

Good housekeeping the second shift essay



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Within the last half century, the number of women participating in the workforce has increased exponentially. Women are gaining more and more equality in the social, economic and political affairs, but gender inequity within the home regarding the division of household labor remains. Women are still primarily responsible for housework and childcare. Arlie Russell Hochschild's concept of the "second shift" describes the situation of many women today. The "second shift" refers to all the chores and tasks that women are expected to complete concerning maintenance of the home and childcare after they have completed their shifts at work.

Much attention has been focused on the gender division of household labor by sociologists and feminists academics, but the emotional and psychological effects of the "second shift" on working mothers have been covered to a lesser extent. Drawing on my personal experiences, I predicted that women who are not able to devote the time, effort and monetary resources needed to fulfill the responsibilities of home maintenance and childcare that they are expected as women, wives, and mothers to satisfy suffer from stress and feelings of failure for not living up to the standards of womanhood and motherhood that American society demands. To test this prediction, I conducted an exploratory survey of 34 working and non-working mothers to determine the time they spend on housework and at work, their attitudes towards housework, and their top sources of stress.

The results of this survey have provided valuable insights into role strain, or role stress, that working wives and mothers experience from their conflicting roles as workers, wives and mothers, and the negative attitudes towards

housework, the stress, distress and decline in emotional and physical well-being that arise out of this role stress.

“ I don’t know of a working mother who can balance a career, children and a marriage. One of these has to give.”

– Nina Tanagawa, a working wife and mother interviewed by Arlie Russell Hochschild in *The Second Shift*

The number of women employed outside of the home has increased drastically over the last century and yet studies have shown that overwhelmingly it is women who continue to do the majority of household chores. A significant source on the prevalence and impact of this phenomenon is *The Second Shift*, a book written by sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild in 1989. Although more than nineteen years have passed since this book was published, it applies well to the situation many working mothers find themselves in today as inequality within the housework between male and female parents and partners remains a major social issue.

Hochschild found that even in dual-earner households (where both parents work for pay outside of the home), women worked an average of fifteen hours per week more than men performing housework and childcare. According to this statistic, the average working mother in 1989 worked an extra month of twenty-four hour days (Hochschild 1989: 3). A more recent study found that women spend on average of 27 hours per week doing housework, compared to men’s average of 11 hours (“ Housework Fairness?” 2005). Hochschild labeled this large amount of time spent by women on

housework and childcare after returning from work each day as their “second shift” (4).

Even though women are slowly gaining equality with men in the workplace, there remains much gender inequality in the division of labor within the home. The imaginaries of the “happy housewife” (a dedicated and doting wife and mother) and the “supermom” (the working mother who can “do it all,” raise well-adjusted children, succeed in her career, cook and clean with expertise, maintain a satisfying relationship with her husband/partner, and still look beautiful) have strong influences on the division of household labor within modern families (Hochschild 1990: 1). Women feel pressured to keep their homes clean and orderly and to show through strenuous effort within the home and involvement at school and in extracurricular activities that they are dedicated to the development of their children.

They also feel pressure in their work lives to excel, and pressure in their personal lives to be fit and beautiful. Working women often do not have adequate time and energy to meet all of these demands. They may become stressed and suffer a decline in their physical and emotional well-being due to the large amount of time required for the “second shift.” Working women may feel like they are failing their families by not living up to society’s expectations of wives and mothers. They may feel like they are failing in their gendered status-roles by not fulfilling to society’s definition of womanhood.

I have researched the division of labor within the home and the effects that the unequal distribution of housework has on women from a structural-

functionalist perspective. Specifically, my interest lies in the stress, distress and feelings of inadequacy that working wives and mothers may feel when they cannot complete the “ second shift,” and the guilt they may suffer from spending less time with their children than is expected of them. My research examines the effects that the “ time-bind” of the “ second shift” has on working women’s feelings of successfully performing their gender and their gendered status-roles (Hochschild 2008; 1989).

Drawing on my personal experiences, I predicted that women who are not able to devote the time, effort and monetary resources needed to fulfill the responsibilities of home maintenance and childcare that they are expected as women, wives, and mothers to satisfy suffer from stress and feelings of failure for not living up to the standards of womanhood and motherhood that American society demands. This prediction is grounded in my personal experiences of being raised by a single-mother, research done by other scholars on this subject, and my own survey of working and non-working mothers.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Background and Basis for Understanding the “ Second Shift” and its Effects of Working Mothers

The concept of the gender-family nexus explains the relationship between the division of household labor and gender as a category of social stratification. The gender-family nexus is defined as “ the ongoing interaction between the oldest and most pervasive form of stratification in the world, gender, and one of the oldest and most pervasive institutions in the world, family.” The gender-family nexus is an ongoing process in which gender and

family shape each other: gender defines and is defined by and within the institution of the family. The gender-family nexus permeates social life and shapes personhood. Men and women are socialized to perform masculinity and femininity, respectively, within the family, and these performances become internalized as intimate elements of people's identities.

The gender-family nexus is deeply connected to the heterosexual imaginary. It involves ongoing work. It and affects and is affected by other institutions and forms of stratification. (Niebrugge-Brantley 2008). My research is guided by a structural-functionalist perspective of the gender-family nexus. Each of the elements of the gender-family nexus create, influence, or are influenced by the "second shift" and its effects on the emotional well-being of working mothers. Below, I define the concepts of gender and family and explore how they affect each other and combine to produce the "second shift." I define gender as a category of social differentiation; males and females of the human species are distinguished from each other by complementary traits and roles which are attributed to (but not necessarily caused by) their physical, sexual differences. From a structural-functionalist perspective, gender is viewed as complementary status-roles.

A status is a structural position within the social system. A social system is a number of human actors who interact with one another in a situation with a physical or environmental context. Roles are the behaviors that an actor does within a status in order to fulfill that status in the context of its functional significance for the larger system. (Ritzer 2007: 73). Gender itself is a status, and other statuses, such as wife, mother, husband and father are gendered. "Woman" and "man" are statuses that entail specific and

complementary roles. The role of women is to be passive and emotional, while the role of men is to be active and intellectual. These status-roles are complementary, but also differently valued. The status-role of “ man” and other status-roles that are gendered male receive a greater degree of social prestige, power and privilege than the status-roles that are gendered female. Gendered statuses within the family such as “ mother” and “ father” also entail complementary roles. The father’s role is to provide economic support to his children, access to social networks, moral guidance, and a positive model of male adulthood (Coltrane 2007: 452).

The mother’s role is to feed her children, to clean them and their surroundings and to provide love, nurturance and moral guidance.

Housework and childcare are considered to be women’s roles. Husbands and fathers do not think of these tasks as their responsibility, even when their female partners are not able to fulfill them. Arlie Russell Hochschild explained male and female perspectives on housework: the “ male way” is to see housework as something a person “ would or would not do,” something to “ help” with depending on time and interest in doing so. The “ female way” is to see housework simply as something that needs to get done. (1989: 53).

The differential valuation of men and women’s roles is evident in the issue of the “ second shift.” The “ second shift” arose alongside an increase in women’s entrance into the roles traditionally reserved for men (i. e. work outside of the home) in order to gain the economic advantages, social prestige and feelings of personal worth that are provided to the men in these roles. The persistence of gendered labor inequality within the home is

caused in part by the reluctance of men to participate in the lesser-valued roles that women perform and to avoid being “emasculated” by performing “women’s work.” For example, in *The Second Shift*, Hochschild describes the division of household labor between Nancy and Evan, married parents of one child who both worked full-time. Evan refused to share the housework equally with his wife, feeling that this was not his responsibility as a man and that he was entitled to refuse to participate in tasks that he saw as his wife’s (Hochschild 1990: 40). I define the family as a social institution involving two or more people related by blood, marriage, adoption or friendship, who are usually living together and are united in the oversight and bearing and raising of children (Macionis 2003: 463).

From a structural-functionalist perspective, the family is an institution: an interrelated system of status-roles, norms and sanctions organized in the interest of satisfying some basic social need[s] (Niebrugge-Brantley 2008). The family in contemporary American society is comprised of gendered status-roles (mother, father, son daughter, etc) which complement each other in order to accomplish the functions of the family. According to Linda L. Lindsey and Stephan Beach, authors of *Essentials of Sociology*, the functions of the family include reproduction, regulation of sexual behavior, socialization of the next generation, and provision of protection, affection and companionship for society’s members, as well as social placement (consignment of society’s members into various social hierarchies such as class, race, religion, etc) (2003: 290).

The roles within the family are divided according to gender in order to accomplish the family’s functions. However, this gendered role-division only

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works for nuclear families, households consisting of a heterosexual couple and their biological or adopted child/children, in which only the father/husband works outside of the home and the mother/wife stays home to care for the household and the children. This ideal is impossible or unattractive for many people. Single-parent households, homosexual couples, blended and extended families, and dual-earner families do not fit this “ nuclear” model and the gendered status-roles attached to them are problematic. The heterosexual imaginary of the nuclear family and the idealized gendered division of roles within it create the “ second shift.” The fact that women still have responsibility for the care of households and children despite their entrance into the workforce highlights the pervasiveness and influence the heterosexual imaginary.

Women who work and still fulfill most or all of the home and child care experience role strain: their roles as wage laborer and mother/wife are both time-consuming and essential to the well-being of their families, but these roles are conflicting. Working women adopt inflexible schedules in order to complete the duties of both roles, leaving little time left for relaxation. I believe that this overextension of working mothers might be better described role stress, rather than role strain, to underscore the emotional, physical and psychological effects of these conflicting roles.

For the purposes of my research, I define the “ home” as the dwelling of a person or family where domestic affairs take place; as the physical environment in which the gender-family nexus and the “ second shift” occur. The home is the site where the gendered status-roles of men and women are most evident. I view the home as a site that shapes the personhood of men

and women due to their relationships within the family and within the home. The definition of womanhood is profoundly linked to the home and to the housework and child care which take place within it, while the definition of manhood reflects men's separation from the home. I also view the cleanliness of the home as a source of stress and as a symbol to working women of their failure/inability to live up to the social expectations placed upon them in their roles as wives and mothers.

My interest in this topic and the predictions that I have made about working mothers' stress and distress caused by responsibility for the "second shift" stem from my personal experiences as the daughter of a working mother. Prior to my parents' divorce, my mother was unemployed and stayed home to care for myself, my two siblings, and the household while my father worked.

After my parents divorced, my mother retained custody of myself and my siblings and she entered the work force full-time. As a family, our financial situation was tenuous for many years: my mother was forced to work very long hours to cover all of the expenses of our family of four. My mother never earned very much at any of her jobs, so she worked 60+ hours per week and sometimes juggled two or more jobs. My mother did not have a car so her commutes to and from work kept her out of the house even more. There were times when I literally did not see my mother for a number of days or even weeks in a row.

Obviously, my mother had no time to spare to clean the house. Chores were delegated somewhat inefficiently to my brother, my sister and me. Being

young and usually unsupervised, we ignored these chores or accomplished them quickly and incompletely. The state of our house upset my mother very much. She would often break down and weep, overwhelmed by the burden of housekeeping that she would never have time to address. I remember her screaming at us that “ The O’Malley’s house doesn’t look like this mess! And they have seven boys!” But what she never acknowledged was that Mrs. O’Malley did not work. She stayed home and cleaned around the clock. Of course her home was cleaner than ours.

My mother’s reactions to the state of her home grew more and more severe over time. As our financial situation grew more desperate over the years and my mother took on more hours and even jobs to support us, her emotional stability grew thin. My mother smokes cigarettes and drinks coffee all day long; she doesn’t eat much and long ago gave up on family meals since she was never home in time to fix them. These stimulants kept her going, but she always had dark circles around her eyes and a tired smile. When my mother returned to a filthy home, she would scream, cry, or sometimes just go into her bedroom and sleep for days. These breakdowns were caused by the stress of her life, represented and set-off by the dirtiness of her home.

Fortunately, she always snapped out of it, and when she did she would take off more time from work (or quit whatever job(s) she had) and clean the entire house, room by room. When the house was finally clean, we would sit and relax together as a family. At these times, she smiled more and let herself unwind. Eventually she would have to go back to work, and resume her hectic schedule. My mother’s home was seldom clean, and she almost never had time to spend with us, but she was a good mother by my

standards. She worked hard to provide for us. I am proud of her, but she is not proud of herself. She suffers from feeling like she failed us, feeling like she over-reacted, and feeling like she never got it right. ***

In the interest of locating sociological evidence to support my thesis that working mothers suffer emotional distress from the “ second shift” and the role stress of being unable to fulfill the demands of their conflicting roles, I performed a review of the sociological literature on working mothers, their attitudes towards housework and the stress that the unequal division of household labor causes them (Allen and Quinn 1989; Atkinson 1992; Burden 1986; Campbell and Moen 1992; Hochschild 1989; Hochschild 2008; Kandel et al. 1985; Kirk and Okazawa-Rey 2007; Lengermann and Niebrugge 1998; Looker and Thiessen 1999; Ogletree et al. 2006; Westwood 2002; Williams 2000)

The gendered division of household labor has been a popular topic of research for sociologists, but a specific focus on the emotional and psychological effects of this inequitable division on working mothers as a group has been examined to a lesser extent. From the literature on this topic several themes emerged that provide excellent support for my thesis and insight into women and men’s attitudes towards housework and the “ second shift.” The first is an attempt to explain the inequitable distribution of household labor among dual-earner families and the association of housework with women (Hochschild 1989; Lengermann and Niebrugge 1998; Looker and Thiessen 1999; Williams 2000). Second is the internalization of the unattainable expectations for the status-roles of wife, mother, and worker and the stress, emotional distress and role strain that this causes in

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working mothers (Allen and Quinn 1989; Burden 1986; Campbell and Moen 1992; Hochschild 1989; 2008; Kandel et al. 1985; Kirk and Okazawa-Rey 2007; Westwood 2002).

Third is women's assumption that their inability to fulfill the "second shift" is due to personal inadequacy rather than an inequitable division of household labor (Allen and Quinn 1989; Hochschild 1989; Kandel et al. 1985; Westwood 1984; Williams 2000). Fourth is observation of the different attitudes towards housework among men and women (Hochschild 1989; Ogletree et al. 2006). The fifth and final theme is the particular focus on working-class and poor women's attitudes towards housework and traditional women's roles (Hochschild 1989; Looker and Thiessen 1999; Westwood 2002).