware of how their social constructions of daily life re-enforced stereotypical gender roles. These engendered social practices may also have had negative consequences for their partners, since their (growing) sense of being an involved father in family, might have been unintentionally interrupted, or left undeveloped.

People at work

The quantitative analysis demonstrated a relatively strong relationship between the perceived support of motivating supervisors and/or colleagues towards fulfilling a mother's full potential at work, and her egalitarian gender values and attitudes. The qualitative findings (again) revealed a process of self-selection: mothers who 'inherited' egalitarian attitudes more often met encouraging supervisors at least once in their lives, compared to traditional/adaptive mothers. Notably, most previous research has demonstrated the opposite pattern: family demands and mothers' ambitions are often neglected by supervisors (Estes, 2005; Karatepe and Kilic, 2007; King 2008; Moen and Yu, 2000), contributing to the withdrawal of mothers from the labour market. The conclusion of this study enhances our understanding of why most Dutch mothers continue to work part-time, whereas a relatively small group of mothers, approximately 25 per cent, have large part-time jobs or work full-time: meeting a stimulating supervisor is probably more a consequence of mothers' own attitudes than a cause.

The impact of peer groups on mothers' gender and work attitudes is undecided. The quantitative analysis could not trace any significant effect. A reason might be that, as is revealed by the interview analysis, mothers generally do not belong to a homogenous peer group, such as adolescents. Dutch mothers rather have a mixture of old friends and new acquaintances. Nonetheless, anonymous people 'out there' seem, at least in the mind of some interviewees, able to influence a mother's feelings. Stay-at-home mothers appear especially sensitive to the critical gaze and comments of other people. But there were also some stories of egalitarian mothers in which they 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 is a mechanism illustrating that people do not easily adjust their attitudes, but rather find ways to reconcile them.

In general, the qualitative findings with respect to the process of secondary socialization showed that mothers with egalitarian gender values and (personal) attitudes, which originated in childhood, have in later life more often been in the presence of supporting secondary socializations agents, like teachers, partners and people at work, compared to mothers with relatively traditional gender attitudes. Dutch mothers' diverse current gender and work attitudes have some discerning origins in childhood, and these aspects of attitudes which originated in childhood appear to have some continuity during the course of their lives through their relationships with secondary others. It seems unlikely that a mother's gender values and ideal family life will easily adapt to changing circumstances. The mothers' narratives rather disclosed that their life paths have to some extent been characterised by continuity with origins formed in childhood.

8.6 Conclusions

The shared and personal social structures of mothers' embedded employment choices.

In the Netherlands, the current dominant view of being 'a good mother' includes the normative standard of part-time work, and modest use of professional day-care, with sparse institutional and moral room left for alternative maternal lifestyles such as not being in paid work or working full-time. Although it is nowadays possible for Dutch mothers to act outside society's norms, they must be able to withstand comments and questions about their lifestyle, whether innocent or harsh. Nonetheless, despite these social institutions, mothers clearly differ in their perceptions about what one should do as a mother, since some of the values and attitudes behind these perceptions are 'shaped' differently in childhood, and are sustained heterogeneously later in life. Either way, the study has found little evidence to support the view that mothers are 'free' from social ties, as is assumed in the contemporary narrative of choice. On the contrary, the larger social system and mothers' own micro social realities influence mothers' actions. In other words, Dutch mothers' choices are thoroughly socially embedded, since they are guided by (invisible) constraints and opportunities, which are shared in the dominant social system and dispersed in personal heterogeneous social experiences.

Firstly, the study demonstrated that different personal work preferences can explain mothers' diverse labour market decisions. Work preferences are based on current life circumstances and earlier experiences, but also on internally driven orientations (general values and personal attitudes) which influence a mother's perception of these circumstances and experiences. Because mothers perceive (appreciate and evaluate) similar circumstances differently, they prefer a diverse number of work hours, whereupon they make different employment decisions. A mother's work preference is therefore a good predictor of her labour market decision. Nonetheless, a mother's work preference cannot be understood as sole expressions of free choice, but rather as an engendered and socialized preference.

The origins of a mother's gender (values) and work attitudes and values could partly be traced back to childhood by often subtle and complex processes of socialization. More specifically, various normative mental and verbal symbols that have been intentionally or unintentionally transmitted by her parents, especially by her own mother, still (partly) characterise a mother's values and attitudes, and subsequently her work preference. Nonetheless, parental influences are mostly outside mother's own awareness, and thus a mother perceives her work preference as her own preference, which of course it is as well, since part of a mother has become what is transmitted by others. This also adds to the explanation of the pre-existence of the narrative of free choice.

In later life, the perceived support of significant others, such as teachers, partners and people at work, towards a mother's professional life and her job ambitions adds to the explanation of why some mothers embrace egalitarian gender roles and other mothers are inclined towards a more traditional division of labour. Nonetheless, the study indicates that a mother who perceived career support from secondary socialization agents towards her work, often already had her egalitarian attitudes formed in childhood. It therefore appears that although probably subconsciously and automatically, a mother looks for social environments where she can find

continuity and consistency of her previously developed attitudes. In this light, mothers' diverse employment decisions can be partly understood as results of long-term and mostly steady social processes.

Last but not least, the specific Dutch social structures (institutions and moral convictions) that enable but also push mothers towards part-time work came to light through the narratives of the interviewees. For example, they cited perceived social approval or punishment from people 'out there' when mothers did not conform to the part-time norm. This is echoed in a mother's appraisal and evaluation of her own behaviour, which is often seen through the eyes of the 'generalized other'. The interviewed stay-at-home mothers especially frequently conveyed internal conflicts between their current unemployed situation, their own work preferences and societies' moral obligations on them to work part-time.

Therefore, Dutch mothers' labour market decisions can be understood as the results of individual preferences that are embedded and deeply interwoven by joint and personal (invisible) constraints and opportunities. Examples of shared social structures include Dutch society's social script for mothers to work part-time, and the 'magical' border of a maximum of three days professional childcare per week (Kremer, 2007). Further corresponding social institutions exist in the form of inflexible school timetables, the narrative of non-complaining towards inequalities within the domestic sphere (which are justified by personal characteristics or by the 'natural' differences between men and women), mothers' shared "engendered" adherence to intrinsic work values, and their reluctance to cling to instrumental work drivers such as salaries and careers. A final contributing factor is mothers' shared memories of their fathers "sitting on the couch with a newspaper", which tended to make the contributions of their own husbands seem a big improvement by comparison.

Clearly, these shared social structures are not internalized or perceived by all mothers in the same manner. They have a specific composition for each woman, the basic components of which were consolidated during childhood. The study could point out some specific and diverse parental mental and verbal codes that still serve as internal guides for Dutch mothers in their labour market behaviour. Mental codes that could be distinguished from the interviewees were for example, a silent, consenting, satisfied or self-evident mother figure, or just the memory of a mother associated with being reluctant, unsatisfied, strong or the sole provider. Different persuasive verbal codes were "you should work in order to become economically independent", or "caring for others is important". Transmission of these mental and verbal codes, examples of which include "the proper thing to do" as perceived by parents, teachers, spouses, people at work, and "other people out there", appeared vital social contexts in which mothers developed their own values and attitudes and made decisions about their lives.

Mothers' preferences and actions are thus firmly embedded within their shared and personal social structures. In getting a better understanding of people's choices, I would therefore argue that we must get closer to the collectiveness and connectedness within people's (prior) social relational contexts, rather than emphasising the narrative of free choice. As Smart (2007) has formulated, we should prioritise the bonds between people.