Culture Unbound
Journal of Current Cultural Research

Foodwork as the New Fathering? Change and Stability in Men's Housework

By
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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore the parallels of fathering and foodwork among men in Sweden. The research question is: can foodwork be seen as "the new fathering"? The paper outlines the narrative of fathers in Sweden and gender progressiveness, and discusses gendered foodwork in Sweden up until the mid-1990s. Subsequently, statistical evidence from Statistics Sweden's three time-use studies is presented, complemented with evidence from quantitative studies about the gendered division of housework. Here, the data demonstrates change over time in men's and women's total housework, foodwork and childcare. Men are doing more and women less, although the absolute changes are greater among women who still do more. Such evidence is further discussed in relation to socio-demographics, household composition and paid work, pointing to the relevance of factors such as gender-egalitarian attitudes and having children. The quantitative section is then followed by an argumentation about cultural shifts in relation to qualitative studies on men's domestic foodwork. In the discussion it is concluded that foodwork can indeed be seen as "the new fathering". Not as a substitution for fathering or as something exclusive for fathers, but as an addition to the repertoire of cultural understandings and social expectations of a "modern" man in Sweden. However, the most substantial change is likely to be cultural—on the level of ideals—while statistics on behaviour mostly support slow and minor changes, with the overall social relation of men and women demonstrating significant stability.

Keywords: Childcare, cooking, fathering, gender equality, foodwork, housework.

Neuman, Nicklas: "Foodwork as the New Fathering? Change and Stability in Men's Housework", *Culture Unbound*, Volume 12, issue 3, 2020: 527–549. Published by Linköping University Electronic Press: http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se

Introduction

This paper discusses a sociological problem that has been around for many years: change versus stability in the gendered division of domestic responsibilities. My empirical case is fathering and foodwork in Sweden. I define fathering as the activities of doing fatherhood—being a father "in action" so to speak—which is different from the state of fatherhood to which a man enters the second he has a child. The literature also involves terms such as "involved" fatherhood/parenthood, but I have chosen fathering since it is a broader and more descriptive term compared to the cultural norm of responsibility encapsulated in "involved" (Forsberg 2009: 11). Foodwork is defined as the chain of activities encompassed in food provision and disposal, which in the domestic sphere includes, at the least, shopping, cooking, clearing tables and washing dishes. Moreover, while foodwork is primarily analysed through its measurable performance of activities, a fuller picture must also take into account the emotional and cognitive efforts involved in planning and experiencing the pressure of having the main responsibility in a household (e.g. DeVault 1991, Cairns & Johnston 2015).

The aim of this article is to explore the parallels of fathering and foodwork among men in Sweden. My research question is: can foodwork be seen as "the new fathering"? By this, I mean a domestic responsibility that has historically been considered "women's work", associated with a caring and other-oriented femininity, but that is now assumed, to a greater extent, by men, in quantitative terms (Neuman, 2019a), while it has shifted culturally to an expectation of men and a desirable form of masculinity (Neuman, Gottzén & Fjellström 2017a, 2017b, Molander 2018, 2019). Put differently, the ideal of a gender-progressive Swedish man, who is an involved, caring and gender-equal father, now has a parallel in the egalitarian, caring, responsible and skilled provider of food in the home.

Below, I will briefly outline the narrative of fathers in Sweden and gender progressiveness. Thereafter, I will discuss gendered foodwork in Sweden up until the mid-1990s, followed by some brief methodological considerations. Subsequently, I systematically present the statistical evidence for my argument, based on Statistics Sweden's three time-use studies (SCB 1992, 2003, 2012), complemented with evidence from quantitative studies about the gendered division of housework. This is followed by an argumentation about cultural shifts in relation to qualitative studies on men's domestic foodwork. Finally, there is a concluding discussion, where I reconnect the empirical discussions to the research question.

Fathers in Sweden—A Gender-progressive Narrative

When historians have outlined Sweden's history of gender equality policies,

they have highlighted the emphasis on gender neutrality and the involvement of men, especially as fathers, to relieve women's domestic burdens and increase their opportunities for paid labour as well as to emancipate men from what was considered a destructive male "role" (Florin & Nilsson 1999, Hirdman 1989/2010, 1992, Klinth 2002). In close connection with such policies from the seventies and onward, studies on men and masculinity in Sweden have historically been dominated by research on fatherhood (Hearn et al. 2012, Mellström, Hearn & Pringle 2014). This research, supported by statistical evidence, suggests noteworthy transitions in men's parenting and the masculine connotations of fathering.

As an example, based on qualitative data from the late 1990s, Plantin (2001) argued that the involved, responsible and caring father had reached a hegemonic position, at least in the middle class (Plantin 2007). This form of fathering, Plantin argues, was seen as deviant in earlier generations of men, but the tide changed; suddenly, a patriarchal and authoritarian form of fathering would be that which was perceived as deviant and undesirable (Plantin 2001, see also Plantin, Månsson & Kearney 2003). Similarly, through a focus group study with a diverse sample of men in Sweden, Johansson and Klinth (2008) proposed that a culturally hegemonic discourse of a "new man", caring and involved in his children's life and upbringing, had been produced, and not only in the middle classes. Hence, involved fatherhood, care and responsibility are characteristics of a man in Sweden that scholars argue to be a dominant masculine ideal—across a wide range of sub-populations (e.g. class fractions)—upheld by the majority (Johansson 2011, Johansson & Ottemo 2015).

Yet, the ideal type does not correspond fully to statistical outcomes of peoples' everyday lives. For example, parental leave remains quantitatively gender differentiated, although men are using an increased share of the parental benefits, with systematic differences among men in different socio-economic groups (Försäkringskassan 2019). Men also work full-time to a greater extent than women (SCB 2012). This does not have to be men's favoured choice; rather, it may for example be a necessity-based financial decision, an adaptation to a woman's wish to stay at home, work-related reasons or a response to the availability of childcare services (Evertsson, Boye & Erman 2018). Regardless of individual reasons, the aggregated decisions are nevertheless manifested in the structural relation between men and women in the labour market and the private sphere. Moreover, the time devoted to domestic childcare, as discussed in detail below, is differentiated as well, with women reporting more time, especially when the children are young (<7 years old) (SCB 2012). Nevertheless, this too has changed, especially in terms of women's time for childcare being reduced, while the overall social relation of gendered group differentiation (women as a category relative to men as a category) continues. Regarding qualitative dimensions of fathering, it has been

suggested that men might often pick "the good bits" of domestic responsibilities. For example, men can play and socialise with their children as a substitute for other domestic chores (Bekkengen 2002, Forsberg 2009, Johansson & Klinth 2008)—what Forsberg (later Gottzén) (2009) describes as time with children and time for children, with the latter constituting the indirect time devoted to cleaning up after children, doing their laundry or planning their schedules.

In sum, then, we must first acknowledge that the quantitative changes we have observed have not transformed the overall social relation in relevant metrics. Second, quantitative and qualitative dimensions do not necessarily synchronise, either in terms of fathering specifically or the gendered division of domestic responsibilities generally. Hence, equal time spent on a given activity does not, by default, imply equal amounts of emotional and cognitive efforts, or that equally joyful parts of the same activity are undertaken. As addressed below, this aspect of mundane everyday work compared to joyful leisure is central to understanding domestic foodwork.

Gender and Domestic Foodwork in Sweden—A Brief History

Parallel to this political development, which led to generous parental benefits and other policies aiming for a more gender-equal society, efforts have also been made to reduce social inequalities related to food (e.g. feeding of children) as well as to influence men to assume domestic foodwork responsibilities. On the one hand, this was part of the welfare-state provision of food, which, first and foremost, centred on reducing class inequalities, through, for instance, nutritious school lunches for all children (Persson Osowski & Fjellström 2018). On the other hand, it also served a double gender-equality purpose of relieving women from domestic foodwork responsibilities, while also providing women with new labour market possibilities (i.e. working in public kitchens) (Mattsson Sydner & Skinnars Josefsson 2019). In 1962, home economics became mandatory for all pupils in Sweden. There were also cooking courses available for men, and food-industrial innovations were sold with the claims of reducing women's time spent in the kitchen (Hirdman 1998). Moreover, government reports about gender equality described not only parental responsibilities but also, to a great extent, other domestic responsibilities, including foodwork (e.g. SOU 1979).

In the seventies, sociologists began to systematically investigate the gendered division of housework (e.g. Oakley 1974), and a more explicitly food-focused sociology developed from the 1980s (Neuman 2019c), partly built on seminal publications on the gendered divisions of foodwork in the UK (Charles & Kerr 1988, Murcott 1982, 1983). This literature developed, and influential studies of the

nineties from the US (DeVault 1991) and Australia (Lupton 1996) continued to demonstrate such gender-unequal divisions of foodwork, while also highlighting middle-class men's specific gourmet interests. A shift in some gendered positions, clearly connected to class, emerged, while food and cooking as domestic leisure entertainment became more prominent.

In the early nineties, similar studies appeared in the Nordic countries as well. In a study about food, gender and class in two Swedish cities, Marianne Ekström (later Pipping Ekström) (1990) suggested a clear gender order in Swedish households, related to food. Importantly, Ekström highlighted how this was not only expressed in the actual time devoted to foodwork but also in the emotional and cognitive strain of "having the pantry in the head", as she phrased it (Ekström 1990: 146). By this, she meant the cognitive and emotional efforts involved in remembering which groceries were present in the home, planning what to cook, what to buy and so forth (cf. DeVault 1991, Cairns & Johnston 2015).

Furthermore, Sören Jansson, a Swedish ethnologist, compared studies from the UK and Sweden, including his own (Jansson 1988, 1990), and argued that in Sweden, domestic foodwork was something that men ought to do, as a prevailing social expectation (Jansson 1995). Nonetheless, little could be said about actual large-scale statistical change. When Jansson's paper was published in 1995, Statistics Sweden had published its first time-use study (SCB 1992), which, compared to earlier reports on women's time spent on housework (where men were not included), suggested considerable declines since the 1950s (Pipping Ekström & Palojoki 2019).

Given the general structural changes that took place in Swedish society between the 1950s and 1990s (primarily women's increased entry into paid labour and higher education) combined with an increasingly established ideology of gender equality and gender neutrality (e.g. about fatherhood), a quantitative change in men's domestic foodwork was a reasonable hypothesis; especially since such developments were observed in the Swedish Level-of-Living Survey (Levnadsnivåundersökningen, LNU), a survey-based study performed regularly since 1968. The results demonstrated a decline in women's housework during the period of 1974—1991, from 27.5 hours to about 19 hours per week, while men's corresponding increases were more modest (slightly above four hours) (Boye & Evertsson 2015).

The hypothesis about Swedish foodwork divisions would also find support in a study conducted in 1997 about food in the everyday lives of Nordic people (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden) (Kjærnes 2001). Methodologically, however, the part of the study that focused on the gendered division of cooking differs from the time-use studies (Pipping Ekström & L'Orange Fürst 2001). First, it only involved households with couples (a man and a woman). Second, the

Nordic food researchers did not ask questions about time, but about who in the household cooked the last hot meal. Third, this narrowing down of the question "Who did the cooking?" meant that many activities that could potentially be placed under the category of "cooking", such as making a sandwich, were excluded. These differences are not exclusively limitations, however, as they more clearly highlight the gendered division of cooking a main meal, thus avoiding average numbers being affected by singles or people living in other constellations than man and woman.

In the study, women in all countries reported to have cooked the last hot meal themselves to a higher degree than men, with an average of 77 percent versus 42 percent, for women and men, respectively, across the countries (Pipping Ekström & L'Orange Fürst 2001). Note that the sum of these percentages is 119. This sum above 100 percent was found in all countries, with 114 percent in Sweden where the gender gap was the smallest (73% and 41% for women and men, respectively). This is discussed as a result of either symmetrical misreporting when both partners report equally "incorrect", asymmetrical when cooking is understood in systematically gender-divided ways, or as a result of social desirability. The latter refers to a cultural idealisation of gender egalitarianism, biasing both men and women by a sense of social pressure of what one ought to do. It is also worth mentioning that there was a clear connection between men who reported "Did the cooking myself" if they also reported an interest in cooking (60% having interest vs 33% having no interest). While women were more likely than men to report an interest, there was no equally clear connection between the two variables (92% vs 87%, respectively). This supported the notion that perhaps food could be a particular interest among some men and that this interest was a driver for them to assume responsibilities (cf. Warde & Martens 2000).

In conclusion, in the mid-1990s, scholars discussed foodwork—or at least cooking—in terms of Swedish male ideal types, not unlike the narrative of fathering, and data did support a certain degree of social change. Moreover, and yet again with parallels to fathering, foodwork could also be a "fun option" among domestic responsibilities. Against this backdrop, the next section provides a brief methodological consideration about basing an argumentation on both quantitative and qualitative data. This is followed by a detailed look at quantitative evidence over three decades, which I then connect to qualitative studies and contemporary discussions about men and foodwork in the Nordic countries, using Sweden as the most prominent example.

Methodological Considerations

Since the main argument of this paper is deduced from a combination of official statistics, quantitative studies and qualitative studies, all from a social scientific

perspective, some methodological considerations are worth mentioning. First, the fact that this paper exclusively utilizes social-scientific data should not be interpreted as a denial of biological mechanisms at play in social behaviour. Nevertheless, assuming that our biology has not changed dramatically since the 1990s, it is reasonable to assume that observed changes say something about transformations in society. Second, evidence of measured change—from time-use studies, for example—is interpreted against expressions of perceived change. In other words, data collected over time are discussed in relation to subjective recollections of the past. I do not treat these as evidence of the same thing, however, but use them pragmatically. It is a strength when subjective recollections (e.g., of social change or stability) are interpreted against statistical data, and it is a strength when qualitative data contextualise numbers and enrich them with nuances and immersions into everyday experiences and understandings of concepts (in the respondents' lives and society as a whole).

Third, the timelines of the qualitative data are not as clear as the quantitative, but I have presented the qualitative studies in the order in which they were conducted (although the time-lapse of data collection to publication date is not always clear). Fourth, theoretical terms such as fathering and foodwork will have to be interpreted based on proxies of measured variables and theorised from expressions of interview respondents. Since none of the SCB classifications perfectly resemble foodwork or fathering, I use "Cooking" and "Dishwashing and table-clearing" as proxies, while fathering is discussed using data from the category "Care of own child" (hereinafter "Childcare"), which is a sum of eight sub-categories (playing with children, surveilling and helping them, talking to them, attending parents-teacher meetings, etc.). From the qualitative studies, I have used my pre-established definitions and applied them to the quotes presented in the published papers. Fifth and lastly, as mentioned in the introduction, foodwork must be understood both as based on activities performed as well as the mental and emotional efforts involved. This is a clear limitation of the quantitative data. However, this will be discussed based on the expressions of interviewed men and put in relation to previous research on gender and food.

How Do (and Did) Swedes Spend Their Time?

In this section, I draw on statistical data from three consecutive time-use studies from Statistics Sweden (SCB 1992, 2003, 2012) and a number of quantitative studies providing information that the time-use studies lack (such as socio-economic associations and attitudes). A problem with these data in relation to my overall argument is that respondents are not necessarily parents

(except for when the categorisation is explicitly about parents). Hence, several men who report high levels of participation in housework may not be fathers, and many fathers may spend very little time on housework. This should therefore not be interpreted as data on fathers per se, but rather should be viewed as (1) an illustration of aggregated change among men (2) in which the trajectory of one category (childcare) seems to be in line with another (foodwork).

Respondents in the time-use studies were chosen based on stratified random samples from which simple random samples have been drawn. Data were then collected prospectively, using diary reports of randomly selected days (one weekday and one day on a weekend). Activities have been reported in the respondents' own words and was, thereafter, classified according to pre-established classification schemes. While the same method was used for all three studies (with some differences in the classification schemes and strata included), there was also a trend of decreased response rates, primarily among men (SCB, n.d, SCB, 2012: 129). This not only affects the interpretation, but also affects the assumption that cultural biases are equally distributed for all three studies. Consequently, if a bias of gender-egalitarian attitudes is systematically different across studies (e.g. more prominent in 2010 than in 1990), then systematic misreporting could follow accordingly. Also, when this paper is published, even the most recent data are relatively old. There may also be relevant developments in the last ten years that we are unaware of. With such caveats of caution, I now explore quantitative change and continuity in time-use.

Some Average Differences and Similarities

To start with, in the total averages (20–64 years of age), the times reported by women for the investigated activities, weekdays as well as weekends, have decreased during 1990/1991–2010/2011 (see Table 1, Appendix 1). For men, we see the opposite trend: increases in reported times for all activities except dishwashing and table-clearing, although the numbers are smaller. The reduction of the gender gap over the same time period is about 45–50 minutes for total housework, about a quarter of an hour for cooking, a little less than ten minutes for dishwashing and table-clearing, and 10–15 minutes for childcare (see Table 1, Appendix 1).

Table 2 below presents average times reported for the same activities (weekdays and weekends combined), the share of people reporting to perform the activities, the average time devoted to the activities among those performing them as well as the differences between the three studies (ages 20–64) (cf. SCB 2012: 228–229, Table B:16b). We see that the reduction in women's average time devoted to housework and both foodwork categories is statistically significant. Men's increased time devoted to total housework and cooking were statistically significant, although smaller than women's differences. Furthermore, there is an

increase in cooking time for male performers that is statistically significant since 1990/1991 and 13 minutes above the overall average from the same year. Third, there are statistically significant reductions in women's average time reported for childcare, paralleled with a small increase among men. In the column for performer averages, men's increase is 18 minutes and significant, compared to 2000/2001.

Table 2. Average time spent on activities, share of performers and averages among performers for activities, as well as differences (in minutes or percentage units) between studies. Ages 20–64.

		Average			Share of performers			Performer averages		
		Time 2010/2011	Diff. 2000/2001	Diff. 1990/1991	% 2010/2011	Diff. 2000/2001	Diff. 1990/1991	Time 2010/2011	Diff. 2000/2001	Diff. 1990/1991
Women	Housework	1.43	-14*	-46*	93	-2*	-3*	1.50	-12*	-44*
	Cooking	0.37	-5*	-11*	80	-6*	-10*	0.47	-2	-7*
	Dishwashing and table-clearing	0.15	-4*	-8*	59	-8*	-15*	0.25	-3*	-6*
	Childcare	0.35	-1	-11*	33	-4*	-3*	1.48	7	-21*
Men	Housework	1.02	4*	5*	82	4*	-1	1.16	2	7*
	Cooking	0.25	3*	3*	67	5*	0	0.38	1	5*
	Dishwashing and table-clearing	0.09	0	0	41	-1	0	0.23	0	1
	Childcare	0.21	4*	3	25	-1	2	1.25	18*	7

*Statistically significant at 95 per cent.

Looking at the gender gaps descriptively, we see that women, compared to men, reported to perform an average of 41, 12, 6 and 14 minutes more on total housework, cooking, dishwashing and table-clearing and childcare, respectively. For performers, the corresponding numbers are 34, 9, 2 and 23 minutes (Table 2).

The Role of Socio-Demographics

The data presented above are further supported by scholarly work from which we also learn more about the social gradient of domestic responsibilities. A study among young (approx. 20–50 years old) Swedes and Norwegians found that in couples where the man earned less than the woman, attitudes were significantly more egalitarian, and vice versa for the opposite income relation, while similar educational levels or higher for the woman was also associated with more egalitarian attitudes (Bernhardt, Noack & Lyngstad 2008). Sharing of housework also strongly depended on labour market attachment, suggesting that the more men work, the less likely the couple is to share, and vice versa for women's work hours. Lower male income also predicted shared housework, as well as high male education and/or high female education.

Other studies about Sweden support associations with income and education (Boye & Evertsson 2015; Evertsson & Nermo 2007) and that participation in foodwork is in fact particularly common among highly educated men, while maintenance and reparations are negatively associated with education (Boye 2014).[1] However, while the study by Boye (2014), drawing on data from the LNU, shows that men's education and income are associated with time devoted to housework (including foodwork), these factors do not seem to explain the result. Boye found that the effects of income and education became weak and did not reach statistical significance after controlling for other factors. However, gender-egalitarian attitudes remained positively associated with participation in all housework chores, especially foodwork (which was negative for women). Thus, attitudes towards gender equality seem to explain more than socio-economic position (cf. Evertsson, 2014).

The above-mentioned study about food in the everyday lives of Nordic people (Kjærnes 2001) was repeated in 2012 (Gronow & Holm 2019). In an article where the data about the gendered division of cooking were published, the authors noted that in 1997 compared to 2012, the average gender gap of dinners reported to be cooked by only a man had gone from 19 to 30 percent and dinners reported to be cooked by only a woman from 70 to 50 (Holm, Ekström, Hach & Lund 2015). Men's increase remained significant after adjustments for socio-economic factors, and the adjusted model also demonstrated evidence of an inverse relationship of age; thus, higher age was associated with lower odds of having cooked the last meal. Moreover, for social class, the difference from 1997 had vanished (Holm et al. 2015). In other words, the data from 1997 supported the notion that the likelihood of a man cooking is higher in the higher classes, but this was no longer the case in 2012. Accordingly, the main difference is found in substantial increases in working-class men's reported cooking, but with more modest increases in the intermediate and salary classes.

The Role of Household Composition and Paid Work

Some evidence suggests that when a couple has children, household responsibilities become divided across more "traditionally" gendered lines compared to the pre-birth relationships (Gjerdingen & Center 2005, Yavorsky, Kamp Dush & Schoppe-Sullivan 2015), including longitudinal data from the LNU (Boye & Evertsson 2015). The time-use data also lend support to this, although they are limited to cross-sectional comparisons between singles and cohabitants with or without children at one time-point, rather than comparisons over time for the same people. The gender gaps in time are only 23, 7 and 1 minute(s) for total housework, cooking and dishwashing and table-clearing among cohabiting men and women (20–44 years old) with no children (Table 3) (see SCB 2012: 230–249,

Table B:17a). With young children (<7 years old), the same respective numbers are 47, 16 and 7 minutes. In the category where cohabiting women and men have children seven years of age or older, the numbers are 49, 13 and 7 minutes. Thus, cohabiting men with children do indeed seem to assume more of the housework responsibilities than men without, but the gender gap is also wider. This is supported in the LNU, although the effects on men's increased housework are much smaller than women's and seem unaffected by the number of children, whereas women continue to increase their time when they have more children (Boye & Evertsson 2015).

Table 3. Average time reported (hours, minutes), share of performers and difference in time since 2000/2001 for total housework, cooking, dishwashing and table-clearing and childcare among men and women with different family situations. Age span for "Cohabiting, no children" is 20-44 and for the groups with children it is 20–84.

		Cohabiting, no children				Cohabiting, children <7				Cohabiting, children ≥7			
		Average		Share		Average		Share		Average		Share	
		Time	Diff.	%	Diff.	Time	Diff.	%	Diff.	Time	Diff.	%	Diff.
Women	Total housework	1.22	0	89	0	2.01	-18*	95	-4*	1.54	-10	94	-3*
	Cooking	0.31	0	74	-3	0.45	-4	85	-7*	0.40	-5*	82	-6*
	Dishwashing and table-clearing	0.10	-3*	45	-6	0.19	-5*	64	-10*	0.18	-3*	63	-9*
	Childcare	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2.20	13	95	-1	0.32	-2	61	1
Men	Total housework	0.59	16*	82	7	1.14	12*	84	5	1.05	1	87	1
	Cooking	0.24	6*	64	9	0.29	3	67	2	0.27	1	71	3
	Dishwashing and table-clearing	0.09	3	34	3	0.12	0	50	1	0.11	-1	46	-3
	Childcare	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1.35	29*	88	9*	0.23	1	41	-2

*Statistically significant at 95 percent.

There is also some systematic differentiation among couples with children regarding (un)equal sharing of housework and childcare. Almqvist and Duvander (2014) showed higher odds for shared housework after becoming parents among couples reporting to share before the child arrived (OR = 2.5) and where the father took a long parental leave (OR = 1.72). For the share of childcare, expecting to share before having a child increased the odds (OR = 2.26), as did longer leave for the man (OR = 2.28) (cf. Evertsson et al. 2018). This says nothing about the causal relationship between parenthood and housework divisions, but indicates that the general trend of housework becoming more "traditionally" divided among men and women when they have a child may have relevant exceptions. These exceptions are associated with gendered behaviours and expectations.

Furthermore, below we see how total housework and total foodwork (cooking and dishwashing and table-clearing combined) relate to total paid work (paid work and work-related travel combined) among cohabiting men and women, as well as childcare in the categories with children (Figure 1). With no children involved, total paid work among 20–44-year-olds differs about 20 minutes. With young children, however, the difference is about two hours. This corresponds to housework and foodwork in the sense that times reported for housework, foodwork and childcare are higher when working hours are lower, and vice versa. The biggest difference is when the children are young.

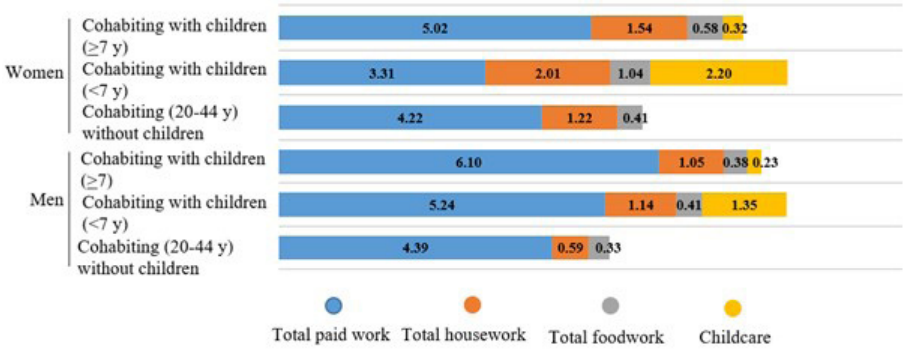

Figure 1. Average time (hours, minutes) reported on total paid work (including work-related travel) (blue), total housework (orange), total foodwork (cooking and dishwashing and table-clearing combined) (grey) and childcare (yellow) among men and women with different family situations. Age span for the groups with children is 20–84.

Another aspect worth noting is that the reported performance of household tasks depending on whether or not men or women (20¬–44 years old) live alone (Table 4). An almost similar share of cohabiting women cook but a smaller share performs dishwashing and table-clearing. Both are larger for cohabiting men compared to single-living men, although even the smaller shares among women are larger than the larger shares among men. Women's total housework is 13 minutes more in the cohabiting group than the single-living group, 6 minutes more for cooking, 2 minutes less for dishwashing and table-clearing and 22 minutes more for paid work. The corresponding numbers for men are 16, 1, 4 and 10 minutes more in the cohabiting group. This suggests that while men spend less time on total housework when they are living alone, they seem to differ less—if at all—in terms of foodwork (not tested for statistical significance).

Table 4. Average time reported (hours, minutes) and share of performers cohabiting and single men and women without children. Ages 20–44.

		Cohabiting, no children		Single-living, no children	
		Time	Share	Time	Share
Women	Total housework	1.22	89	1.09	90
	Cooking	0.31	74	0.25	71
	Dishwashing and table-clearing	0.10	45	0.12	53
	Total paid work	4.22	53	4.00	52
Men	Total housework	0.59	82	0.43	66
	Cooking	0.24	64	0.23	53
	Dishwashing and table-clearing	0.09	34	0.05	24
	Total paid work	4.39	53	4.29	49

Cultural Context—What Do Qualitative Studies Tell Us?

The above-mentioned data must be contextualised in order to grasp them culturally. To do this, I turn to qualitative studies on men in the Nordic countries, especially Sweden, regarding everyday domestic foodwork. My focus is primarily on studies conducted and published after 2000. It is after the millennial shift that the literature on food and gender really begins to explicitly focus on the lives and experiences of men. The studies presented include men of different generations as well as descriptions of (perceived) social change, meaning that I treat them as contemporary expressions of how Swedish historical change is subjectively interpreted.

As with the statistical data, here too we find information about men who are and who are not fathers, which means that we cannot say that every interviewed man's expression about foodwork is also an expression of fathering. However, even men without children express attitudes about gender, food and the division of domestic responsibilities, and sometimes reflections about potential future fatherhood or memories of their own fathers. Thus, I contend that the studies say something about the culture of gendered everyday responsibilities, allowing us to explore the parallels between cultural ideals about fathering and those of domestic foodwork.

The literature here demonstrates patterns of shared understandings and values that one would have anticipated from developments since the mid-1900s: domestic foodwork and feeding of children are becoming a male duty and are no longer self-evidently "womens work" (Meah 2017, Neuman, Eli & Nowicka 2019, Szabo & Koch 2017), and the Nordic countries stand out in terms of men's expressed relationship to domestic food responsibilities. In fact, based on interviews conducted with Norwegian men in 1990 and 2005 about food in everyday lives, Aarseth (2009) argues that cooking has become a degendered late-modern lifestyle project of the middle class, rather than a symbol of a gendered division of labour. As I will argue below, and have developed elsewhere (Neuman 2019a), such a proposition finds some support. Nevertheless, domestic foodwork, even cooking as a separate activity, is still clearly gendered.

Gender Equality, Foodwork Responsibility and Food's Social Function

In the study by Holm et al (2015), the discussion about gender convergence and convergence of class found among men in 2012 focuses primarily on two dimensions. One is about gender transitions broadly, in which public policy and debate about gender equality could have had an effect. The second alludes to Jönsson's (2012) suggestion that Sweden has gone through a gastronomic revolution, starting in the 1980s. Through this revolution, the status attributed to food and cooking changed, perhaps in a way that made it more attractive to wide-ranging segments of men (Holm et al. 2015). Independent of this study, Neuman and Fjellström (2014) proposed a similar argument. While more firmly grounded in gender theory and based on a theoretical synthesis of already-published empirical work, they argued that the combination of the status of domestic cooking with the cultural idealisation of gender equality could have led to domestic cooking being a self-evident responsibility; no longer a source of emasculation and for some, a leisure-time hobby.

This proposition was then further investigated qualitatively in interviews with 31 men, 22–88 years old, having different degrees of food interest (Neuman 2016). The studies, with data collected in 2013 and 2014, showed, first, that among several of the men, domestic foodwork was indeed considered a self-evident responsibility (Neuman et al. 2017a, 2017b). In contrast to previous literature, men claiming to cook regularly did not necessarily enjoy it. Rather, both foodwork in general and cooking as a specific foodwork activity could be considered boring and mundane, yet something one ought to perform. Several of the younger men, both with and without children, also raised the question of cooking being "the fun option"; the one that men may select among housework chores due to its potential for expressing creativity and bringing pleasure (cf. Klasson & Ulver 2015). These

statements echo arguments made before by scholars of fatherhood in Sweden (Bekkengen 2002, Forsberg 2009, Johansson & Klinth 2008). Another specific thing that was mentioned, and also highlighted by Jansson (1990), among young Swedish men in the late 1980s, is that living alone was a time for learning to cook and establishing foodwork routines (Neuman et al. 2017b), thus suggesting that single-living matters.

The men expressed awareness of gendered transitions in Swedish society, compared to previous generations and foreign cultures, and the social expectation that responsibilities for domestic foodwork ought to be shared fairly (again with clear similarities to the fatherhood literature). For example, Johan (fictitious name), a 40-year-old single father who was unemployed at the time of the interview stated, "There was a role because it was already settled when you met …, 'you take care of the kitchen and the food because I am a man and I work', really, it was like that before" (Neuman et al. 2017b: 156). When asked about whether he thought housework is equally divided today, he responded:

> Yeah, I think so. It's probably that way today. I want to believe that, or I mean, I don't know how it works for my neighbours and all that but […] young people that have families (N: Mm). It's probably more of a given that you share the tasks (N: Mm) than it used to be. Yeah, and that could include cooking too, of course. But I don't think that there is, there can't possibly be anyone who just goes in [to the kitchen] and sits down, someone who just sits down and says, 'Is the food ready soon?' (N: [Chuckles]). No, I have a hard time seeing that (N: Mm). I'm pretty sure that you'd more or less help each other out […] I hope it's like that. (Neuman et al. 2017b: 156)

The existence of such ideals was even mentioned among the oldest men in the sample, despite the fact that they had admittedly not followed it in their own lives, such as when Martin, 85-year-old retired engineer, reminisced about "the days when there were housewives and the man brought home the bacon", and how today "it's very, it's becoming increasingly alike …, which, of course, contributes to men learning to cook at home as well" (Neuman et al. 2017b: 155).

Moreover, not only was this desirable form of masculinity about sharing burdens, but also about the social expectation of possessing acceptable levels of culinary skills. As the authors concluded, a "less-desirable masculinity is represented by a man who puts the lion's share of household duties on a woman's shoulders and at best heats ready-made meatballs and boils pasta", while a desirable masculinity "is personified by a man who takes on a considerable amount of foodwork, with cooking skills far beyond merely the survival level, and

is portrayed as a more gender-equal man than those of former generations and foreign cultures" (Neuman et al. 2017b: 161). In another paper, the analysis was extended to the sociality of cooking, that is, the social functions of cooking as an activity in itself (Neuman et al. 2017a). "Christian" and "Philip", two friends in their late 20s who lived with partners but no children, talked about cooking with others as follows:

> Philip: Yeah, but I guess it's mostly when you have time to cook [. . .] then the cooking itself is a large part [. . .] you don't just eat dinner together but you perhaps cook the meal together and then you do, you do something together (N: Mhm) (Michael: Mhm) [. . .]. It becomes, yeah, it becomes like a hobby where you disconnect from everything else. It's like anything else, like going to the gym and stuff. Cooking can be the same (Michael: Mhm). That's what I think.
>
> Michael: Yeah, it's a blast when you have time to cook something that you think will taste really good. That you can [. . .] like, when you've stood there all day and done it as a fun activity (N: Mhm) together so you can eat it together and enjoy it together. (Neuman et al. 2017a: 826)

As the quote shows, commensality, the sharing of a meal, was important but could also be secondary to the social connection achieved when preparing the meal together (cf. Persson Osowski & Mattsson Sydner 2019). All in all, the men talked about cooking as a means of a self-oriented expression, a gift for others and an activity for building communion with partners, friends and children. In other words, typically "feminine" virtues of other-orientation and care were clearly expressed, including the blending together of foodwork and fathering, but also more stereotypically masculine notions of self-expression and pleasure derived from showing off skills (Neuman et al. 2017a).

A Cultural Ideal of "Father = Domestic Foodworker"?

Some findings from the two papers discussed (Neuman et al. 2017a, 2017b) have been supported in a more recent study about foodwork among single-living fathers of urban middle-class areas (Molander 2018). First, among the men, cooking was described as an individual interest, hardship and simply a mundane part of daily life. Regardless of which, cooking and child-feeding were tightly entangled with fathering. This may seem obvious since they were single, but these middle-class men did not lack the means to buy ready-prepared food and some reported receiving extra help from babysitters and parents. Hence, nothing in the

study suggests that their feeding responsibilities were mere adaptations to life conditions over which they had no influence.

Second, some also expressed joy in involving children in foodwork and the pleasure in the commensal experience with them. Some also highlighted priorities of the children's nutritional status; yet another aspect that the literature has connected more to women and femininity (Cairns & Johnston 2015). The same was observed by Neuman (2019b), demonstrating how some men even described the entry into fatherhood as a window of opportunity to eat healthier. Thus, fathering and domestic foodwork seem hard to distinguish. Being an involved and caring father appears to include, as a matter of common sense, feeding your children and feeding them well. The study by Molander differs from those of Neuman, Gottzén and Fjellström, since the focus on single-living fathers means that attention is not paid to gendered divisions of housework. Nevertheless, it does lend support to earlier findings about men's relationship to domestic foodwork in a culture that idealises gender equality and involved fatherhood.

In a later paper, Molander (2019) directed her attention to fathering more broadly, especially the men's everyday navigations of state and marketplace ideologies. Again, food is at the centre of fathering—in all of the stories. Here, a rather undramatic relationship to foodwork was expressed—undoubtedly a fatherly duty, but most of the interviewed men did not appear to worry about whether their everyday cooking was good enough or not. For example, "Bo" said that his children:

> … never make me feel bad [for my bad cooking], like, "Dad, you really should" or "when we're at Mom's," because she's so much better at cooking. Never any comparison. They would never, ever make me feel bad about the fact that the meals [I prepare] aren't the most sophisticated and advanced. (Bo) (Molander 2019: 11, parentheses in original)

This also resembles expressions in Neuman et al. (2017b), finding that while domestic foodwork is seen as a self-evident responsibility of a man in Sweden, both with and without children, men may experience less intensive social pressure. This is important, since identified cultural change in gender relations by no means guarantees that cultural associations are ascribed equally, just as quantitative change towards a reduced gender gap does not equal a break-up of the structural relation.

Change and Stability—Concluding Remarks

Men have reported an increasing amount of time for foodwork and childcare over

time, and men express perceived expectations on them to take responsibility for, and be good at, both foodwork and fathering. Thus, having put quantitative change over time into conversation with findings from qualitative studies, I conclude that foodwork can indeed be seen as "the new fathering". Not as a substitution for fathering or as something exclusive for fathers, but as an addition to the repertoire of cultural understandings and social expectations of a "modern" man in Sweden. If this proposition is correct, then this has implications for studies on both men's parenting and foodwork, since the understanding of one will be insufficient without attention to the latter—at least in Sweden, and most likely throughout the Nordic countries.

However, I contend that the most substantial change is likely cultural, on the level of ideals of what it means to be a gender-progressive man in Sweden. On a structural level, we see modest (yet non-trivial) change within the limits of structural stability. For example, given the quantitative evidence provided above, there is little to suggest any general boom of men's foodwork, although the averages could potentially hide important variation of particularly food-oriented men. The average increase is small, while the drop in women's respective numbers is larger, similar to trends in time spent on childcare. Hence, there is change on the level of detail, but the overall social relation is rather stable. Also, the major changes in the gendered division of housework, according to the LNU, took place before the 1990s, after which they have slowed down (Boye & Evertsson 2015). What is more, modern qualitative studies focusing on food in the everyday lives of women in Sweden continue to show that domestic foodwork constitutes a perceived social expectation on women, both as partners and mothers (Anving 2012, Molander, 2011). For example, Anving (2012) argued that Swedish middle-class women in their interviews gave individualised accounts for unequal divisions of foodwork in conflict with their ideals, which she interprets as their way of upholding ideals of gender equality despite experiencing the lion's share of responsibility. Among a sample of North American women, Cairns and Johnston (2015) found that mothers became guardians of healthy eating and good taste for children, something several expressed as an emotional burden. Again, quotes from men in Sweden do not seem to support such an emotional burden, although they do convey fatherly duties and care. This calls for further research in which foodwork, mothering and fathering are explored both as performed activities (that can be measured in time-use) and as cognitive and emotional strain.

One aspect requiring further exploration is the effect of single-living. Men in Sweden are more likely than women to be single in the age group 20–29 years, where the proportion is among the highest in the European Union, and 30–49 years (Iacovou & Skew 2011). Since qualitative studies suggest the importance of single-living for men's foodwork activities and the time-use data show that

men living alone do indeed spend a fair amount of time on such activities, one hypothesis to test is whether this is a time when domestic foodwork becomes a matter of routine and if such routines "spill over" into cohabitation and fathering. This is a structural dimension that is critically understudied, and the answer is likely to depend on whether the barrier is mostly a matter of competence, lack of routines or household power asymmetries.

Already in the 1990s, Alan Warde (1997) challenged the notion—popular in cultural studies of the time—of accelerated change, individualisation and self-expressivity, using food consumption as his empirical case. Warde's critique seems salient today as well. We are not experiencing radical individualisation of eating habits or a destructuration of meal rhythms (Gronow & Holm 2019), nor are we witnessing anything even remotely close to eradicated gender-differentiations in domestic foodwork. On the contrary, and despite what expressions of cultural ideals might convey, statistics only support slow and minor changes, with the overall social relations demonstrating substantial stability.

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Notes

1 This study included the variables cooking, dishwashing and grocery shopping. This is thus a slightly different "foodwork" category than the one I have created from the SCB data.

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Appendix 1

Table 1. Total averages and averages for people who reported to perform the activities (in parenthesis) for self-reported time spent on total housework, cooking, and dishwashing and table-clearing and childcare, as well as change over time, in three consecutive time-use studies. Ages 20–64.

		Women		Men		Gender gap	
		Weekdays	Weekends	Weekdays	Weekends	Weekdays	Weekends
Total housework	1990/1991	2.19 (n/a)	2.53 (n/a)	0.48 (n/a)	1.18 (n/a)	1.31 (n/a)	1.35 (n/a)
	2000/2001	1.48 (1.54)	2.25 (2.31)	0.50 (1.04)	1.18 (1.34)	0.58 (0.50)	1.07 (0.57)
	2010/2011	1.36 (1.44)	2.09 (2.17)	0.54 (1.08)	1.21 (1.37)	0.42 (0.36)	0.48 (0.40)
	Diff.[a]	-0.43 (n/a)	-0.44 (n/a)	0.06 (n/a)	0.03 (n/a)	-0.49 (n/a)	-0.47 (n/a)
Cooking	1990/1991	0.45 (n/a)	0.58 (n/a)	0.20 (n/a)	0.28 (n/a)	0.25 (n/a)	0.30 (n/a)
	2000/2001	0.39 (0.45)	0.52 (1.00)	0.21 (0.33)	0.30 (0,45)	0.18 (0.12)	0.22 (0.15)
	2010/2011	0.35 (0.44)	0.45 (0.56)	0.23 (0.36)	0.31 (0.45)	0.12 (0.08)	0.14 (0.11)
	Diff.[a]	-0.10 (n/a)	-0.13 (n/a)	0.03 (n/a)	0.03 (n/a)	-0.13 (n/a)	-0.16 (n/a)
Dishwashing and table- clearing	1990/1991	0.22 (n/a)	0.28 (n/a)	0.08 (n/a)	0.12 (n/a)	0.14 (n/a)	0.16 (n/a)
	2000/2001	0.18 (0.28)	0.24 (0.34)	0.09 (0.22)	0.13 (0.27)	0.09 (0.06)	0.11 (0.07)
	2010/2011	0.14 (0.24)	0.20 (0.30)	0.08 (0.22)	0.11 (0.26)	0.06 (0.02)	0.09 (0.04)
	Diff.[a]	-0.08 (n/a)	-0.08 (n/a)	0.00 (n/a)	-0.01 (n/a)	-0.08 (n/a)	-0.07 (n/a)
Childcare	1990/1991	0.46 (n/a)	0.41 (n/a)	0.16 (n/a)	0.22 (n/a)	0.30 (n/a)	0.19 (n/a)
	2000/2001	0.34 (1.39)	0.29 (1.34)	0.17 (1.09)	0.19 (1.19)	0.17 (0.30)	0.10 (0.15)
	2010/2011	0.34 (1.41)	0.34 (1.48)	0.19 (1.19)	0.25 (1.47)	0.15 (0.22)	0.09 (0.01)
	Diff.[a]	-0.12 (n/a)	-0.07 (n/a)	0.03 (n/a)	0.03 (n/a)	-0.15 (n/a)	-0.10 (n/a)

[a]Numbers refer to the calculated differences between 2010/2011 and 1990/1991 for total averages. No difference has been calculated for average time of performers (in parentheses), due to the lack of such data in 1990/1991.