

More on the second shift and related matters - Sherryl Kleinman

Arlie Hochschild used the term “second shift” to refer to the pattern, documented in both qualitative and quantitative studies, that in heterosexual married couples, when both the wife and husband work full-time outside the home (and, in her study, have two young children) the wife/mother is likely to do significantly more of the housework and childcare. The wife/mother is also more likely to take on the role of “house manager.” You only read a short excerpt from her book; you’ll get a fuller picture if you read the rest. It’s called The Second Shift.

Did Hochschild find exceptions? Yes. In approximately 20% of cases where women and men both worked full-time, the couple shared equally in the housework and childcare. These were couples who worked at fairness, so it is possible! These were couples in which men learned not to resist doing what we in our culture call “women’s work” (remember the strategies of resistance mentioned in the article in Men’s Lives). It also occurs in couples in which women have learned not to reinforce this wire; the women have not dropped the issue of equality but have pushed for it. They have also learned to let go of perfectionist standards for the household. One could say that women and men have learned, in these cases, to work together to achieve fairness.

What stats do we have on the second shift from 1965 to 1995? As reported in Harper’s Magazine (April 2000: 61-62): “[in heterosexual households] women still do two thirds of whatever housework—including bill paying, pet care, tidying, and lawn care—gets done...the inequity is sharpest for...cleaning: in the 30 years between 1965 and 1995, men increased the time they spent scrubbing, vacuuming, and sweeping by 240%—all the way up to 1.7 hours per week—while women decreased their cleaning time by only 7 percent, to 6.7 hours per week.” The author adds, “...perhaps the most disturbing finding is that almost the entire increase in male participation took place between the 1970s and the mid-1980s.” This suggests that social change, particularly in the direction of equality, is not linear. The fact that more years have gone by does not necessarily mean that things are fairer now. Again, women and men need to work together to achieve fairness. Both need to be vigilant if they care to maintain fairness.

How can differences in the amount of housework and childcare performed by men and women in heterosexual marriages be explained? In a study of 5000 couples, Brines, a sociologist, tested two models. (To see the full article: <http://www.soc.washington.edu/users/brines/jbrines.pdf>).

The first model is the economic dependency model. This model argues that women have traditionally done more housework and childcare than men because they have been dependent on men’s greater income. In this gender-neutral model, economics is the explanation for why women do more housework and childcare than men. If economics is all that matters, then in cases where women outearn their husbands,

men will do more of the housework and childcare. According to this argument, it is economic dependency of one partner on another, not the sex category of the partner, that predicts who will spend more time on housework and childcare.

The gender display model, on the other hand, predicts that things will look different, depending on the sex of the higher earner and the lower earner. Brines was trying to solve this puzzle (p.653): “The distribution of household responsibilities remains more unequal than many anticipated following the entry of married women into the labor force and increased egalitarian attitudes....Wives’ employment leads to only a very slight increase (1-2 hours per week) in husbands’ housework time.”

Brines found that (p.682): “Wives respond in ways consistent with the dependency model. The same is not true for husbands. Regardless of whether economic patterns of support between wife and husband are measured contemporaneously or over a period of years, dependent husbands do less housework the more they depend on their wives for income.” She found that newly unemployed husbands did a lot of work around the house. But, “husbands who have been unemployed for a longer period of time do no more housework than their fully employed counterparts [i.e., fully employed husbands], and there is some evidence that they may do even less” (p. 677). She explains the men’s behaviors this way: “The more severely a man’s identity is financially threatened—by his wife’s higher salary, for example—the less he can afford to threaten it further by doing ‘women’s work’ at home” (p.665).

Does this mean there are no cases in which women earn more than their male partners and their male partners do more of the housework and childcare? Of course not. There are always exceptions—and we need more studies to understand how couples produce that outcome. The quote, immediately above, suggests that the men who are NOT threatened by their wives’ higher salary will be more likely to do housework. But these exceptional cases should be seen as exactly that: exceptions to the dominant pattern.

Some people would argue that the amount of time spent by heterosexual women on housework and childcare, compared to their male partners, has mostly to do with who is working more hours outside the home. In one way this is true. As Sayer, Casper, and Cohen reported in 2004 (see <http://www.prb.org/Template.cfm?Section=PRB&template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=12023>), “Employed women do less housework and child care compared with women who do not work for pay. [BUT] in contrast, men’s employment has little or no association with time in housework and child care.” What this means is that heterosexual men, on average, are not taking up the slack at home when their female partners enter the workforce. Whether men are employed or unemployed has little effect on how much work they do in the house (consistent with Brines’ finding, above, that men who are unemployed for more than a short period of time refrain from doing housework).

Why do some heterosexual women “give in” to the second shift? Because in our

society women are held responsible for whether the house is a mess and for how children turn out. Motherhood is what sociologists call a “moral identity” — it becomes the basis of judging whether a woman is a good person. The standards for mothering are perfectionistic in this society, particularly for middle-class heterosexual women. But women can learn to resist those standards and not reinforce this wire of the birdcage.

For men, being a breadwinner is a moral identity in our society. If that identity is not lived out, the man (and others around him) may see him as less of a responsible person. This may explain, sociologically, why long-term unemployed men do little housework. To add “women’s work” to his daily routine would further threaten his identity as a (successful) man (in our society). On the other hand, if a man is doing well at the breadwinner role, he may be forgiven for not mowing the lawn. He may be seen as having more important tasks to do related to the workplace and his success in it.

Many women are not demanding that their husbands do a perfect job, but only that their partners do their share. Also, some men resist housework through “strategic incompetence” and other means (see Men’s Lives article on “Strategies Men Use to Resist”). Hochschild was very concerned about divorces that might result from women’s double shift and their resentment about it. That resentment, and the struggles in the marriage that ensue, can erode love.

Hochschild is not denying the work that men do around the house. As she put it (p. 261): “Twenty percent of the men in my study shared housework equally. Seventy percent of men did a substantial amount (less than half but more than a third), and 10 percent did less than a third.” Hochschild added that “even when couples share more equitably in the work at home, women do two-thirds of the daily jobs at home, like cooking and cleaning up—jobs that fix them into a rigid routine. Most women cook dinner and most men change the oil in the family car. But, as one mother pointed out, dinner needs to be prepared every evening around 6 o’clock, whereas the car oil needs to be changed every six months, any day around that time, any time that day. Women do more childcare than men, and men repair more household appliances. A child needs to be tended daily while the repair of household appliances can often wait ‘until I have time.’ Men thus have more control over **WHEN** they make their contributions than women do” (p. 261). Women’s chores around the house, like men’s, involve physical labor; but women are also more likely to be the household manager (noticing what needs to be done and making sure she, or he, gets it done) and engage in emotional work (with children, especially). This combination of roles in the workplace and inside the home is draining.

How might the second shift affect heterosexual women’s ability to compete in the workplace? How might it affect how male employers think about women as employees? Remember when we did the “he works, she works” exercise? Think about how you expected bosses and co-workers to respond to a picture of his

(heterosexual) family on the desk in the workplace compared to her (heterosexual) family's picture, and to the announcement that his wife is having a baby rather than that she is having a baby. (In other words, think about connecting the wires of the second shift and the wage gap.) Even if a particular woman enjoys some of the housework and childcare and feels a sense of empowerment in taking care of the home, does it translate into economic or other power?

And what do heterosexual men lose in not sharing the second shift with their female partners, especially when it comes to childcare? For one thing, they lose knowledge of their children. One could argue that in a humane world, workplace policies would allow—even encourage—both men and women to spend less time at work, allowing them to take care of children and aging parents and engage in volunteer work. In other words, as with all the wires, there are human costs for both heterosexual women and heterosexual men when it comes to the birdcage.

How does the second shift operate in lesbian couples and in gay male couples? There is less research on these arrangements, but from what we know from quantitative studies and qualitative interview studies, lesbian relationships are more likely to come closer to an egalitarian model than gay male relationships, and heterosexual relationships are the least likely to obtain equality (compared to lesbian relationships or gay male relationships). Why would these differences exist? When there is a man and a woman in a relationship, societal expectations about who is supposed to do what are clearer (with women expected to do more of the second shift). With two women or two men in a domestic partnership, the gender order is challenged with regards to societal expectations. So one might expect greater negotiation around housework and the possibility of greater equality. Also, given gender socialization, one might expect both women in a lesbian relationship to feel they should do the second shift, which would lead to greater sharing of tasks.

However, the study of domestic labor among lesbian couples and among gay male couples that most closely resembles Hochschild's study of heterosexual couples finds that an unequal division of labor with regard to specific tasks and who does how much housework still occurs. Chris Carrington's (2002) *No Place Like Home: Relationships and Family Life among Lesbians and Gay Men* included in-depth interviews with many lesbian couples and gay male couples; importantly, he also lived with some of the couples and observed them on errands and so on. His data indicate that if a partner makes more money and/or spends a lot of time at work outside the house (some partners did their paid work from home), they were less likely to do domestic work; the partner who was around the house more did more of the housework. Yet, in individual interviews, most of the partners described their relationships as equal when it came to domestic work. Carrington found that lesbian couples and gay male couples had an investment in the BELIEF that they had an egalitarian relationship, but that inequalities existed and persisted.

As in heterosexual relationships, he found that class-privileged "lesbigay families will achieve greater parity in their relationships through relying on the poorly paid labor

of undocumented workers who clean their house, tend their garden, and do their laundry and other domestic tasks. Any discussion of equality within such a family must make clear that it is an equality premised upon a broader pattern of inequality” (2002: 21).

Carrington also analyzed how gender played out in the domestic arrangements among lesbian couples. He found that in lesbian relationships in which one partner did much more of the housework than the other, the more domestically involved partner gave credit (in interviews with the researcher) to a partner who had not really done the work! (p. 53). Carrington argues that the partner who did more of the housework was trying to communicate to the interviewer that the less involved partner was indeed living up to societal expectations for women (doing housework) and thus was not violating that role. Believing that the less domestically-involved partner did more than she actually did also implied that the two women were living up to egalitarian standards when it came to who did housework, when the pattern was in fact unequal.

Gay male partners who did less of the domestic work tended to say that the partner who did more of the housework did LESS than was the case. As one man put it in an interview, “I worry that people will get the wrong idea about Bill [his partner]. I know that he does a lot of stuff around here, but he really wants to become an artist, and I don’t want people to think of him as a housewife or something” (p. 54). The implicit put-down of “housewife” shows the devaluation of domestic work and equating that devaluation with women/female role (i.e., “women’s work”). Overall, Carrington found that domesticity is devalued and invisible in many of the lesbian relationships he studied—as in heterosexual relationships—and that the partner who did more of the domestic work had less overall power in the relationship. In break-ups, Carrington found that the partner who had done much more domestic labor didn’t see his or her contribution as deserving of compensation (even though they took care of the home, putting in years of domestic labor as compared to the higher-earning partner).