

## Gender and Demography

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### Summary

#### 1. Some history

The aim of this book is to contribute to the introduction of a gender perspective into demographic research on the developed countries, providing scientific evidence on the relations between the gender system and demographic behaviour, from the point of view of the life course. The behaviours studied are: sexual initiation, the formation and dissolution of partnerships, fertility, migration, the living conditions of the elderly and survival. There is also a discussion of the characteristics and trends of the gender system, the data and indicators available, advisable methodological strategies and research prospects. In most of the chapters there is a strong quantitative component, with the use of some large national and international data bases.

As we know, the concept of gender refers to the social and cultural aspect of the differences in behaviour between men and women, while the concept of sex makes reference to the biological sphere. Of all the different concepts used in the literature, such as women's status, female empowerment, roles and gender stratification, we shall make frequent use of the more general concept of gender system, as denoting the set of power relations between the sexes, and the rights, duties, expectations and roles which pertain to being a man or being a woman in any given society or culture.

Gender studies in demography are fairly recent: some demographic phenomena have only been studied up until now for one of the two genders, either for convenience or for cultural reasons: fertility, for example, has usually been observed with reference to women (women have a much more precise minimum and maximum age for procreation, "mater semper certa" etc), and migration with reference to men (in the past it was men who emigrated in the majority of cases, while the expatriation of women for purposes other than joining their families was rare). In other fields, on the other hand, there is a long tradition of analysis of certain demographic phenomena distinguished by sex (mortality differences, for example).

It was only in the '90s that a serious debate developed on how to incorporate gender issues into demographic research. This field of research has benefited from international initiatives both at a political level and at that of scientific research. The UN and the international bodies responsible for health, development, labour and women's status, have identified changing the gender system and female empowerment as two of the main goals for resolving demographic, health and social problems in the developing countries. Since 1985, the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP) has undertaken various initiatives to promote this field of studies. However, much of the research in recent years has been organized and funded by developing countries, due to the urgency of understanding the mechanisms sustaining the still high levels of fertility and mortality, and the implications of the substantial

migratory flows, while less has been done for the developed countries. The consequences of changes in the gender system on the demographic trends of developed countries have still been little analysed, and the consequences of the new forms of demographic behaviour on relations of symmetry/asymmetry between men and women have not yet been adequately investigated (for example the diversification of forms of partnership and their instability, immigration from developing countries or those of the former Communist bloc and the ageing of the population).

Indeed, in addition to introducing a gender perspective into demography, it would also be appropriate to introduce demography into gender studies, given that many demographic indicators are unambiguous markers of the system of relations between men and women: the decrease in the age differences between girls and boys at first sexual intercourse informs us of a more egalitarian way of embarking upon sexual relations between the two sexes; the greater difficulties experienced by educated and working women in forming and maintaining a partnership and having children are an indicator of the competing demands which exist only for women between professional success and family fulfilment, while the cancellation of these inequalities demonstrates the effect of more woman-friendly institutions and partners; sex differences in survival suggest that men experience serious difficulties, and the results of studies on the living conditions of the elderly demonstrate the effect of women's transition from imposed roles to chosen ones, and confirm that this kind of reconciliation of women's different roles pays off, both in terms of survival and in terms of intergenerational reciprocity of assistance and care. The vitality of women's role and its positive function in the quality of personal life and in that of the other members of the family is also evident in the experience of woman immigrants, who are active both in providing economic support and in weaving networks of solidarity and relations contributing to the integration of the family into the social fabric of the host country.

## 2. The theoretical framework of reference

The theoretical framework of reference for gender studies in demography is already well known and well structured in its aspects concerning family and reproductive behaviour, and many of the chapters of this book refer to it.

The main theory is that of the "new home economics", ie of the economic and opportunity cost rationale: a woman in possession of resources becomes less dependent for her personal economic security on the traditional models of behaviour in the sphere of life as a couple and the formation of a family, with a consequent increase in the opportunity costs associated with domestic chores and the bringing up of children. As certain studies have demonstrated, women with their own resources are less interested in marriage, limit their family obligations either by not having any children or by limiting their number and are more likely to get a divorce. Economic and demographic oscillations may accentuate the need for women to study and work, reinforcing the impact on family and reproduction. From this theory it derives that more egalitarian couples will feature less traditional family behaviour.

A second theoretical line might be termed structural. We may distinguish two main arguments in it. The first concerns the marriage market: for women who are better

educated and integrated into the labour market at high levels, it may be difficult to find a suitable partner on the marriage market if her expectations are that the partner's status should be equal to or higher than her own. This aspect may partly explain these women's lower rate of nuptiality. Indeed, traditional models of behaviour for the matching of couples dictate that men should be older, better educated and in a higher professional position than their partners, something which is rendered increasingly difficult by the increase in women's level of education (in many countries they are now better educated than men on average) and by their entry into the labour market in more substantial numbers and at higher positions. If there is no change in the rules of couple matching, it could become particularly difficult for women at the top to find men with the desired characteristics, as they are required to choose from a much more restricted group than that available to men (women choose from the upper part of the social pyramid, which is more narrow, while men choose from the lower part, which is broader). Moreover, if a woman's earning power can make her a more attractive partner, this same quality will however be in conflict with her reproductive ability and sometimes preferred to it, and as a result might lead her to limit her fertility. Finally, the woman's increased ability to negotiate the division of roles and the care of any children with her partner could make it more difficult for her to find a partner willing to undertake greater domestic and parental commitment. These observations show that working women either find it more difficult to achieve and maintain life as a couple and a large family, or are less interested in doing so.

The second argument of the structural theory, of no less importance, is related to the change over time of the structure of the female population by education and occupation. It concerns the fact that the increase in women's education and their integration into the labour market leads to a mechanical delay, so to speak, in the building of a family and in the birth of children. For women, this delay can amount to renunciation for various reasons, not least biological ones: the biological limit for reproduction is much stricter for women than it is for men, given that women's fertility starts to decline from the age of thirty, and markedly so from that of thirty-five, ages at which it is becoming increasingly frequent to have the first child. It might not be possible to make up for an initial delay in later years. In addition to this biological reason, fertility may also decrease due to the increase in the competition between the desire to build a family and other interests, the longer a woman has been involved in a career.

A third theoretical line is that of the ideational shift towards greater individual autonomy in ethical, political and religious spheres. The development of movements of emancipation in the area of gender relations is an important part of these ideational changes. There is an ideational component in the decision to cohabit, to get divorced and to limit one's fertility. We may expect working women to be selected from the point of view of the value structures of reference, and thus less likely to undertake traditional female roles (wife, mother, caregiver).

A fourth theoretical line for the interpretation of gender differences in family and reproductive behaviour concerns the importance of the institutions: the laws which regulate the rights and obligations of the two genders in society and in the family, and the institutional support given to the family for functions of care provision. Different

studies show that the force of constraints varies among countries with different institutional systems and, in particular, that the results of the delays caused by the prolongation of women's education and by the greater instability of partnerships are less serious or even non-existent in countries with more favourable contexts. The comparison between geographical areas with different institutional set-ups undertaken in all the chapters meets the need to hold constant the influence of different geographical/institutional contexts on the family behaviour of women and men.

There is no theoretical framework so articulated from the point of view of the gender perspective for other aspects of demographic behaviour. The gender system involves a difference between males and females in their sexual life: males embark upon sexual activity before females, but the differences in behaviour over time, within each country and among countries, shows that there are different individual and social determinants of the onset of sexual activity for the two genders. There are gender issues related to the ageing of the population: women more often experience solitude in their old age, and for longer, due to male supermortality, the age difference between spouses, which is normally to men's advantage and the lower incidence of new partnerships for widows compared to widowers, and they end up having to undertake roles which they have never previously performed, and at ages in which health conditions may not favour the assumption of new responsibilities. The link between gender system (on which these differences in mortality, age at beginning of partnership, probability of forming a new partnership etc partly depend) and the problems of old age is evident. The theoretical models concerning gender differences in old age in the receiving of help or assistance from children contrast family solidarity (I help you because you are my father or my mother, independently of any other considerations) with individual solidarity (I help you because you need it, because I love you, independently of your sex and of what I have received from you), or concern the exchange of resources (I help my parents with a view to receiving something in exchange, eg a house or an inheritance, ie I help you if you have something) and integration (I help whoever has been closest to me). In old age, then, women on their own might receive more than men on their own because they are more integrated into the family network, while men might receive more if utilitarian considerations prevail, since they usually possess more. On the other hand, there shouldn't be any differences in a society where the family sentiment prevails.

Economic development, the development of the transport system, globalization and the increase in the level of education have created greater possibilities of geographical mobility and encouraged independent female migration, with consequences on the gender system in this case too. But does the greater autonomy achieved in migration remain the patrimony of women upon their return to the country of origin?

If we look at the gender analysis of mortality, then factors related to biology and to structural conditions of a social type come into play (education, labour market, nosological picture), but also ideological and institutional aspects: laws and measures of social policy can alter mortality differences between the sexes, eg by imposing speed limits or the wearing of helmets and banning smoking or the use of alcohol in certain circumstances, thus encouraging a reduction in male mortality. It is a proven fact that women enjoy a biological advantage in survival, but this advantage is

assessed at around two years of life expectancy. If the real difference is lower, we may be sure of the existence of discrimination against the female gender, while if it is greater (as happens more often) it means that men are at a disadvantage, both for social reasons (eg regarding work and its related hazards or lifestyles more generally) and for cultural ones (more frequent harmful behaviour, lack of attention to health). So, in order to analyse the various aspects of demographic behaviour from a gender perspective, we must always bear in mind the influence of the development, in the broad sense, of ideologies and institutions.

### 3. Data and methods

#### 3.1 Focus on gender differences: the micro data

Most of the chapters make use of the data of the Family and Fertility Surveys (FFS). The FFS project was born in the second half of the '80s as an answer to the research questions generated by the extreme variety and heterogeneous nature of the patterns of family behaviour observed in Europe, both in terms of modality and in terms of timing. The aim of the project was to acquire knowledge - targeted at policies - on determinants and consequences of the changes which have taken place in the formation of partnerships and in reproductive behaviour in Europe and in the other developed countries.

The project was launched at the end of the '80s on the initiative of the Population Activity Unit of the UN Commission for Europe (PAU-UNECE) in Geneva, in sequel to the two other international projects: the Comparative Fertility Survey (CFS) and the World Fertility Survey (WFS), which had similar goals but different specific features. The goals of formulating family policies, with particular attention to fertility, are more explicit on this occasion, together with the goals of comparison, for the analysis of the process of family formation. This time the collection of life histories bears witness to the careful attention paid to the longitudinal perspective of analysis. In 1992, the PAU presented a core questionnaire consisting of ten sections plus four optional modules. This was constructed on the basis of the questionnaires used by Norway, Finland, Belgium and Poland, which had previously conducted surveys with similar goals. The contents of the questionnaire range from information on the characteristics of the respondent's current family and family of origin to partnerships, pregnancies and children, contraception, opinions on the family and children, education and occupation of respondents.

Conducted in 24 countries (all European with the exception of Canada, the US and New Zealand) between July 1988 and October 1999, the survey is based on an elaborate sample design, with samples of men and women of every marital status, with age limits under 50 for women and under 55 for men. The minimum age interval common to all countries is 20-39. The samples vary in size, but the male one, where included, is usually smaller than the female one. The project was formally concluded in May 2000 with the FFS-Flagship Conference, organized in Brussels.

In this book few of the countries mentioned have never been included in the analyses, given the attention to aspects of a comparative nature required by the research. In

particular, we attempt to represent at least those European areas exhibiting the greatest differences with respect to changes in family behaviour and the gender system, as identified in Chapter 1 [Di Giulio, Pinnelli]. Other sources of micro data are used in the chapters which explore particular features. Chapter 9 [Farina, Terzera] analyses the population which has immigrated to Italy from Egypt and Ghana and compares it with return migrants and the population of those who have never emigrated, while Chapter 10 [Tomassini, Glaser] compares the conditions of the elderly in Italy and Great Britain.

### 3.2 Focus on contexts and on the gender system: macro data

The importance and centrality of those dimensions which concern the individual - decisions, attitudes, choices, patterns of behaviour, opinions etc, fundamental in a study on gender for the establishment of its differences and specific qualities - has not prevented us from concentrating much attention also on those macro dimensions of phenomena which help to better define groups and areas, ie context. In particular, then, when attention is shifted from roles and gender differences to the gender system, there is a transition from micro to macro, though this does not preclude the possibility of switching back (What effect or function does the gender system have on behaviour? How does context contribute to the definition of behaviour and roles?). We may say that substantial use has been made for this purpose of international sources of macro variables and indicators. Two chapters in particular [Di Giulio and Pinnelli, Chap. 1; Nobile, Chap. 11] process indicators concerning the countries, with the express aims of analysing the levels of the phenomena, characterizing contexts, synthesizing structure and making international comparisons. In other chapters, the macro data deriving from international sources is used to better frame the phenomena and to make comparisons.

The experience gained within the study, working on these data sets, has opened up spaces for further and more incisive reflection on the information required by gender studies, and has provided the opportunity to recapitulate the current state and prospects of data collection in developed countries and among the international coordinating bodies. Chap. 12 [Pinnelli et al.] presents a useful excursus on the data available and the data needed for research from a gender perspective.

### 3.3 Methodological tools

The topical nature of the subjects tackled in the entire project and the complexity and wealth of data used are reflected in the up-to-date nature and variety of the methodological apparatus used in the various chapters.

Of the 13 chapters, some, due to the particular nature of the subjects discussed [data: Pinnelli et al., Chap. 12; methods: Racioppi, Chap. 13] do not involve empirical analyses and hence the use of statistical methods. The other 11 use univariate and bivariate statistical tools, such as association measures, chi-square and nonparametrical tests, as well as multivariate statistical methods (event history analysis, logistic regression, factorial analysis)

Within the volume, it may be said that the methodological approach is fairly homogeneous, given the goals of the research. In the first place, there is the unanimous choice to use methodology of a quantitative nature, given also the sources of data examined. Attention is mainly on individual behaviour rather than macro characteristics, with a consequent prevalence of the micro approach, with an equal emphasis on description and interpretation. Description generally precedes interpretation.

As regards interpretation, it is the causality of relations which is at the centre of the elaborations performed, as a natural consequence of a research strategy which pays great attention to the variability of behaviour, its determinants and the dynamics of individual decision-making processes. It is precisely on these bases that we may indicate the other fundamental element of the methodological approach, which lies in the analysis of event histories, one of the most advanced approaches for the complete and integrated study of behaviour, which recognizes in the longitudinal dimension the only way of taking account of the complexity of the paths which are interwoven in the life of an individual, determining its various specific features. Indeed, an individual's life cycle is that natural seat in which gender identity takes form, where roles and differences are defined and, as each life history interacts with the others and with the characteristics of the environment, the individual contributes to the evolution of the system of relations and gender behaviour.

The main orientations of a methodological nature within this volume are therefore:

- dependence analysis;
- event history analysis (EHA).

At least five studies make use of the methods of event history analysis, also making use of most advanced techniques such as mixture models [Pinnelli and Di Giulio, Chap. 6] in order to distinguish estimates of the effects of covariates on intensities from those on the timing of the avoidable phenomena observed.

The individual perspective which certainly prevails in this text is nonetheless sufficiently backed up by a macro level approach which satisfies the need to treat gender issues also in terms of the social system in which the collectivity recognizes itself; in particular, use is made in Chap. 1 [Di Giulio and Pinnelli] of multiway methods of analysis (analyses of several matrices of indicators relative to different events in time), in order also to highlight the temporal dynamic of the macro gender system in developed countries.

Moreover, more traditional forms of exploratory factor analysis (eg of multiple correspondence analysis) are used for preliminary descriptions of the structure of the groups examined (in 2 chapters).

Some chapters of the volume [Pasquini and Samoggia, Chap. 5; Farina and Terzera, Chap. 9] are oriented towards an "analysis strategy", an approach which has yet to be adopted on a broad scale, which involves the use of various methods, no longer individually or at any rate in an isolated and independent manner, but according to a strategy which, through the application to the same set of data of various methods combined in parallel or in sequence (thus exploiting, on each occasion, the results

previously obtained), makes it possible to make maximum use of all the information available and reduces errors and redundancies to a minimum.

Finally, Chapter 13 [Racioppi], provides a review of the most widespread and most recent statistical techniques - starting with the univariate sphere - used to identify gender roles and differences and assess the effects of the gender system on demographic behaviour. While there is no specific statistical method for gender studies, it is nonetheless possible to discern those with the best gender-oriented potential, in the sense of having a good comparative valence and a good potential of synthesis in order to better outline the different gender systems. This review of methods makes it simpler to suggest the possibility (or affirm the desirability) of using them according to a strategy of analysis which takes account of the complexity of the data, which is simply an expression of the complexity both of the phenomena investigated and of the gender perspective utilized.

#### 4. Possible interpretations of the results

##### 4.1 The gender system in different contexts: macro and micro aspects

Analysis of the gender system in Europe highlights the existence of four groups of countries, on the basis of women's status (human capital, participation in the labour market, political representation), men and women's use of time, the criteria of couple matching and related family behaviour, and survival [Di Giulio, Pinnelli, Chap. 1; Nobile, Chap. 11]. The first group consists of the Scandinavian countries: these already had a gender system which was more favourable to women in the '70s: high levels of education and political representation, a high rate of participation in the labour market (with the frequent use of part-time employment, flexibility and positive segregation), greater involvement of the partner in domestic and family activities and more time for self. Associated with this status is the greater de-institutionalization of the family and a relatively high rate of fertility, a low rate of mortality and male-female life-expectancy differentials which are contained or decreasing.

The second group of countries consists of those of eastern Europe: in the '70s these experienced an apparently more egalitarian situation between men and women from the point of view of employment/education/power, with traditional patterns of family behaviour (also in the modalities of couple matching, with the man considerably older than the woman) and a relatively high rate of fertility. Since the crisis of the Communist regimes, these countries still exhibit small gender differences in employment and education, but women have lost out in terms of political representation and have less personal time compared to the other countries, to the evident detriment of their quality of life. The patterns of family behaviour associated with this situation are fairly traditional, but fertility has fallen greatly and mortality is relatively high, with high and generally increasing differences in life expectancy between the sexes.

The third group of countries consists of those of southern Europe, where the gender system was very traditional in the '70s and progress over the last thirty years has been slow: women's human capital was and is inferior compared to the other countries and

there are low levels of political representation and participation in the labour market; there is a traditional allocation of roles and women have less personal time as they devote more of it to family commitments. The patterns of family behaviour associated with this situation are traditional (stable marriage as the virtually exclusive form of partnership), but marriages are scarce and late and fertility is very low. In compensation, mortality is low and differences in life expectancy between the sexes are not pronounced, though the trends vary between the countries.

Finally, the fourth group consists of the countries of western Europe, which feature a situation in between the Scandinavian countries and those of southern Europe, from the various points of view, both in the '70s and in the more recent period.

While the Scandinavian countries can be taken as a point of reference for better women's status and a fairer gender system, their experience shifts the goal to be reached by women from an idea of equality to one of equality of opportunities and possibilities of choice, and proposes as a model of compatibility between social and family responsibilities, thanks to the support of the institutions (niches of the labour market suited to women with children, generous entitlement to leave and availability of services) and to the partner's participation in family tasks. An evolution of the gender system in this direction makes it possible to achieve fertility at close to replacement level. Low mortality and a minimum difference in life expectancy between men and women complete the picture of a high quality of life, both for men and for women.

Are there signs of any such evolution in those countries which are still a long way from what would currently appear to be the ideal scenario? One chapter looks for signs of change in this direction, analysing the characteristics and trends of gender socialization in childhood: Di Giulio and Carrozza [Chap. 7] analyse the role of the father in Italy, Austria and Hungary, which are taken as examples of three of the four groups of countries illustrated above, and find that children live in families where gender roles are traditional and fathers participate to a limited extent in the care of their children, almost exclusively in playing with them and helping them with their homework and rarely in the more central tasks of childcare. All the rest is up to the mothers. Children therefore perceive a traditional division of roles in their families, and will be inclined to reproduce it. The signs of change are very limited: younger fathers with medium-high levels of education (though if the level is very high they hire assistance instead of providing it themselves) and with working female partners (but not everywhere), give greater collaboration. One finding is surprising: while religious mothers require less help from their partner, religious fathers participate more in childcare. This prompts us to interpret religiousness as a condition of greater individual responsibility towards children, and undermines the stereotype which regards it as a characteristic which is backward and traditional compared to the secular world.

#### 4.2 The accelerators of change

It is no easy undertaking to treat, in a single study, asymmetries of role between the genders in the most important social-demographic processes. It may seem hazardous

to give priority to the comparison of results for a lot of countries from different geographical and social-political spheres, as happens in this volume. Nonetheless, what emerges from a cross-sectional reading of the various chapters is a big photograph of the statistical variability present in Europe, from which common elements nonetheless emerge which are tending to attenuate asymmetries of role between men and women and to increase women's autonomy.

We have termed these aspects the accelerators of change: their existence is clearly identifiable in every area and for each of the forms of behaviour or choices investigated, even though their effect does not always act in the same direction, and they do not always exhibit the same importance or intensity. The variables which may be described as accelerators are: generations, secularization, education, participation in the labour market, residence in urban centres, legislation and institutions, and migration.

It should be stressed that each of the elements listed is interrelated with the others, and one of the goals of the analyses is to seek to measure the single contribution of each of them.

The positive role of the generation effect in decreasing gender inequalities emerges in most of the contributions. Male and female behaviour tends to become more similar as we pass from the older generations to the more recent ones, starting with those born immediately after the Second World War, down to those born in the early '80s. A respondent's generation may be interpreted as a proxy of the social norms specific to the historical period in which they have experienced their adolescence [Coppola, Chap. 2]. Western societies' evolution towards modernity has involved a particularly fast sprint for women, who have exhibited more rapid rates of change in behaviour compared to men. In the case of first intercourse, the transition from generation to generation has seen a transformation of female behaviour over time towards an earlier debut, which is more significant and more marked than that of men [Coppola, Chap. 2]. In the case of autonomous choices, such as exit from the family of origin and experimentation of first partnerships, innovation is concentrated mainly among the younger generations: there is a significant increase down the generations in the proportion of women who, prior to the transition to marriage, experience periods of independence, both economically and in terms of housing, or opt for partnership forms other than marriage [Rettaroli, Impicciatore, Chap. 3]. The tendency for women's behaviour to change at a greater pace may also be noted in those countries where gender asymmetries are less pronounced. The acceleration of transformations for the younger female generations may also be detected in their increased tendency to renegotiate couple roles in the family: younger fathers participate more in childcare [Di Giulio, Carozza, Chap. 7], independently of national contexts, which nonetheless determine differences in average levels of participation.

The generational transition is necessarily accompanied, in most of the contexts examined, by an increase in the level of education, especially for women. It is precisely the increase in the number of years of study which necessarily causes a delaying effect on subsequent choices, given the specific sequences in the phases of passage to adult life prescribed in the various societies. Higher levels of education are synonymous, especially for women, with a greater degree of human capital, which

may be brought to bear in every choice: it becomes easier to leave home for an independent life as opposed to marriage, forms of partnership other than marriage are chosen more frequently, cohabitation is converted into marriage less frequently and people are more likely to dissolve a partnership and less inclined to start a new one. Education also appears to be a significant brake and delaying element: as its level rises, there is a corresponding delay in entry into adult sexual behaviour, exit from the family, the starting of the first partnership and the birth of the first and subsequent children. There is a strong connection between education and the marriage market: the modes of couple matching change with the growth in average levels, with an increase in the number of cases in which the woman is more educated than the man, even though this delays marriage. To greater gains in education correspond stronger expectations as regards the working sphere, with the rejection in most cases of choices which do not include the seeking of employment and professional fulfilment. We shall deal with the close relations between participation in the labour market and female autonomy in the following section.

Other dimensions influencing changes in behaviour between the genders are secularization, in the sense of a moving away from religious observance and traditional values, and urban residence [Pasquini, Samoggia, Chap. 5]. Although the abandonment of religious conviction/observance and life in an urban centre (in the sense of greater opportunities of transmission of information and a lesser degree of social control) also have an effect on male behaviour, there is always a significant link between such characteristics and demographic behaviour in the case of women, once again representing a point of discontinuity, even with the more recent past.

The role played by legislation and the institutions should also be stressed. It is not measured quantitatively in the studies presented in this volume, but it may nonetheless be deduced indirectly from the selection of countries observed, according to the geographical picture highlighted in Chap. 1 [Di Giulio, Pinnelli]. Overall, in those countries where the institutional framework determines a greater possibility of women's reconciling domestic and extra-domestic commitments, women's choices appear to be less limited: while there is a delaying effect between older and younger generations often visible in the formation of a stable partnership or the birth of the first or subsequent children, it hardly ever translates into renunciation, as it does in those societies more tied to traditional patterns of gender relations. In these areas, the lack of any decisive impetus towards the renegotiation of roles still all too often means renunciation of the family for women.

One tool which is certainly revealed as being effective in increasing the autonomy of women from contexts very different from those of Europe appears to be the experience of migration [Farina, Terzera, Chap. 9]. Women with an experience of migration are more likely to be the principal agents of the decisions and choices affecting their own lives. The acquisition of a greater level of psychological and often also economic autonomy remains a patrimony which cannot be totally altered and also finds expression upon return to the countries of origin. Such a change may represent the beginning of a long process of reviewing of gender roles and relations.

#### 4.3 Opting for autonomy: the importance of employment

In all western countries, the high levels of education achieved by women have created ever higher expectations of stable participation in the labour market. Productive collaboration in the occupational sphere and the knowledge and expertise which may be acquired therein have necessarily pushed in the direction of equality in relations with men, at least (and primarily) in the sphere of employment.

Limiting ourselves to an interpretation of the results, what emerges are several interesting points as regards the relation between women's employment and demographic and social behaviour, which are worth highlighting.

In almost all of the contributions dealing with the variable of employment [Di Giulio, Pinnelli, Chap. 1; Impicciatore, Rettaroli, Chap. 3; Pasquini, Samoggia, Chap. 5; Pinnelli, Di Giulio, Chap. 6; De Rose, Di Cesare, Chap. 8; Angeli, De Rose, Chap. 4; Farina, Terzera, Chap. 9], the influence of extra-domestic work is interpreted as representing the possibility of both economic and psychological autonomy for women. If we are to outline an ideal life history describing transitions of status from the point of entry into adult life and thus, in most of the countries examined, from the abandonment of full-time education, the accumulation of professional and psychological experience provided by employment seems significantly linked to the choices made in each transition in the life course.

In countries with a family-oriented culture, such those of the Mediterranean, economic autonomy and aspirations towards professional fulfilment are at the basis of changes in the courses of women's lives representing the transition from youth to adult age. In this case, marriage is reached in a condition of greater symmetry: experiences of work and cohabitation eliminate economic and psychological subjection.

And the effect of employment also seems to emerge clearly in the long and complex process leading to the formation of the first partnership [Rettaroli, Impicciatore, Chap. 3]: both in the more traditional societies (such as those of the Mediterranean) and in the more liberal ones, or in those formed under Communist regimes, the direct relation between employment and partnership formation (employment precedes access to a partnership) is always strong in the case of the man, especially in the case of marriage. The strength of this relation also seems to increase the more a country features asymmetrical relations within the couple, ie the further south one goes, but also in countries of central Europe such as Switzerland and Hungary.

In the case of female employment, on the other hand, the construction of the couple presents a different picture. Employment has a delaying effect on the formation of the family in the more family-oriented societies, in the case of the more traditional types of partnership and where the employment of women is lower in incidence and may be regarded as a recent gain [Rettaroli, Impicciatore, Chap. 3; Pasquini, Samoggia, Chap. 5]. Alongside the familiar picture of the relation between employment and the likelihood of forming a formal or informal partnership, a less well known situation exists in the countries of eastern Europe, where women's participation in employment has long been fully attained. For these countries, the employment of women is a structural element of society (the gender-oriented effects of recent variations in economic situation are not dealt with here) which is partly imposed and not always chosen, rather than a fact of emancipation. In this case it is therefore interesting to

explore whether this element has had any influence on the processes of forming a family and on the gender contract. What seems to emerge from the analyses contained in this volume is a substantial degree of independence between the two spheres in the case of the countries of the East or, where a relation exists, what is underlined is the importance of a double income in the upkeep of a family. The extent to which double income and “double presence” are related for women in these countries might constitute the object of future research. In any case, the picture which emerges is one of a greater symmetry of roles as regards employment in the case of those opting for cohabitation as opposed to marriage, and this aspect appears to be independent of the type of society, as it affects the Scandinavian countries just as much as it does those of central and southern Europe.

That decision-making processes are oriented by gender is an aspect which also emerges from the contribution of Pasquini and Samoggia [Chap. 5]: ideational system has a strong impact in all countries, and its effect differs between men and women. In the contexts in which the values of reference are more traditional (Italy, Spain and Switzerland), there appears to be a strong effect of secularization, ie of departure from traditional values and religious observance; the importance of such ideational aspects is not however usually isolated from the strong effect that employment status always has for women, as intensifying their effect on individual choices.

Employment affects the choices and decisions regarding fertility [Pinnelli, Di Giulio, Chap. 6]: it usually delays the arrival of children for women. It has been demonstrated that in some contexts women in high-level professional positions limit family responsibilities and the number of children, while in the case of men the action-reaction is exactly the opposite. Both Becker's economics-oriented approach and Lesthaeghe and Moors's theory of changes in ideology and values come to the same conclusion: fertility control is greater when the woman is in permanent and responsible employment outside the family, or at any rate is involved in domains of occupational life requiring a high expenditure of individual energies.

The delaying of life paths caused by the mainly female increase in education, often magnified by the greater expectations in the sphere of work which such an increase usually creates, is a familiar element which has been proven in many quantitative and qualitative studies. To the increase in the amount of time devoted to education should be added the time spent looking for a job which corresponds to personal expectations; it may certainly be affirmed that the postponement of formation of a family and children is a phenomenon which unites most of the western developed countries. What remains less clear is whether the search for and practice of the desired occupation have a similar effect on this delay in all cases, and whether or not it constitutes the inevitable start of renouncing having the desired number of children, for example.

Chapter 6 of this volume [Pinnelli, Di Giulio] contains some interesting points of reflection in this respect: for men, employment status is no obstacle to having more than one child, while in the case of women it often creates a delaying effect on the birth of both first and subsequent children. In Europe, this delay is transformed into renunciation as we proceed from north to south, especially in the case of the second or third child. In Sweden, while the employment-related delay of the birth of the first child does not result in the putting off by women of having at least a second child, in

Italy the delay more often means stopping at the first child. The conclusion underlined by the authors is strongly related to the action of the institutional context: organizational situations which are more favourable towards the reconciliation of work and the family mean fewer limits to fertility for women, but also increased constraints for men, given that they must take partial responsibility for running the family.

Women's employment renders the duration and continuity of a partnership more uncertain. In countries where the traditional family still represents an important value, such as Italy, "... the greater a women's commitment to work, the greater is the risk of the partnership's dissolving" [De Rose, Di Cesare, Chap. 8]. Conversely, employment represents an element of stability for men. Even in areas with better organized institutions for the support of the family and maternity (Switzerland and Hungary), women's participation in extra-domestic work nonetheless constitutes a risk to the stability of the couple's relationship. In this case, the effect of the economic and psychological independence developed outside the domestic sphere gives rise to choices which, while traumatic, are no longer regarded by both partners as being unthinkable.

The construction of personal economic independence may be of use in choices in every phase of the life history. It may be strategic [Angeli and De Rose, Chap. 4] in the case of a decision regarding the formation of a second partnership, when the existence of a personal income may render a new family collocation less urgent; there is also a substantial independence between the two careers in the case of men. In the case of breakdown of a partnership, however, the woman's need to work may be the fruit of a pre-existing economic inequality, indicating a more acute worsening of living standards than for the man.

Women's participation in extra-domestic work may, in conclusion, be seen as an element contributing to making gender a social construct. The studies collected here show that development in the sphere of women's autonomy, which has been extremely rapid over the past decades, alters the bases of gender relations, whatever the social context in which one moves. Difficult as it may be to compare situations with different institutional set-ups and social-economic conditions, what the above-mentioned chapters confirm is that women's participation in paid employment outside the home and the consequent accumulation of personal income tend to alter relations between men and women in the basic areas of autonomy, power, roles and access to and control of resources.

#### 4.4 The settling of scores

While family and reproductive behaviour highlight disadvantages for the independent woman, as she clearly pays a price for her emancipation in terms of greater difficulties in forming a first partnership and any subsequent partnerships, greater instability of partnerships and lower fertility compared to men of the same status, at the end of the life cycle the equilibrium is inverted. This is demonstrated not only in life expectancy but also, to a certain extent, in the conditions of old age.

Women live longer than men, much longer than the difference which might be explained by biological reasons. The fact of having been less exposed to hazards in the

workplace (either by not working or by working less and in more protected sectors compared to those of men) and the fact of having made better use than men of progress in prevention and treatment (as a result of caring for the whole family), together with the decrease in and disappearance of, in the case of the most recent generations, inequalities in human capital. After many years of increasing gap of life expectancy between men and women, the difference has recently started to decrease in many developed countries, suggesting a new scenario: men are starting to imitate the virtuous elements of women's behaviour, while women's adoption of the hazardous elements of male behaviour remains a more contained phenomenon [Nobile, Chap. 11]. If the ultimate goal of satisfactory life as a couple is reduction to the minimum of the period of widowhood (the stressful event most feared by elderly people), by prolonging the life of men and eventually accepting non-traditional criteria of couple matching (eg man of the same age or younger), such a goal might be reached.

Do widows and widowers receive assistance and care to the same extent? There is no doubt that women have devoted more time to children, and have often sacrificed autonomy and career to caring for the family. Is there any recompense for this? Tomassini and Glaser [Chap. 10], in their comparison of Italy and Great Britain, find that the behaviour of children towards their parents in the former, more family-oriented country does not differ with the sex of the surviving parent. The situation is, however, different in the case of the more individualist country: in this case, men receive less than women. Indeed, the family-oriented country has the family as the main, if not the only support for elderly parents, and assistance from children is a respected social norm. The individualist country has, on the other hand, developed a system of services which provide care for the elderly also in the absence of family support and in this case, if there is any relationship of intergenerational solidarity, it is more likely to be with the mother, insofar as reciprocal, than with the father, who has been a less central figure on the children's affective and relational horizons. In conclusion, at the end of the life cycle, in contexts in which the existence of support outside the family weakens the social norm of intergenerational solidarity, women receive more than men in exchange for past dedication.

## 5. Prospects of research and need for data

The design of the Family and Fertility Surveys (FFS), the data bases most used in this volume, did not offer any other possibilities of analysis, in terms of either exploration of contents, the limits inherent in the very structure of the surveys, or the possibilities of comparison.

One limit, for example, is that the survey concerns independent samples of men and women (with problems of statistical significance linked to the different numerical sizes of the samples) and does not afford the possibility of analysing partners' joint characteristics and man/woman interactions within the couple, while most of the choices concerning individual behaviour analysed in the chapters are the result of a complex interaction, often conflictual, between men and women. In this sense, an understanding of the different strategies applied by the components of a couple or small group, such as the family, in the identification of roles, the recognition of status

and the management of power and resources is essential for our understanding of the outcome of the process. The sphere of gender analysis, insofar as it is involved in describing the persistence of inequalities between men and women and understanding the processes leading to these imbalances, must necessarily include the field of interaction between the subjects involved. In this sense, the study of phenomena such as entry and exit from partnerships and fertility choices cannot therefore be limited to the analysis of individual propensities but must necessarily attempt to include the relational aspect of the couple. This makes it desirable to have data available concerning couple histories, measured with information about both partners from the start, or, in places where the frequency of complex partnership histories is high, starting from information provided by the women about her various partners, with reference to circumstances preceding the demographic events, so as to permit a causal analysis.

Another limit highlighted by the analyses presented lies in scarcity of the time-dependent information reconstructed by the surveys used: indeed, the analysis of life histories would require many more covariates for the temporal measurement of changes of status, so as to be able to relate them to verification of the demographic events of interest. This means a very accurate planning of the hypotheses to be tested at the phase of constructing the questionnaires, so as bear them in mind, simultaneously, at the different levels of longitudinal aggregation of information (individual, couple, family, context).

Some of the aspects highlighted in this research emphasize the need for further surveys. One example is the need to analyse past and ongoing changes in the social role of the woman, along with the evolution of the system of gender inequalities. It is indispensable to continue to reflect upon the modalities of construction of those gender-sensitive indicators of social inequality needed to reveal important aspects of female and male roles and their transformations. Indeed, introducing the gender perspective into demographic research does not mean simply comparing the demographic behaviour of men and women, which is nonetheless an essential step, but above all observing how gender (gender system, contract, roles etc) influences demographic behaviour or is affected by it. A crucial step in this sense is to "mine" family situations. In this context, an increased availability of variables capable of revealing the processes of acquisition, distribution and use of resources within the family becomes essential, on both gender and generational lines, variables which are still unfortunately fairly scarce in the data bases available.

At a collective level, we need to know more about all the institutional aspects which might influence the gender system (eg system of leave for women and men with children and relative Antonella Pinnelli, Filomena Racioppi and Rosella Rettaroli s to look after, flexibility of the labour market, availability of services for children and the elderly, availability and cost of services substituting domestic work) and on the division of roles within the couple. Aspects which have hardly been developed at all are those regarding autonomy (which is not only provided by work, but also by the possibility of spending money, deciding on important issues and having an independent social and associative life). Up until now, education and employment have been used as proxies for many aspects in which there is actually no knowledge of

their characteristics. Indeed, what emerges from the results presented in this volume is that, in some cases, the best condition of women from the point of view of human capital and integration into the labour market does not actually correspond to a more equal allocation of roles.

The change in women's status and the difficulty of renegotiating roles within the couple highlights another need, which is to know if and how standards are changing as regards the tasks of family care hitherto undertaken almost exclusively by the woman. Indeed, domestic work has become much less onerous with the availability of electronic domestic hardware and external services, and this may have taken place differently in the various countries and among the different social classes. Moreover, expectations may have changed as regards what has to be done: tasks which were initially regarded as being a necessary part of the female role might simply have been eliminated. The analysis of standards would also tell us something about the quality of domestic life in the various conditions.

Another field of research to be developed is that concerning women's biological role, which is jeopardized by its competition with other roles and by the interests of medical and pharmaceutical corporations. The increase beyond any reasonable international standard of the percentage of Caesarean births, the abandonment of breast feeding and the excessive medicalization of pregnancy are aspects which must still be studied in a comparative fashion: having gained control of their own sexuality and fertility, or of their own human capital, women must now recover their possession of maternity as a natural aspect of female life, instead of allowing themselves to be deprived of it or renouncing it.

Two fields of particular interest have emerged from our study, which should be further cultivated alongside the more classical ones: that of gender socialization and that of the marriage market and the criteria of couple matching, which are two aspects which may have notable consequences on future gender relations.

Finally, the comparative analyses between countries have highlighted the interest of the comparison between different situations, in order to understand the relations between gender and demographic behaviour, which, as we have seen, vary with context. Particular attention should be paid in monitoring the changes underway in the east and south of Europe, where specific models of demographic behaviour are emerging, which cannot be described in the same terms as the situations which have hitherto been recorded. Political discontinuities or deep cultural differences may be breaking new ground in the relations between gender and demographic behaviour. The onerous and complex task of international coordination of surveys and studies is well worth the effort and cost involved, and should be continued bearing in mind the need to include the various theoretical perspectives present in research on the gender system - which is inevitably interdisciplinary - and to combine various research techniques (macro, micro, quantitative and qualitative).