

# A breadwinner rethinks gender roles

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A Breadwinner Rethinks Gender Roles The economic recession has undoubtedly increased the unemployment rates across the U. S. More and more men are becoming ' stay at home dads', thus challenging the status quo. This would be a good thing according to conflict theorists, who believe that the male exploitation of women is detrimental to society; any sort of exploitation of rich to poor, male to female, must be deconstructed. " A Breadwinner Rethinks Gender Roles" supports the rising number of traditional gender roles being reversed in today's society.

However, just because the roles are switched, does not mean that true gender equality exists. Social norms establish the privileges and responsibilities a certain status may occupy. Females and males, mothers and fathers are all statuses with distinct role requirements that are perceived as " normal" to society. The status of a mother includes ' expected' roles involving love, caretaking, duties in the kitchen, etc. The status of a father primarily includes the expected role of a breadwinner.

The huge increase of women in the workforce, an achieved status, may unfortunately lead to the experience of Durkheim's concept anomie, or uncertainty of rules/norms in a society. These ' traditional norms' have begun to change, but new ones have not yet developed, " To put it simply, because we're not there yet..." (Kathleen Gerson, quoted in article). So why does gender inequality persist even though men and women are not tied to traditional roles as they were in earlier times? Conflict theorists argue that women are at a disadvantage because of the inequalities built into the social structure.

This social structure 'built' into society refers to the agents of socialization that have structured what it means to be gendered-female and gendered-male; gender roles are learned through the socialization process. Children learn proper behavior for girls and boys, first—and most crucially—through parents, then the media (Disney movies) and finally peer groups or other sources of socialization. Even at an early age, children develop stereotypical notions of both genders and then use those notions to systematize their thoughts and behavior.

However today, the media puts out ideas that are inconsistent with ideas of family, education and so it is directly antagonistic to the other important institutions in society. These pre-conceived ideas of gender-typical behavior have prevented individuals from truly assuming the identity of a reversed role, " Men have a sense of esteem, of identity that comes with being the provider...Women don't get the same identity benefit — there's a sense that one has a double burden. " (Barbara Rissman, quoted in article). The author clearly struggled with her new gendered-male role.

She wasn't prepared for the role conflict she would experience in partaking a ' man's role', " I didn't think I'd feel so guilty, or derelict in my womanly duties, when my husband is quick to comfort our fussy 4-month-old—or reminds me where we keep the muffin tin. Or that I'd feel so much chest-tightening pressure when I monitor our bills. " (Dunleavey). When asked, " Did your concept of ' equality' ever include supporting the family? ", the author had to admit her answer was no. Women have consistently complained and fought for equality— but is that what they really wanted?

Now that we have it, we are “ seething — with uncertainty, resentment, anxiety and frustration. ” (Dunleavey) The pre-ordained notions of what is right vs. wrong, female vs. male that have been engrained in our heads from early childhood and then through constant resocialization over the years, have prevented some of us from truly being equal, even when we are on the surface—equal. A conflict theorist would point out for this case, that the need to eliminate inequalities does not just include eliminating the suffering of those on the bottom, but eliminating the suffering of those on the top as well.

Despite the increase of women in the labor force and the now blurred boundaries of gender discriminations, men and women live in a society where the demands of balancing work and parenting are unsettled. Women were not prepared for what true equality would actually entail—but can we blame them? Literature Cited: Dunleavey, M. P. “ A Breadwinner Rethinks Gender Roles. ” The New York Times 27 January 2007, Section C 1: 1. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/27/business/27instincts.html>