The second shift: Employed women are putting in another day of work at home

ARLIE HOCHSCHILD/*NEW AGE JOURNAL*

Every American household bears the footprints of economic and cultural trends that originate far outside its walls. A rise in inflation eroding the earning power of the male wage, an expanding service sector opening up jobs for women, and the inroads made by women into many professions—all these changes do not simply go on around the American family. They occur *within* a marriage or living-together arrangement and transform it. Problems between couples, problems that seem "unique" or "marital," are often the individual ripples of powerful economic and cultural shock waves. Quarrels between husbands and wives in households across the nation result mainly from a friction between faster-changing women and slower-changing men.

The exodus of women from the home to the workplace has not been accompanied by a new view of marriage and work that would make this transition smooth. Most workplaces have remained inflexible in the face of the changing needs of workers with families, and most men have yet to really adapt to the changes in women. I call the strain caused by the disparity between the change in women and the absence of change elsewhere the "stalled revolution."

The question of who does what at home is a source of deep tension in a marriage.

If women begin to do less at home because they have less time, if men do little more, and if the work of raising children and tending a home requires roughly the same effort, then the questions of who does what at home and of what "needs doing" become a source of deep tension in a marriage.

Over the past 30 years in the United States, more and more women have begun to work outside the home, and more have divorced. While some commentators conclude that women's work *causes* divorce, my research into changes in the American family suggests something else. Since all the wives in the families I studied (over an eight-year period) worked outside the home, the fact that they worked did not account for why some marriages were happy and others were not. What *did* contribute to happiness was the husband's willingness to do the work at home. Whether they were traditional or more egalitarian in their relationship, couples were happier when the men did a sizable share of housework and child care.

In one study of 600 couples filing for divorce, researcher George Levinger found that the second most common reason women cited for wanting to divorce—after "mental cruelty"—was their husbands' "neglect of home or children." Women mentioned this reason more often than financial problems, physical abuse, drinking, or infidelity.

A happy marriage is supported by a couple's being economically secure, by their enjoying a supportive community, and by their having compatible needs and values. But these days it may also depend on a shared appreciation of the work it takes to nurture others. As the role of the homemaker is being abandoned by many women, the homemaker's work has been continually devalued and passed on to low-paid housekeepers, babysitters, or day-care workers. Long devalued by men, the contribution of cooking, cleaning, and care-giving is now being devalued as mere drudgery by many women, too.

In the era of the stalled revolution, one way to make housework and child care more valued is for men to share in that work. Many working mothers are already doing all they can at home. Now it's time for men to make the move.

If more mothers of young children are working at full-time jobs outside the home, and if most couples can't afford household help, who's doing the work at home? Adding together the time it takes to do a paid job and to do housework and child care and using estimates from major studies on time use done in the 1960s and 1970s, I found that women worked roughly 15 more



hours each week than men. Over a year, they worked an extra month of 24-hour days. Over a dozen years, it was an extra year of 24-hour days. Most women without children spend much more time than men on housework. Women with children devote more time to both housework and child care. Just as there is a wage gap between men and women in the workplace, there is a "leisure gap" between them at home. Most women work one shift at the office or factory and a "second shift" at home.

In my research, I interviewed and observed 52 couples over an eight-year period as they cooked dinner, shopped, bathed their children, and in general struggled to find enough time to make their complex lives work.

Even when husbands share the work, their wives feel more responsible for home and children.

The women I interviewed seemed to be far more deeply torn between the demands of work and family than were their husbands. They talked more about the abiding conflict between work and family. They felt the second shift was

ILLUSTRATION BY DEBBIE DRECHSLER

their issue, and most of their husbands agreed. When I telephoned one husband to arrange an interview with him, explaining that I wanted to ask him how he managed work and family life, he replied genially, "Oh, this will *really* interest my *wife*."

Men who shared the load at home seemed just as pressed for time as their wives, and as torn between the demands of career and small children. But of the men I surveyed, the majority did not share the load at home. Some refused outright. Others refused more passively, often offering a loving shoulder to lean on, or an understanding ear, as their working wife faced the conflict they both saw as hers. At first it seemed to me that the problem of the second shift *was* hers. But I came to realize that those husbands who helped very little at home were often just as deeply affected as their wives—through the resentment their wives felt toward them and through their own need to steel themselves against that resentment.

A clear example of this phenomenon is Evan Holt, a warehouse furniture salesman who did very little housework and played with his four-year-old son, Joey, only at his convenience. His wife, Nancy, did the second shift, but she resented it keenly and half-consciously expressed her frustration and rage by losing interest in sex and becoming overly absorbed in Joey.

Even when husbands happily shared the work, their wives *felt* more responsible for home and children. More women than men kept track of doctor's appointments and arranged for kids' playmates to come over. More

Who takes care of our parents?



As American society ages, the issue of elderly care will become more critical.

Most elderly Americans—80 to 90 percent—live outside a nursing home and are cared for by family members. Who are the primary caregivers of aged people and other disabled adults needing some form of assistance? It will come as no surprise to learn that approximately three-fourths or more are female. In the recent past, the spinster daughter was the expected caregiver of a widowed, aging parent. Today, primary caregivers in family settings are overwhelmingly spouses and daughters, followed by sisters, daughters-in-law, nieces, and friends. For women who also work outside the home, including many lower-income women, family caregiving is an added responsibility to the demands of job, children, and housework.

Of course, some men are very effective caregivers. But this situation occurs far less frequently for males than females, because it is a role reversal. For women, caregiving is an expected duty; for men, it is an unexpected expression of love or devotion.

Women are susceptible to what has rightly been called by feminists "the compassion trap." The very nurturing skills and sensitivity that make women more responsive to pain and suffering also make them more willing to take on arduous and often unrewarded personal duties.

As matters now stand, society is counting on women to bear the largest part of the burden of caring for family members who can no longer care for themselves. Yet given the dramatic rise in recent years of women working outside the home, compassionate women may find the pressures unbearable, unless the burden is shared more equitably.

The duty of caring for failing elderly relatives is more than a family matter, a personal dilemma, or a sex equity issue. Basically, it is a problem of how our society views old and disabled people. With the growing numbers of chronically ill, it can no longer be a matter of "out of sight, out of mind." It can no longer be some other family's tragedy. Eventually we must face hard questions, as individuals and as a nation.

—Tish Sommers and Laurie Shields

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mothers than fathers worried about a child's Halloween costume or a birthday present for a school friend. They were more likely to think about their children while at work and to check in by phone with the baby-sitter.

Partly because of this, more women felt torn between two kinds of urgency, between the need to soothe a child's fear of being left at day-care and the need to show the boss she's "serious" at work. Twenty percent of the men in my study shared housework equally. Seventy percent did a substantial amount (less than half of it, but more than a third), and 10 percent did less than a third. But even when couples more equitably share the work at home, women do two thirds of the daily jobs at home, such as cooking and cleaning up—jobs that fix them into a rigid routine. Most women cook dinner, for instance, while men change the oil in the family car. But, as one mother pointed out, dinner needs to be prepared every evening around six o'clock, whereas the car oil needs to be changed every six months, with no particular deadline. Women do more child care than men, and men repair more household appliances. A child needs to be tended to daily, whereas the repair of household appliances can often wait, said the men, "until I have time." Men thus have more control over when they make their contributions than women do. They may be very busy with family chores, but, like the executive who tells his secretary to "hold my calls," the man has more control over his time.

Another reason why women may feel under more strain than men is that women more often do two things at once—for example, write checks and return phone calls, vacuum and keep an eye on a three-year-old, fold laundry and think out the shopping list. Men more often will either cook dinner *or* watch the kids. Women more often do both at the same time.

Over a year, women work a full month of 24-hour days more than men.

Beyond doing more at home, women also devote proportionately more of their time at home to housework than men and proportionately less of it to child care. Of all the time men spend working at home, a growing amount of it goes to child care. Since most parents prefer to tend to their children than to clean house, men do more of what they'd rather do. More men than women take their children on "fun" outings to the park, the zoo, the movies. Women spend more time on maintenance, such as feeding and bathing children—enjoyable activities, to be sure, but often less leisurely or "special" than going to the zoo. Men also do fewer of the most undesirable household chores, such as scrubbing the toilet.



Drawing by R. Chast; ©1987 *The New Yorker* magazine.

As a result, women tend to talk more intensely about being overtired, sick, and emotionally drained. Many women interviewed were fixated on the topic of sleep. They talked about how much they could "get by on": six and a half, seven, seven and a half, less, more. They talked about who they knew who needed more or less. Some apologized for how much sleep they needed—"I'm afraid I need eight hours of sleep"—as if eight was "too much." They talked about how to avoid fully waking up when a child called them at night, and how to get back to sleep. These women talked about sleep the way a hungry person talks about food.

If, all in all, the two-job family is suffering from a speedup of work and family life, working mothers are its primary victims. It is ironic, then, that often it falls to women to be the time-and-motion experts of family life. As I observed families inside their homes, I noticed it was often the mother who rushed children, saying, "Hurry up! It's time to go," "Finish your cereal now," "You can do that later," or "Let's go!" When a bath needed to be crammed into a slot between 7:45 and 8:00, it was often the mother who called out, "Let's see who can take their bath the quickest!" Often a younger child would rush out, scurrying to be first in bed, while the older and wiser one stalled, resistant, sometimes resentful: "Mother is always rushing us." Sadly, women are more often the lightning rods for family tensions aroused by this speedup of work and family life. They are the villains in a process in which they are also the primary victims. More than the longer hours and the lack of sleep, this is the saddest cost to women of their extra month of work each year.

Raising children in a nuclear family is still the overwhelming preference of most people. Yet in the face of new problems for this family model we have not created an adequate support system so that the nuclear family can do its job well in the era of the two-career couple. Corporations have done little to accommodate the needs of working parents, and the government has done little to prod them.

The Reagan and Bush administrations say they are "pro-family" but confuse being pro-family with being against women's work outside the home. During a time when more than 70 percent of wives and mothers work outside the home (the rate is still climbing), the Reagan administration's Panel on the Family offered as its pro-family policy only a package of measures against crime, drugs, and welfare. In the name of protecting the family, the Republicans proposed to legitimize school prayer and eliminate family-planning services. They did noth-

The hard facts about hard work

When it comes to time, men and women are created equal. Each has 168 hours a week. How they spend this time is different. In the past decade there has been a significant shift in who does the housework, with men taking on more household chores.

Surveys of several thousand Americans done in 1965, 1975, and 1985 show that men aged 18 to 65 have been doing a greater share of housework since 1965. This has happened in two phases. From 1965 to 1975, women dramatically cut the amount of time they spent on housework (from 27 to 22 hours a week) as more of them took paying jobs and as they had fewer children. During that decade, the amount of time men spent on housework increased from 5 to 7 hours a week, mainly because men spent more time on traditional male chores such as home repairs and lawn care.

From 1975 to 1985, however, the pattern changed. Men continued to spend more time on traditional male tasks, but they also spent more time cleaning and cooking—a total of almost 10 hours of housework a week. In contrast, women continued to cut back on the amount of time they spent doing the cleaning and cooking, but they also spent more time doing traditional male chores, for a total of about 20 hours of housework a week by 1985.

To analyze who does the housework, the Survey Research Center of Maryland divided housework into eight categories. Four are activities that women spend more time doing than men: cooking (77 percent of the time spent cooking at home in 1985 was spent by women), meals and cleanup (83 percent by women), cleaning house (78 percent), and laundry and clothing care (88 percent). For that reason, the researchers called these activities "female" tasks.

The two male-dominated activities are outdoor work (74 percent of the time spent on yard work in 1985 was spent by men) and home repairs (82 percent by men). The two "equal" activities are garden/pet care, and managerial tasks such as paying bills. The researchers called these four activities "male/shared" tasks. The study showed that women spent more time on female tasks than men spent on male/shared tasks. Women spent 16 hours a week doing the cleaning, cooking, dishes, and laundry in 1985, for example, while men spent only 6 hours a week doing home repairs, outdoor work, and other male/shared jobs.

In all households surveyed, women did 92 percent of female tasks in 1965, 89 percent in 1975, and 80 percent in 1985. In other words, men now do one fifth of the cooking, cleaning, and laundry.

—John P. Robinson
American Demographics

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ing to help parents integrate work and family life. We have to ask, when marriages continue to end because of the strains of this life, is it pro-family or anti-family to make life in two-job families so very hard? As working parents become an interest group, a voting block, and a swing vote in elections, the issue of policies to ease life in two-job families is likely to become a serious political issue in years ahead.

We really need, as sociologist Frank Furstenberg has suggested, a Marshall Plan for the family. After World War II we saw that it was in our best interests to aid the war-torn nations of Europe. Now—it seems obvious in an era of growing concern over drugs, crime, and family instability—it is in our best interests to aid the overworked two-job families right here at home. We should look to other nations for a model of what could be done. In Sweden, for example, upon the birth of a child every working couple is entitled to 12 months of paid parental leave—nine months at 90 percent of the worker's salary, plus an additional three months at about three hundred dollars a month. The mother and father are free to divide this year off between them as they wish. Working parents of a child under eight have the opportunity to work no more than six hours a day, at six hours' pay. Parental insurance offers parents money for work time lost while visiting a child's school or caring for a sick child. That's a true pro-family policy.



A pro-family policy in the United States could give tax breaks to companies that encourage job sharing, part-time work, flex time, and family leave for new parents. By implementing comparable worth policies we could increase pay scales for "women's" jobs. Another key element of a pro-family policy would be instituting fewer-hour, more flexible options—called "family phases"—for all regular jobs filled by parents of young children.

Day-care centers could be made more warm and creative through generous public and private funding. If the best form of day-care comes from the attention of elderly neighbors, students, or grandparents, these people could be paid to care for children through social programs.

In these ways, the American government would create a safer environment for the two-job family. If the government encouraged corporations to consider the long-range interests of workers and their families, they would save on long-range costs caused by absenteeism, turnover, juvenile delinquency, mental illness, and welfare support for single mothers.

These are real pro-family reforms. If they seem utopian today, we should remember that in the past the eight-hour day, the abolition of child labor, and the vote for women seemed utopian, too. Among top-rated employers listed in *The 100 Best Companies to Work for in America* are many offering country-club memberships, first-class air travel, and million-dollar fitness centers. But only a handful offer job sharing, flex time, or part-time work. Not one provides on-site day-care, and only three offer child-care deductions: Control Data, Polaroid, and Honeywell. In his book *Megatrends*, John Naisbitt reports that 83 percent of corporate executives believed that more men feel the need to share the responsibilities of parenting; yet only 9 percent of corporations offer paternity leave.

There's a "leisure gap" between men and women at home.

ILLUSTRATION BY DEBBIE DRECHSLER

A view from other cultures: Must men fear "women's work"?

Anthropologists have found that around the world whatever is considered "men's work" is almost universally given higher status than "women's work." If in one culture it is men who build houses and women who make baskets, then that culture will see house-building as more important. In another culture, perhaps right next door, the reverse may be true, and basket-weaving will have higher social status than house-building.

Anthropologists agree that biology is not a sufficient explanation of male dominance. Following are three different theories anthropologists have suggested to account for the universality of male dominance and female subordination.

• **Nature Versus Culture:** In all cultures women are seen as closer to nature than men, whereas men are seen as more involved with culture than women. Since the cultural is universally valued more than the merely natural, women, by being closer to nature, are therefore devalued.

Women are considered closer to nature than men because their bodies share the same reproductive functions as non-human female mammals. These involve more time, energy, and bodily risk than men's reproductive role. Men therefore have more freedom and energy to invest in technology, trade, games, arts, politics, and religion.

And since women spend more time with young children, who are born incontinent and unsocialized and thus seem more like animals, women are also seen as more connected to nature because of their care of "unacculturated" children. Because of this, women are often seen as more "childlike" themselves.

• **Domestic Versus Public:** Although women's reproductive activities do not inevitably force them to keep their activities close to home, women are more apt than men to do domestic tasks that are easily combined with child care. For the same reason men are more likely to engage in "public" activities that take them out of the home and away from the children. These public, male-dominated activities almost always have commanded more cultural respect than the domestic, less visible activities of women.

• **Object Relations and Family Life:** Psychologists have traced the process by which children become aware of being male or female. It is not until around age three that a child is able to reason that he or she is either a boy or a girl, and always will be. From that time on, one of a child's developmental tasks is to become emotionally secure and happy about being either a boy or a girl.

Here is where the role of mothers as almost exclusive child rearers begins to matter. Both little girls and little boys are naturally attracted by the nurturance and apparent power of the mother, and want to be like her. But a little boy soon finds out that he can't grow up to be like Mommy. He must be like Daddy—the big male person he sees only a short time mornings and evenings.

The boy is caught in a double-bind in that he cannot stay attached to his mother; yet his role model for imitation is largely absent. Thus his sense of being securely male is less solid and he may nurse deep and unconscious doubts about his ability to cope with the male role.

But as the boy grows older, he begins to realize that being male is supposed to be a privilege, and if men are "real men" they are socially more important than women. Already somewhat insecure in his masculinity, he must now try all the harder to prove to himself and the world that he is a real man.

How to do this? The safest way is to have as little to do with women and their activities as possible, to repress and deny any "womanly" qualities or impulses in himself. In extreme cases he may do this by openly scorning or even mistreating women. Or a man may simply avoid women except when he has domestic and sexual needs to be filled, spending the rest of his time in visibly and exclusively male groups. Or paradoxically, he may idealize women, "placing them on a pedestal." This too keeps them at a safe distance, but is often accompanied by impossible demands of "womanly perfection" from them as well.

In some cultures, men may seesaw between attitudes of scorn and idealization, a common feature of the "machismo" cult in many Latin American societies. In such cultures, aggressive displays of masculinity may alternate with reverence for the Virgin Mary and heavy-handedness toward the women in one's own family.

Whatever strategies are used, they allow an insecure man to mask what amounts to an unconscious "dread of women." His earliest associations are still of a mother who seemed all-powerful. When combined with his early deprivation of an available male role model, the result may be a deeply repressed yet powerful conviction that women can somehow strip him of his masculine identity.

In this way we can see how masculine insecu-

rity perpetuates itself from generation to generation. The underfathered boy develops a fragile, ambivalent male identity. To compensate for this insecurity in adolescence and adulthood, he distances himself from women and "women's work." And what is most obviously women's work? Caring for young children. So he avoids nurturing contact with his own sons and unwittingly contributes to *their* development of insecure masculinity, dread of women, and woman-rejecting behavior.

Is there any escape from this vicious circle? Since cultures differ in the extent to which they emphasize the private/public split, it may be instructive to look at one culture that minimizes the gender roles between men and women. I will draw on my own research experience with the Pygmy nation of Central Africa, who live as hunter-gatherers.

Among the Pygmy there are some gender role differences, but the smallness and mobility of the group require close cooperation among all members. Women and children help with some of the hunting, and a woman can call on her husband to care for an infant while she is cooking. Grandparents of both sexes care for toddlers while both parents hunt and gather. Here the public/private split has very little relevance.

Of particular interest is the fact that hunter-gatherers' flexibility in gender roles and cooperation is accompanied by greater intellectual similarity between men and women.

What can we learn from this about our own situation? Some cultural anthropologists say that it is imperative to move in two directions: Men must be integrated into the domestic sphere, sharing in the socialization of children and performing domestic tasks; and women must participate equally with men in the public world of work and culture. Only then can women's status be elevated.

Such changes do not turn men into women and women into men. What is vital in upgrading the status of women's work is not eliminating the presence of gender roles, but rather the degree of proximity, cooperation, and role flexibility that men and women share. In fact, even when men and women do perform a common task—such as child care—they approach it rather differently, and many of these stylistic differences turn out to be very much worth preserving.

—Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen
Daughters of Sarah

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Public strategies are linked to private ones. Economic and cultural trends bear on family relations in ways it would be useful for all of us to understand. The happiest two-job marriages I saw during my research were ones in which men and women shared the housework and parenting. What couples called good communication often meant that they were good at saying thanks to one another for small aspects of taking care of the family. Making it to the school play, helping a child read, cooking dinner in good spirit, remembering the grocery list, taking responsibility for cleaning up the bedrooms—these were the silver and

These women talked about sleep the way a hungry person talks about food.

gold of the marital exchange. Until now, couples committed to an equal sharing of housework and child care have been rare. But, if we as a culture come to see the urgent need of meeting the new problems posed by the second shift, and if society and government begin to shape new policies that allow working parents more flexibility, then we will be making some progress toward happier times at home and work. And as the young learn by example, many more women and men will be able to enjoy the pleasure that arises when family life is family life, and not a second shift. ■

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Domestic chores weren't always women's work

In January 1973 a young criminal named Paul Giles was ordered by a British magistrate to clean an elderly person's house as a punishment for his offense. On hearing this, women around the world might be forgiven for wondering just what heinous crimes *they* must have committed to justify their life sentences of housework.

Women in the industrialized world did not gather together over tea one afternoon and agree to work unpaid at cleaning, cooking, laundry, child care, and nursing out of the sheer kindness of their hearts. No, they were given little choice. They were, as Ivan Illich put it, "flattered and threatened, by capitalist and cleric" into their current situation.

A number of authors have investigated the history of housework and have discovered that the housewife role is a very recent one indeed—and confined to industrialized societies. As sociologist Anne Oakley put it: "Other cultures may live in families but they do not necessarily have housewives. They have women, men, and children whose labor is woven together to create a home and livelihood for the whole family."

As a woman in Kenya, for instance, starts to untie the shawl securing a baby to her back so she can wield her hoe with more freedom among the maize stalks, another child will be there to take the baby from her. While she works, her daughters will be pounding sorghum and fetching water for the evening meal, her sons driving goats and cattle to fresh grazing, her husband sinking wooden poles into the ground for a new house.

All of these activities are work, but those that we would term housework are so intricately interwoven with agriculture that it is difficult to tease them apart. The growing of food and the growing of children are both vital to the family's survival. Without children the food cannot be grown; without food there can be no children. Who would dare make the judgment that holding your youngest baby on your lap is less important than weeding a few more yards in the maize field?

Yet this is the judgment our society makes constantly. Production—of autos, canned soup, advertising copy—is important. Housework—cleaning, feeding, and caring—is unimportant. How did this degradation of domestic work come about? And how is it that women in our societies are expected to do all this work alone?

Well, according to Oakley, Illich, and other historians, this situation set in with the growth of the cities, factories, and mines in the early 19th century. By 1850 half of the United Kingdom population were living in cities. In those days factory and mine owners did not care who did their work for them and hired whole families to dig coal or weave cloth in the textile mills. It might have continued that way, too, except for two reasons.

First was the extraordinarily high infant mortality rate in the dreadful city slums where the workers lived. This came about largely because attention to domestic chores among the new proletariat had been reduced to an absolute minimum, crowded out by the demands of wage labor. Babies were left untended in filthy hovels with no water or sanitation and weaned onto gruel as soon as they were born, to free their mothers for work in the factories. The general "condition of the working class" became a cause for serious concern among capitalists. Malnourished, disease-ridden, stunted, and crippled by the conditions in which they lived, the workers were less and less able to do a good day's work.

Meanwhile, as machines became efficient, fewer workers were needed to work them—which was the second factor contributing to the creation of the housewife.

(At this point the story starts to read like a conspiracy—though in fact capitalism tends to operate more by trial and error, rather like Darwinian evolution, with the "fittest," by which I mean the most cost-effective for capitalists, economic arrangements surviving.) It turned out that the most cost-effective way to run a work force was to remove women from the factories and put them to

work on improving the conditions in their homes. This had the added advantage that only one wage would need to be paid—to the man of the house—to support a working-class family.

Both women and men protested vigorously: the women because they were accustomed to providing for themselves; the men because they resented being made suddenly responsible for their wives and children (compulsory education and child labor laws had barred children, too, from the factories). "The plebeians rioted," says Illich. "And the crowd was led, more often than not, by its women."

The rioting went on until what Illich mischievously calls "the enclosure of women"—the transformation of women into housewives—was completed. In 1737, more than 98 percent of married women in England worked outside the home. By 1911, more than 90 percent were employed solely as housewives. And this pattern was repeated throughout the industrialized world.

Perhaps if women had enjoyed the support of their men from the beginning, they might have been able to resist these pressures on them to provide free domestic services. But the industrial revolution created a split between working-class men and women by, as Illich puts it, "making working men wardens of their domestic women." A similar antagonism between the sexes can be observed today in developing countries where the introduction of cash crops and wage labor has given men—but not women—access to money. The men feel the money is theirs; the women resent their lack of control over the family's income.

Today the carrots and sticks used to force women into domestic work are no longer necessary. We are trained for specific gender roles from the day we are born. So powerful is our training that even the massive influx of women back into the labor force in recent years has had little effect on the division of labor in our homes.

This is because women are trained to *take care* of their loved ones. This means that the housewife role includes much more than the sheer drudgery of providing clean socks. It is also a cool hand on a feverish forehead in the early hours; boiling his eggs exactly the way he likes them; flowers on the table; organizing a treasure hunt for Easter eggs. . . . Domestic labor has become fused in our minds with love.

It is probably not necessary to point out here that *men* do not appear to have the same problem with limiting their devotion. While this is lamentable in many ways, there is a part (a very small part) of me that sympathizes with them.

Men perceive that equating love and domestic work is a trap. They fear that to get involved with housework would send them hurtling into the bottomless pit of self-sacrifice that is women's current caring role. As soon as they do attempt a smidgin of housework, they often find themselves caught up in a wrangle with women about "standards" of cleanliness—a wrangle that is really about deciding when enough is enough. If housework really were only about providing clean socks, then men *might* be more prepared to do their share.

Women have to unpick this confusion of domestic labor (which has its limits) and love. This is not to suggest that we should stop loving. Just that we should stop equating loving with unpaid domestic service as if the two were interchangeable. Ironing shirts yet more perfectly does not increase the sum of human happiness.

—Debbie Taylor
New Internationalist

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