



## SOME CONCEPTUALISATIONS AND MEANINGS OF DOMESTIC LABOUR

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In this article, it is suggested that the definitions and conceptualisations of domestic labour should emphasise that it is productive, involving many different types of work and that it is also about constructing 'proper' and 'appropriate' gender relations. An overview of studies, mostly from Anglo Saxon contexts, show that unpaid domestic labour is persistently segregated by gender and continues to be, in practice, mainly 'women's work'. The implications, meanings and consequences of this are outlined as well as a number of explanations that elucidate why inequitable divisions of labour within the home are considered to be fair. It is concluded that the gendered division of domestic labour is not based on a static agreement between individuals but rather should be viewed as a way to 'do gender' that also produces appropriate gender relations. Clearly, these relations as interpersonal processes in combination with prevailing discourses (in the media, community, and government policies) constitute, maintain and enhance a gendered division of labour within a particular context. Thus, to avoid generalisations as household tasks convey social meanings about masculinity and femininity, it is important to understand that conceptualisations, meanings and values vary according to historical, socio-cultural contexts such that a universalising framework is inappropriate.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

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Throughout history, domestic labour has been conceptualised in many different ways and given diverse meanings (and values) in different socio-cultural contexts. As a historical construct, it is not homogeneous. Hence, roles, expectations and

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experiences associated with domestic labour are not universal. In other words, the images, attributes, activities and appropriate behaviour associated with domestic labour are always culturally and historically specific and cannot be assumed. Moreover, it is not only necessary to consider variations between cultures but within cultures. Hence, it is inaccurate to assume a 'single' society where the culture is 'shared' by all members (e.g., where domestic labour is conceptualised and given the same meaning by everyone) since divisions of gender, age, status, class, race, and ethnicity are inherent in complex societies.

As a 'broad' starting point to this article, while acknowledging that vastly different findings may be found in other socio-cultural contexts, unpaid domestic labour of the household lost value with the development of industrialisation in the 19th century. Specifically, women's domestic labour lost its footing as a recognised aspect of economic life so that the image of the 'goodwife,' valued for her contribution to household prosperity was replaced by the image of a 'dependent' and a 'non-producer.' It was no longer even defined or counted or recognised as work and until recently was not considered a fit subject for research (Oakley, 1974; Strasser, 1982). Researchers<sup>1</sup> have found that domestic labour is often invisible, devalued, and taken for granted, without psychological rewards (Bergmann, 1986; Gove & Geerken, 1977; Gove & Tudor, 1973; Oakley, 1974; Chafetz, 1991; Hooks, 1984). Likewise, there are no financial rewards and there is no opportunity for advancement or promotion for work well done. As well as lower levels of work fulfilment, there is less likelihood of receiving gratitude for doing unpaid work. In sum, household tasks have been typically described as ungratifying, unfulfilling, and unenjoyable; tasks that do not give a person a chance to learn or develop as a person (Berk & Berk, 1979; Gove & Tudor, 1973; Hill & Stafford, 1980). Housework has also been portrayed as isolating (Bernard, 1972; Gove & Tudor, 1973) and described as routine, monotonous, menial, repetitive, and mindless (Berheide, 1984; Bernard, 1972; Gove & Tudor, 1973; Oakley, 1974; Grote, Frieze & Stone, 1996). According to Clark & Stephenson (1981), many housewives themselves accept the view that their role is unimportant and insignificant.

In their critique of the dominant paradigms regarding household labour, Ahlander and Bahr (1995) lament that these models *assume* that housework and childcare is a drudgery, demeaning and a source of inequality. Namely, they argue that recent scholarship masks moral meaning because it focuses on power, dependence and equity issues while disregarding norms that are not present in other institutional contexts such as obligation and reciprocity associated with caring. They stress

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that the moral dimensions of housework should be brought into discussion and recommend that family researchers re-conceptualise 'housework as family work with its basis in moral obligation (1995:54).<sup>2</sup> Bonney and Reinach (1993) also argue that housework is diverse, and the tendency to represent it in negative terms tends to undermine an understanding of its complexity, and its ability to be a satisfying and rewarding form of work. Evidently, it is important to investigate all the different situations in which housework is performed if we are to understand more completely the varied meanings it carries for the people that do it. Housework is also performed in one-person and one-sex households, and contributions are sometimes made for reasons having more to do with needs, altruism and sociability than with relative power (DeVault, 1991). On a positive note, some researchers have shown that a high level of autonomy may be derived from domestic labour. Housewives report that a lack of supervision, being able to set their own schedules and organise their own work are the most valued aspects of housework (Bird & Ross, 1993; Andre, 1981; Berheide, 1984; Kibria, Barnett, Baruch, Marshall & Pleck, 1990, Ross & Wright, 1998). As a positive role aspiration, Looker & Thiessen (1999) found that working class females tend to describe their mother's work in positive terms and define housework as a viable option in adulthood. Undoubtedly, household labour is productive work, as it involves physical activity, yields a clean and pleasing living environment, all of which can reduce psychological stress. However, Bird (1999: 33) aptly points out that because housework is more routinised on average as well as less rewarding and fulfilling than employment, the negative effects of performing large amounts of housework may be exacerbated.

## **DEFINITIONS OF DOMESTIC LABOUR**

Earlier definitions of housework were simple and did not include the whole array of activities that constitute domestic labour. Delphy (1984) defined it as work that services other members of a household or family. Mackie & Pattullo (1977) concluded that housework is everything that is part of organising and caring for the family. A significant difference is apparent between these two early definitions of domestic labour that may determine and influence attitudes, judgements, and evaluations. Servicing suggests subordination while organising and caring might suggest skill, control and inner motivation (Speakman & Marchington, 1999). Clearly, there is considerable ambiguity and contradiction in understanding the nature of work performed within the home. For example, the relation of childcare within the general definition of housework is a source of controversy. Namely, childcare (e.g., read-

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ing a story) is not easily connected to general household 'servicing' tasks such as washing and ironing children's clothes, making it difficult to separate the leisure and work components. Another simple definition describes it as 'all household and family maintenance activities undertaken by family members on a routine basis' (Berk, 1985:2). Aptly, Spitze (1999) suggests that some household tasks that are routinely defined as housework can be performed by persons who are not family and/or household members, whether paid helpers or unpaid family or friend helpers. By and large, the limited common-sense definitions have been criticised and there has been a call to develop a more complex, comprehensive understanding of the variety of tasks involved in performing family work. For example, Delphy and Leonard (1992) in response to these criticisms have suggested that domestic work includes practical work on people or things (often called "housework" or physical child care tasks), emotion work (creating bonds of solidarity, providing moral support, developing a sense of personal strength), cultural work, childbearing and child rearing. Seery and Crowley (2000: 103) define family work as complex and involving the co-ordination of thoughts, emotions and behaviours. Beyond providing for the family's physical maintenance, it also supports the emotional and psychological well-being of both individuals and the family collectively.<sup>3</sup>

## **CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF DOMESTIC LABOUR**

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Domestic labour should not be conceptualised in a limited or bound ahistorical manner within a universalising framework. Moreover, important analytical distinctions need to be made among different aspects of domestic labour. According to Coverman (1989) domestic labour includes household tasks, childcare, emotion work and status enhancement. Household tasks and childcare includes much planning, organising and managing that is central to the housework and childcare getting done and this management work falls principally to women (see Mederer, 1993; Walzer, 1996). With regard to the emotion or relationship work in families, women perform most of this work (see Erikson, 1993; Tingey, Kiger & Riley, 1996) and are content with this arrangement (Tingey et al., 1996). Status enhancement is work done by one partner (typically the woman) to aggrandise the other partner's career (see Coverman, 1989). For example, a woman's job to prepare dinner for her husband's boss to enhance her partner's career opportunities is often overlooked as domestic labour. Pavalko and Elder (1993) propose that this type of wives' support, although seemingly invisible, is nevertheless important. Daniels (1987) reviews different types of 'invisible work' that are often overlooked. These include: emotion work (Delphy & Leonard, 1992;

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England & Farkas, 1986; Hochschild, 1982, 1989), care work (DeVault, 1991; Thorne, 1992), interaction work (Fishman, 1978), sociability work (Daniels, 1987; DeVault, 1991), kin work (di Leonardo, 1987); and household management work (Mederer, 1993). As Lorber (1994: 174) argues, "the expansion of domestic work beyond housework and childcare turns it into social reproduction." Thus the meaning is extended from the tasks of housework, such as child care, cooking, cleaning, laundry, shopping, yard and repair work, to include emotional work, social caring and overall nurturing of all the family members. This is all part of homemaking that according to Duras (1990: 50) is "an activity that has nothing to do with men. They can build houses, but they can't make homes." Clearly, gender is likely to be significant in the experience of home as long as women make homes for men and take the major responsibility for raising children.

Finally, the type of task carries with it a high- or low-control factor. Traditionally, 'male-type' tasks are high-control. These types of tasks allow a good deal of choice and flexibility in terms of when and how they are performed. 'Female-type' tasks afford little discretion (doing dishes, preparing dinner, bathing children, changing nappies) and cannot be easily postponed (Riley & Kiger, 1999: 546). Compared to employment, household labour is associated with lower levels of sense of control<sup>4</sup> and higher levels of psychological distress (Bird & Ross, 1993; Brown & Harris, 1978; Ross & Bird, 1994; Thoits, 1983). Performing burdensome amounts and an inequitable share of household labour are likely to reduce perceived control over one's life and, in turn, increase psychological distress. For example, Ross and Wright (1998) found that compared to full-time employees, homemakers have a lower sense of control in part because their work is more routine, less enjoyable, and more isolated.

Appropriately, Speakman & Marchington (1999) claim that it is important to differentiate between merely carrying out household tasks<sup>5</sup> and having responsibility for ensuring that the tasks are done. Responsibility for a task tends to be linked with task ownership (Deem, 1988) that is associated with standards (Cliff, 1993; Madigan & Munro, 1996; McRae, 1986). When the task is carried out by one who does not have ownership, then their status is often that of 'helper' (Oakley, 1974). In many households, men who contribute to domestic labour still see themselves as 'women's helpers' rather than as full partners.<sup>6</sup> Cliff (1993) found two potentially reinforcing aspects as to why many men do not engage in certain aspects of housework. These include i) the claim of ownership of the work by the woman and ii) the declared incompetence of the man. Speakman and Marchington (1999) claim that the gender-dif-

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ferentiated ownership of a task appears to override knowledge and ability to be able to undertake the task in such a way that men either feign ignorance and/or incompetence. Seemingly, task mystification (or task disinterest since involvement would entail self-degradation) is used as an instrument to avoid knowledge acquisition. Men's self-declared incompetence thus reinforces the imperative that women are 'naturally' more competent and 'rightfully' ought to undertake household work.

Inevitably, home spaces where domestic work is carried out hold different meanings for women and men.<sup>7</sup> Attempts have been made to produce a universal one-size-fits-all definition of household. However, it is crucial to recognise the specific particularities of households in different socio-cultural contexts. Anthropologists, Hammel & Laslett 1974 and Sanjek 1982 have categorised five major household types that constitute a cross-cultural scheme that is sensitive and adaptable to ethnographic variation.<sup>8</sup> As much research has shown, the ideology of the 'home', associated with women and domesticity, is a place of work and an important site for the reproduction of unequal gender relations. Feminist writing on the home highlights the complexity of the meaning it has for women. Game and Pringle (1983: 137) describe the home as "crucial to women's identity and the site of their oppression." Flax (1990: 53) depicts it as a locus of "complex fantasies and conflicting wishes and experiences." For men, the home is often a space associated with pleasure and relaxation rather than drudgery.

## **DIVISION OF LABOUR IN THE HOUSEHOLD**

Unpaid domestic labour remains stubbornly segregated by gender,<sup>9</sup> in that housework and child care continue to be, in practice, primarily 'women's work' (Armstrong & Armstrong, 1990; Weiss, 1990; Kiernan, 1992; Bittman, 1999; Wilkie, Ferree & Ratcliff, 1998). Extensive research has shown that in many households, women spend significantly greater amounts of time on domestic labour than men because they continue to undertake the bulk of housework duties, childcare and other 'invisible' tasks that are a crucial part of domestic labour. Despite entry into the labour force in increasing proportions, wives remain disproportionately responsible for household maintenance (Baxter, 1992; Blair & Johnson, 1992; Ross, 1987; Shelton & John, 1993; England & Farkas, 1986; Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994). In a recent study of 1,256 men and women in the United States, Bird (1999) found that married men reported performing 37 percent of the household labour, and women (who worked outside the home or were full-time homemakers) almost twice as much – more than 70 percent. Lennon and Rosenfield (1994) also found that wives regardless of em-

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ployment status, consistently perform twice as much housework as their spouses. Even full-time working wives according to some researchers do more of the work at home than their husbands (Berardo, Shenan & Leslie, 1987; Geerken & Gove, 1983). It could be argued that women who perform important work outside the home enjoy 'a more' equitable division of labour in the home. However, researchers have shown that without a high level of respect for the wife's work, a more egalitarian relationship is unlikely (Risman and Johnson-Sumford, 1998; Schwartz, 1994). Predictably, with children present in the home, women were more likely than men to perform the bulk of the housework, a phenomenon that predicted lower marital satisfaction for women, but higher satisfaction for men (White, Booth & Edwards, 1986). An Australian survey of time use (see Bittman, 1992) showed that mothers of preschoolers spent an average of 56 hours a week in child care and household tasks, compared with 17 hours for men, and that mothers' employment status did not affect their unpaid workload. Social classes and educational levels were of no significance in a study by Moss, Bolland, Foxman & Owen (1987) who found a consistent trend towards a traditional sex-based division of labour among parents. Hochschild (1989) found that mothers that work outside of the home, finish their paid work and return home to what she called the 'second shift'.<sup>10</sup> Not surprisingly, the unpaid domestic worker is the most female-dominated occupation and would be the largest occupation if it were counted (Andre, 1981; Bergmann, 1986).

Despite substantial increases in women's labour force participation, there has been little or no increase in men's housework and childcare over the past three decades (Coverman & Sheley, 1986; Shelton, 1992). Moreover, men whose wives work outside the home spend the same amount of time doing housework as those whose wives are full-time homemakers (Berardo, Shenan & Leslie, 1987; Pleck, 1985). Although men's participation in domestic life and in particular their contribution to child care has become a high profile issue (White, 1994: 3) their practices, in many cases, are far from expectations. For example, research in Australia by Bittman (1992: 46-48) in the early 1990s showed that once men became fathers they spend less time at home doing household chores and more time in their paid jobs.

In their study of sixty nine male process shift workers employed in the North West of England, Speakman & Marchington (1999) elaborate how housework is regarded by other male workers in a somewhat confused manner in that it is seen as an inappropriate activity because it is 'women's work' or is trivialised as 'goofing off'. Not surprisingly, Rosenwasser, Gonzalez & Adams (1985) found that 'househusbands' are rated more negatively than housewives are. Overall, negative reac-

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tions are often expressed when men deviate from traditional gender norms within the household in comparison to women who are often praised for 'doing it all'.<sup>11</sup> Aptly, Deutsch & Saxon (1998: 680) suggest that the underlying message in these appraisals is tantamount to discouraging women from trying to get their husbands to share.<sup>12</sup> In addition, holding up the 'superwoman ideal' is implicitly endorsing inequality. Clearly, from these examples, criticism (and appraisal) act as 'aligning action' mechanisms for preserving cultural norms (Stokes & Hewitt, 1976). In other words, doing housework may be a devalued activity, but women are still expected to do it and are criticised if they don't whereas men are not and are subject to criticism if they do.

Stereotypically, the most time-consuming household responsibilities performed on a daily basis are typically performed by women (see Thompson & Walker, 1989; Ferree, 1991). These 'female' tasks include childcare, grocery shopping, laundry, making meals, clean-up after meals and routine general house cleaning and are predominantly indoors. In comparison, 'male' tasks are those mostly outdoor household jobs done less often and usually performed by men e.g., yard work and household maintenance.<sup>13</sup> Tasks that are male-typed often involve the highest levels of help (Spitze, 1999:741). This is consistent with Cowan's (1987) argument that historically, male tasks have been more likely to be replaced by purchased goods and services. Nevertheless, when female tasks are replaced by others (e.g., female domestic helpers, grandmothers, female relatives, kindergarten teachers, other 'housewives', and female child care workers) this gendered division of domestic work does not violate the expression and experience of male dominance. Interestingly, Garrido & Acitelli (1999:632) found that regardless of sex, the more relational individuals' identity<sup>14</sup> was, the more likely they were to perform those tasks that directly involve care and maintenance of the family and household that are usually associated with women. They elaborate that these tasks are more likely to be carried out by those high in relational identity because of their importance to the success of a marriage or relationship. Another reason, they claim, why those high in relational identity are more likely to perform household tasks typically carried out by women may be the strong relational bonds that are developed as a result of performing these tasks. Berheide (1984) found that most people feel strong emotional attachments to the household members they laboured for.

In marital relationships, according to Kluwer, Heesink and Van de Vliert (1996:960) housework implies a division of joint work (the more one does, the less needs to be done by the other and vice versa). They compare it to time spent on paid



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work that may vary according to personal preference, capacities and basic financial needs. In addition to doing more, the time most women spend in domestic labour varies throughout the life course, expanding and contracting in accordance with their responsibility for others (i.e., care of their children, spouse, the elderly and sick) (see Glezer, 1991). In comparison, almost regardless of their position in the life course, men's weekly hours of domestic work tend to be a fixed quantity and not regulated by immediacy or changes in the family's needs. Accordingly, domestic labour rarely disrupts the careers of men but often does have adverse affects on the careers of women. Bittman (1999:29) outlines the social disadvantages that flow from women's family responsibilities. These include: i) interrupted labour force attachment and downward social mobility; ii) lower lifetime earnings, less employment security; iii) increased exposure to the risk of poverty; iv) increased dependency on a male provider and low marital bargaining power; and v) restricted opportunities for public participation since family responsibilities are organised around family homes.

In many cases, if women do less paid work, they are required or it is expected that they engage in more domestic labour whereas men under the same circumstances can literally choose between paid work and leisure. A persistent 'housework gap' has left most women with more work and less leisure time than their male counterparts- a factor that often leads to resentment (see Russell, 1983; Shelton, 1992; Dempsey, 1997). According to some estimates, women average two to three fewer hours of leisure a day than do married men (Gerson, 1994). As Lorber (1984) found in interviews with women physicians in her sample, it is often free time, not work, that is given up for children and other obligations.

## **SATISFACTION WITH HOUSEWORK**

Paradoxically, a large percentage of women seem untroubled and seemingly unconcerned by the explicitly inequitable divisions of labour in the home. Many studies have found that women, despite the fact that they are responsible for the bulk of the work, are satisfied with an 'unfair' division of labour<sup>15</sup> (Benin & Agostinelli, 1988; Blair & Johnson, 1992; Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994; Greenstein, 1996; DeMaris and Longmore, 1996). Major (1993) argued that women are relatively satisfied with an unequal division of housework because the distribution (a) matches their comparison standard (b) is perceived as justifiable, or (c) matches what they are socialised to want or value from their relationship. Some studies have shown that non-traditional women who work tend to report more dissatisfaction with the division of household labour and their rela-

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tionships than traditional women (Greenstein, 1995; Pina & Bengston, 1993) because they are more likely to perceive the inequalities inherent in the typical division of household labour as..... being forced to work a second shift (Greenstein, 1995: 40). (See Baker, Kiger & Riley (1996) and Tingey, Kiger & Riley (1996) for more studies illustrating women's dissatisfaction because they have to do most of the housework). Satisfaction may be related to who does what around the household rather than the amount of time spent doing household chores. For example, Benin & Agostinelli (1988) show that wives' levels of satisfaction increase when husbands do some of the wives' traditional tasks, even when the amount of time husbands spend on household chores is much less. Using data from an Australian national survey-1993 of 2,780 men and women, Baxter & Western (1998) attempt to explain why women (almost half the sample) paradoxically report high levels of satisfaction with these arrangements. They claim that gender differences in satisfaction with housework between men and women may reflect women's greater propensity to define objectively unsatisfactory circumstances as satisfactory. They also propose that women may not require their objective circumstances to be the same as men's in order to be satisfied with them. For instance, they may report satisfaction with circumstances, even though they are less than ideal.

## **EXPLANATIONS OF THIS PARADOX**

A number of explanations have been suggested so as to elucidate these apparently contradictory arrangements of inequitable divisions of labour within the home.

Some studies suggest that a woman's lack of resources and power within families<sup>16</sup> leads women to accept unequal divisions of labour (Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994; DeMaris & Longmore, 1996). This resource-power perspective, originating in Blood and Wolfe's (1960) classic study suggests that spouses who bring more resources (e.g., income, occupational status, education) into the household will be able to bargain their way out of more housework (see also Coverman, 1985; Deutsch, Lussier & Servis, 1993). For example, in a cross-sectional study, Lennon & Rosenfield (1994) found that women's perception of fairness of the division of labour in their home is affected by the context, that is, the structural realities of their lives. Those women who had fewer alternatives to marriage and less economic resources were more likely to view performing a large share of the housework as fair, while women with more alternatives viewed the same division as unjust. According to Baxter & Western (1998:103), fewer resources and options will be associated with lower expectations so that women will be more inclined to define their situation as fair and

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be satisfied with even minimal involvement by husbands in domestic labour.

Secondly, a model of gender role ideology asserts that beliefs about and attitudes towards gender roles are responsible for the division of domestic work (Baruch & Barnett, 1981; Deutsch et al., 1993; Greenstein, 1996; Huber & Spitze, 1981). Within the framework of this model, a traditional gender role ideology that encourages women to accept unequal workloads may be responsible for women's relatively high levels of satisfaction. This explanation focuses on socialisation and gender role attitudes, suggesting that men and women who have grown up with and come to hold an ideology supporting a gender-based division of household labour will enact this in adulthood (Goldscheider & Waite, 1991).<sup>17</sup> Komter (1989) argues that couples use ideological justifications of presumed gender differences to reinforce a traditional and unequal division of labour in the household. Further, there is no conflict over this issue because gender ideology has sufficiently shaped the expectations and experiences of these spouses (e.g., she enjoys it more, he's not as good at it) such that inequalities in the division of household labour are seen as equitable and as acceptable. This hidden power that is shaped by gender ideology can be uncovered by examining "regularities in the inconsistencies and contradictions in the common sense thought and daily experiences of married men and women" (Komter, 1991: 60). For example, if most men and women still define child care and housework as women's work, then women are less likely to be critical of inequitable divisions of labour in the household (Thompson, 1991). Hochschild (1989) in her study found three types of gender ideologies: "traditional," "egalitarian," and "transitional." Traditionals want the woman to base her identity on her work in the home, and they want the man to have more power in the marriage and to identify with his work outside the home. Egalitarians want each spouse to identify with the same spheres-work, home, or both-and they want the spouses to have equal power in the marriage. Transitionals fall between these two extremes. Unlike the traditionals, they hope that the wife can identify with her work role as well as her domestic role. Unlike egalitarians, however, transitionals want work to be more important for the husband's identity than for the wife's. Moreover, Baxter & Western (1998) advocate that women who see childcare and housework as an essential part of being 'good' wives and mothers<sup>18</sup> are more likely to be satisfied with unequal divisions of household labour than women who reject traditional role ideology since a traditional view of gender role responsibilities implies and legitimates an unequal division of domestic labour. Subsequently, women who see house-

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work only in terms of its virtue and goodness vis-a-vis the family, could well be experiencing 'false consciousness' (see Riley & Kiger, 1999: 545) that is, an unwillingness and inability to acknowledge their gender-related exploitation.

A third explanation is that wives spend fewer hours in paid employment so it is inevitable that housework then becomes the women's responsibility and not an opportunity to have more leisure time. This perspective focuses on more rational and practical considerations whereby time and/or energy availability affects one's contribution to housework (see Coverman, 1985). Recently, a life course perspective has focused on the implications of the timing, sequencing and duration of life events such as marriage and child bearing for task allocation (Aviolo & Kaplan, 1992; Pittman & Blanchard, 1996). Interestingly, Davies & Carrier (1999:38) report that results from studies examining the relationship between time availability and involvement in family work are inconsistent and appear to vary depending on the country reflecting divergent work-family policies. Unequivocally, paid employment gives women more negotiating power and resources to disclose their discontent. Nonetheless, if women are considered to be a secondary labour force this downplays their contributions to the household in terms of income and simultaneously supports the notion of man as primary worker presuming his greater attachment to work and incomparable necessity for leisure.

A fourth explanation is that women enjoy housework tasks more than men and are therefore satisfied with arrangements that leave them with the bulk of household work. This reputed 'enjoyment' is most probably men's presumption at work who use gender socialisation practices to legitimate their explanations as to why girls and women (because they know this) should like this work. In addition, not all household tasks can be rated equally in terms of enjoyment. For example, Berheide (1984) and Kahn (1991) found that cooking and caring for children are rated as enjoyable by homemakers. Ratings such as these may be justifiable since cooking can carry with it connotations of creativity while caring for children does not have to be a servicing activity like cleaning that always scores low on pleasure scales. Rather than enjoyment, earlier studies have acknowledged the negative feelings generated by housework such as isolation, boredom, and repetitiveness (Oakley, 1974; Malos, 1980) or research in which housework is presented by women as 'drudgery' (Gavron, 1966; Hobson, 1978). In Oakley's study (1974) among a small group of London housewives, most women reported dissatisfaction with their status and disliked the work they did at home. More recently, Sullivan (1996) found no evidence that women enjoy domestic work more than men since women are usually left with the least enjoy-

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able tasks (e.g., cleaning, clothes care and food preparation) whereas the more enjoyable ones such as some forms of childcare are undertaken by men. As a concluding point, enjoyment of a particular task is not a fixed quality, invariable across individuals or different contexts (Van Berkel & De Graaf, 1999: 805) such that assessments of men and women may well depend on their actual situation at home.

According to Pittman, Solheim, & Blanchard (1996) all these perspectives conceptualise the division of labour as *an outcome* rather than an interpersonal process of dividing labour, such that the implicit assumption seems to be that the division of labour is based on a static agreement between spouses. Clearly, it is important to investigate and understand how couples actively and continually (re)construct, (re)negotiate and resist gender roles and to pay attention to the way interpersonal processes in combination with prevailing discourses (e.g., in the media, community, government policies, etc.) constitute, maintain and enhance the gendered division of labour.

### **'DOING GENDER' TO EXPLAIN PATTERNS OF HOUSEWORK**

Using a gender constructionist argument, doing housework and childcare (and being satisfied with this arrangement) is more an indication of what women and men *'should do'* than it is about their actual capabilities, affinities, time availability and resources (Oakley, 1974; Berk, 1985; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Specifically, gender is created, not just in the doing of particular acts but in the meanings associated with them (West & Zimmerman, 1987) and the family is often the locus of the creation of gender (Osmond & Thorne, 1993). Since gender is constructed in a particular context it is variable in composition and essence such that a universalising framework discounts the multiplicity of cultural configurations of male and female. Ortner and Whitehead (1981) argued that while there are, no doubt, some natural bases of gender distinctions, and of sexual and reproductive behaviour, these are relatively minimal in terms in which gender, sexuality and reproduction are culturally defined. Or in the words of J. Butler (1990:8) "not biology, but culture, becomes destiny" such that gender as a social construction does not flow automatically from genitalia and reproductive organs, the main physiological differences of males and females. Furthermore, members of the same gender category are located differentially in the social structure so that they both subjectively and literally occupy different social worlds and realities. Namely, women become 'women' by participating within those available sets of social meanings and practices that describe them as women and these discourses

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provide the available positions or 'ways to be' that shift in contradictory ways.<sup>19</sup>

Relevantly, the concept of *doing gender* is indispensable when explaining patterns of housework performance (Berk, 1985; Brines, 1994; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Decisions about who does what at home are not first and foremost determined by the needs of the household but rather reflect and reinforce the much broader organisation of society around assumptions of gender. Studies like that of Komter (1989), Hochschild (1989) and Sharpe (1984) are part of a growing stream of research that frames housework patterns as fundamentally 'gendered'. Certainly, what most research has shown is that gender, more than any other factor, explains how family work is allocated (Major 1993). In sum, gender theorists affirm that mainstream research has failed to address the fact that housework not only produces goods and services but also reproduces gender relations (Berk, 1985; Fenstermaker; West & Zimmerman, 1991; Thompson & Walker, 1989). Thus, from the gender perspective, performing housework is productive in material terms (e.g., tidy home, clean clothes, cooked meals, etc.), but the gendered division of household labour is viewed as a way to "do gender" that also produces proper gender relations (Berk, 1985; Brines, 1994; Coltrane, 1989; DeVault, 1987, 1991; Fenstermaker, West & Zimmerman, 1991; South & Spitze, 1994; Blain, 1994) and social identities (Fraser, 1989). Gender, they believe, consistently predicts family work participation because this work is an "occasion for the accomplishment of work and the affirmation of the essential natures of women and men" (Fenstermaker et al., 1991:301 authors' emphasis). Moreover, housework is said to produce gender through the everyday enactment of dominance, submission and other behaviours symbolically linked to gender (Berk, 1985; Ferree, 1991). It is argued that all work, including household work takes on symbolic meaning and its division along gendered lines establishes boundaries between men's and women's work.

Kroska (1997: 307) argues that although the "doing gender" approach highlights the links between gendered identities and behaviours, gender is not specified or given an operational definition. She claims that West & Zimmerman (1987: 127) who popularised this paradigm define gender as "the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category". However, she contends that this overlooks the importance of self-meanings because normative conceptions are deduced on the basis of respondents' behaviour and not measured. As a solution, Kroska (1997) proposes a model that couples the "doing gender" approach with affect control theory (Heise, 1979; Smith-Lovin & Heise, 1988) and identity the-

ory (Burke, 1991). She claims that this model explains many of the previous findings on the division of labour in the home while also filling some theoretical gaps.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF POWER RELATIONS**

In their structural account, Riley & Kiger (1999:547) claim that men use power and authority to create the woman's sphere and then relegate women to this sphere. They suggest that women might engage in housework for moral reasons<sup>20</sup> but that power-related issues of (in)equity, (in)justice and exploitation in household labour are of importance. In an attempt to move beyond a microanalysis of the gendered division of labour, Davies & Carrier (1999) pay attention to the connections between micro and macro levels of social life so as not to limit our understanding of division of household labour. They recognise that power relations constitute a key, albeit complex and multi-dimensional component of gender at the macro and micro levels of society. Their research findings indicate that sex composition of one's occupation,<sup>21</sup> hours worked and income reflect power relations at the macro level, specifically tapping the gendered nature of the labour force. Moreover, they show that these structural arrangements also translate into power at the individual level, serving as 'bargaining tools' in the negotiation of task distribution shaping the division of labour within the home. Davies & Carrier (1999:37-9) clearly demonstrate how the advantaged status of men within marriage regarding domestic work and their ability to maintain this status and not 'give it up' is inextricably tied to the broader organisation of society around gender. Other studies have also illustrated how the labour market is central to reproduction and maintenance of a traditional division of labour, that is, in heterosexual nuclear families where the wife performs a disproportionate share of the family work regardless of her employment status (Arber & Ginn, 1995; Peterson & Gerson, 1992). From these examples, it can be clearly seen that the negotiation of the division of paid and unpaid labour is critical to the creation and maintenance of gender relations (Hartmann, 1981; Berk, 1985; West & Zimmerman, 1987; Ferree, 1991). By reacting to an array of opportunities and constraints in the structure of unpaid and paid work, and by 'doing gender' in these two locales, men and women perpetuate a work-family system that provides economic independence and power for men, and economic dependence and subordination for women (Chafetz, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Davies and Carrier (1999: 47) maintain that gendered inequities at the macro level translate into power differentials at the micro level-specifically, by more often empowering men with deci-

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sion-making responsibilities which then allow them to exempt themselves from a greater sharing of female tasks.<sup>22</sup> The authors recommend that future research is required to extend and better develop the concept of power relations as they reflect and create gender, paying particular attention to the intersection of race/ethnicity and class in understanding of gendered division of labour.

## **INEQUITABLE SHARING OF LABOUR**

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A lack of shared responsibility in and of itself increases the sense of inequity. In intimate relationships, inequity is a source of psychological distress (Mirowsky, 1985; Walster, Walster & Bersheid, 1978). With regard to equity in the household, Baxter & Western (1998:104) point out that satisfaction is not necessarily a simple function of the degree of equity in hours spent on household tasks. Hence, equity may be judged in terms of time and/or in terms of some other desired outcome (i.e., avoiding tasks that one dislikes, caring partner, partner prepared to put some input into women's work). Pertinently, carrying out household tasks as well as having responsibility for them should be considered in assessments of equity. Oakley (1974: 160) aptly points out that "as long as the blame is laid on the woman's head for an empty larder or a dirty house it is not meaningful to talk about marriage as a 'joint' or 'equal' partnership". Lastly, change towards egalitarian behaviour in marriage is slow because couples stick to an allocation of responsibilities by 'blatant normalcy' (see Komter's 1985 study of Dutch couples). Typical examples of this mechanism are husbands and wives agreeing that 'she, of course, has more time,' 'he has less talent,' 'he is not born to it' or 'she enjoys it.' These are cognitive mechanisms used by both men and women to legitimate an unequal distribution of housework. Accordingly, wives' perceptions of inequity in the performance of housework frequently decline over time (McHale & Crouter, 1992; Schafer & Keith, 1981).

Contradictorily, individuals may hold a strong commitment to the egalitarian sharing of housework, but in reality there is much inequality in the division of domestic tasks.<sup>23</sup> In other words, what people say is not necessarily what they do. Appropriately, Deutsch and Saxon (1998: 668) argue that egalitarian principles do not free one from possessing double standards. Research has shown that spouses with egalitarian attitudes about gender roles experience more uncertainty and conflict about gender roles within the relationship because these roles are subject to change (Scanzoni, 1978; Scanzoni & Fox, 1980) in comparison to spouses in traditional marriages where there is consensus about rules, roles and norms. Ac-



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According to popular opinion, at best men are making selective choices such that change is confined to the more enjoyable or more highly valued activities. Interestingly, Coltrane (1990) found that US couples who delayed childbearing tended to be more egalitarian in the division of work; male partners were more interested and showed more commitment to the parenthood role than younger fathers. From this example, it seems that older parents seem to be able to deal inequities in the household more effectively and efficiently. In any case, double standards according to Gershuny, Godwin & Jones (1994) may be due to the 'theory of lagged adaptation'. They assert that men need more or better socialisation if they are to perform the more equitable roles of husband and father newly demanded of them. Due to traditional upbringing, the theory goes, men lack domestic competence and appropriate role models but after a sufficient interval men will adapt. Bittman & Matheson (1996:31) argue that longitudinal data does not support this hypothesis although there is some evidence for a very short-term lagged adaptation (e.g., men work out how to use appliances after five years) but that the sons of women influenced by second wave feminism are no more 'housework ready'. The alternative but phony solution to reconciling egalitarian values with unequal practice is pseudomutuality. 'Pseudomutuality' is a miscarried solution to the problem of a disjunction between belief in equality and actual inequality. According to Bittman (1999) there are two chief mechanisms at work in the creation of pseudomutuality, namely, i) misapprehension and ii) discursive redefinition of equality whereby men tend to inflate the size of their own contributions and diminish the significance of their partner's contribution.

### **THE INEQUITIES OF DOMESTIC LABOUR AND ITS EFFECTS ON MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS**

Inevitably, an unfair segregation and division of household labour can have disconcerting effects upon a marriage. Considerable research has shown that the division of labour appears to be a prominent issue around which marital conflict develops (Benin & Agostinelli, 1988; Berk, 1985; Blair, 1993; Rice, 1979; Scanzoni, 1978; Sutor, 1991; Yogev, 1983; Yogev and Brett, 1985). Compared with paid work, Kluwer et al., (1996: 965-6) found that the division of household labour leads to marital discord more often. They also showed that wives' dissatisfaction plays a crucial role in conflict about the division of labour whereas husbands are more likely to avoid discussion. In another study among Dutch couples, Kluwer, Heesink and Van De Vliert (1997) found that traditional wives and wives with traditional husbands are more inclined to avoid conflict when

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they experience discontent with the division of domestic labour compared to egalitarian wives or wives with egalitarian husbands. Other researchers have suggested that women in traditional relationships are more likely to withdraw because they feel less powerful or feel discouraged by traditional husbands (Berheide, 1984; Hochschild, 1989; Mederer, 1993; Pleck, 1985; Scanzoni & Fox, 1980). DeVault (1990) elaborately discusses the lack of open conflict<sup>24</sup> over housework and argues that it is still difficult for women to complain and engage in conflict over the division of labour. Being a 'wife' in many socio-cultural contexts, demands a certain amount of submission and compliance with no claim to superiority or dominance over a husband. Hence, wives may be reluctant to exercise control out of fear of appearing to be powerful or even a 'bitch.' A bitch is not a wife; she is uncaring, unloving, and domineering (Tichenor, 1999: 648). As an example of womanhood affirmation, Tichenor (1999) found that the women in her study of status-reversal couples backed away from power derived from occupational status and income. They either give up control or adopt strategies that make it appear their husbands are in control. Doing gender in this way reaffirms them as 'women' and reinforces their position as 'wives' in the marital relationship, thereby reproducing the gendered relations of power in their marriages.

In Australia, Terry, McHugh & Noller (1991) found that a perception that the male partner was contributing fairly to household tasks was associated with women's perceptions of increasing marital quality over the transition to parenthood, while a perception of inequity was associated with decreased marital quality. In their study, Grote, Frieze & Stone (1996) found that family work traditionalism has symbolic and psychological meaning in terms of men's and women's experiences of love which, in turn, predict marital satisfaction. More specifically, for both men and women, when one is less exclusively responsible for family tasks because the other spouse is participating more, this condition has a favourable association with feeling more erotic toward and connected (Friendship-based love) with the spouse and ultimately more satisfied in the marriage (Grote, Frieze & Stone, 1996:224). Alternately, they also found that the more traditional the division of family work, the less strong was erotic and friendship-based love for their spouses.

## **TOWARDS A MORE BALANCED DIVISION OF DOMESTIC WORK**

As social norms regarding gender egalitarianism in family work roles become accepted and as women begin to feel more entitled to an equal sharing of family tasks (Major, 1993), it is likely that the division of family work will become more balanced,

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despite the presence or number of children in the home. Coltrane (1997) propounds that the sharing of housework and childcare will increase as wives are employed more hours, as they earn more of the household income, and as they are defined as co-providers. Changes such as these will encourage women to relinquish total control over the home and children. He also asserts that fathers' growing attachment to parenting and changing paternal values that reflect stronger family involvement as well as less devotion to rapid career advancement will encourage shared parenting. In addition, delaying parenthood and smaller total family size will also eradicate the inequities and foster sharing. Although Coltrane's findings have implications for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, he notes that it is difficult to determine the pace of these changes.

Considering women's disadvantageous position of having to bear the responsibility of unpaid work that is more often than not demeaning, time-consuming and menial, Bitman (1999) outlines three remedies that have been proposed to alleviate hardships. These include (1) renegotiation of domestic division of labour (2) substitution of market provision for unpaid labour and (3) public provision of key services. Using time use and expenditure data from Australia, his findings unsurprisingly show that most changes in the domestic division of labour have come from women's rather than men's adaptations and that much of the change is attributable to increased reliance on market substitutes for women's domestic labour. This seems to suggest that state support, as in many cases, does not directly and immediately lead to improvements in all aspects of gender relations because many vestiges of a traditional ideology remain intact despite public provision of key services and family-friendly policies (see Windebank, 1999). Nonetheless, entitlements to generous parental leave, high quality child care, and to family-friendly hours of paid work are all necessary components of an equitable solution to the difficulties of combining work and family in 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Scandinavian countries for example, are typically considered to have made considerable progress toward gender equality by implementing a variety of welfare programs designed to alleviate the conflicting demands of home and work (Ruggie, 1988; Moen, 1989; Gelb, 1989; Castles, 1991; Sainsbury, 1994). The introduction of parental leave policies, a progressive taxation system, extensive childcare facilities and flex-time have all been designed to minimise the conflicts between paid and unpaid work. Moreover, fathers are encouraged and obliged to take advantage of these liberal family-friendly workplace policies.

## CONCLUSIONS

As mentioned at the beginning, most of this article cites research that has been conducted in Anglo-Saxon contexts as very little or no research on domestic labour has been carried out elsewhere. Since the existing research may have been interpreted from a certain angle or set of interests, the investigators may not have asked all the questions that might be relevant in a different socio-cultural context. The possibility that significant differences with regard to the gendered participation and patterning of housework may be found across different historical, socio-cultural contexts must be taken into consideration. In addition, it is important to determine how different countries address gender inequality and how this in turn reflects (non)egalitarian views about gender roles as well as levels of satisfaction among individuals. In a cross-national study on gender equality and participation in housework, Baxter (1997: 239) found that the gendered division of labour does not vary markedly across Sweden, Norway, the United States, Canada and Australia reflecting an unexpected consistency across these countries. She reports that while there is some evidence to suggest that men do a slightly greater share of housework in countries such as Sweden,<sup>25</sup> the data indicate that women do approximately three-quarters of routine household tasks. Her findings seem to suggest that the division of labour appears to be resilient to broader macro-level variation. In comparison, research on the gendered division of domestic labour and its related meanings in post-socialist, transitional countries would undoubtedly give quite a different representation and contribute to our understanding of this theme. In some of these countries, women faced resurgent nationalist movements that advanced the notion that the best place for women is at home. For example, in the early nineties, pro-natal population policies and other public discourses (e.g., in the media, religious institutions) in Croatia echoed a retraditionalisation of female roles. As an independent nation state with a new political system in the midst of a war that undoubtedly strengthened existent patriarchal values as well as an economic crisis, women were being depoliticised, disciplined and domesticated (Tomić-Koludrović & Kunac, 1999: 96).

In any case, it appears that housework persists in being work that is synonymous with women. Its gendered nature is generally rationalised as 'natural' and therefore 'inevitable'. Not only is housework usually portrayed as women's work, the homemaker role is neither rewarded financially nor viewed in a positive light. As it is unpaid, it is not *recognised* as a work role but rather as a component of women's marital and/ or

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child-rearing roles. Since it is often not recognised as work, the constraints and frustrations associated with housework often go unacknowledged (Wilson, 1986). Inadvertently, women play a dynamic role through their daily rehearsal of socially expected gender roles and relations in the production and reproduction of gender inequalities. In other words, gender inequalities are reflected in, and reinforced by women's participation in domestic labour that encapsulates a system of gender relations that silently disadvantages women in their access to power relations. Moreover, through 'doing gender' an unequal distribution of household labour persists as well as the belief that the distribution of those tasks is fair and equitable. Although women may be fully capable of resisting, they do remain constrained by an overarching social system, so that scattered and uncollected resistances do not disrupt existing unequal gender roles and relations. Accurately, as argued in this article domestic labour is both productive, sometimes 'invisible' work and about constructing "proper" and "appropriate" gender relations. More specifically, as Ferree (1990: 874) states the division of labour is 'gendered labour, that is, a set of culturally and historically specific tasks that convey social meanings about masculinity and femininity, and therefore about power'. Evidently, based on the research conducted so far on this subject there is a compelling need to focus on the conceptualisations, meanings, values, and negotiations embedded in household labour (that indubitably vary in different socio-cultural, historical contexts) that sustain household inequalities.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Most of this article cites research that has been conducted in Anglo-Saxon contexts as very little or no research on domestic labour, in comparison, has been carried out and published elsewhere.

<sup>2</sup> Pertinently, Riley and Kiger (1999:546) contend that Ahlander and Bahr (1995) focus on women (not the family) and housework so that the 'woman question' around housework becomes the problem: men are nowhere to be found.

<sup>3</sup> See DeVault's (1991) work, *Feeding the Family* that examined women's family work as it relates to feeding the family as an illustration of these complexities. She demonstrated that these tasks go beyond cooking or shopping because women construct family meals through their sociability work. Her research shows that by attending family members' schedules, coordinating a menu that the family enjoys, and managing mealtime interaction women literally constructed a social sense of family, that is, a feeling of warmth and belongingness among family members.

<sup>4</sup> Perceived control versus powerlessness represent two ends of a continuum, with the belief that one can and does master, control, and

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shape one's own life on one end of the continuum, and the belief that one's actions cannot influence events and outcomes at the other (Mirowsky & Ross, 1989).

<sup>5</sup> Skill in doing certain household tasks is likely to be gender related due to patterns of childhood socialisation, adult experiences and a history of doing gender in married couple household (Gerson, 1985; Goldscheider & Waite, 1991; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> In English-speaking countries, the common practice of referring to married women as 'housewives' reinforces the gender specificity of domestic work (Oakley, 1990) with women at the heart of the domestic ideal.

<sup>7</sup> Conceived in a dialectical fashion, space as a social construct embodies dominant ideologies about what types of activities take place where, when and by whom; and, once in place, it assumes a life of its own, and perpetuates those dominant ideologies regarding appropriate gender roles and relations by physically constraining, directing and delimiting activities (Phua & Yeoh, 1998:309-10).

<sup>8</sup> *Solitaires* are single-person households; subtypes consist of single, divorced, widowed or duo-locally married persons. *No family households* have no spousal pair or parent-child members, but may be comprised of other relatives (siblings, cousins, grandparents and grandchildren), or only of non-related room-mates. *Simple family households* include both spousal couples with or without children, and male and female single-parent households; an important sub-type in many societies are mother-child households in which the father resides elsewhere, sometimes with another adult woman. *Extended family households* are simple family cores that add other kin, but not other spousal couples or parent-child units; they may be extended laterally (with siblings of simple family core adults), or lineally, both up (to include perhaps a parent of a married pair) and down (adding a co-resident grandchild). *Multiple family households* contain two or more discrete simple families (e.g., a couple and two married sons, two divorced sisters or widowed co-wives and their children, or a four generation Japanese ie), and may be extended with other kin as well. All five types may also include live-in household workers, less satisfactorily labelled 'servants', boarders, who pay to eat and sleep in a household, and lodgers, who pay only to sleep, may also be counted as members.

<sup>9</sup> For an overview of studies that illustrate a clear division of labour within the household. See Bittman (1992); Goodnow & Bowes (1994) for Australian examples, Sharpe (1984); Delphy & Leonard (1992); Warde & Hetherington (1993) for the United Kingdom and for examples from the United States see Berk (1985); Pleck (1985).

<sup>10</sup> Levine (1998) challenges Hochschild's account of women's double shift to argue that men's work in employment should be tallied as a contribution to the family. For Levine, men should not be judged by the criteria applied to women's family work because this is flawed and unfair to men. He concludes that women carry no double burden and that men are doing very well at fatherhood.

<sup>11</sup> To recapitulate differences that need to be taken into account in a different socio-cultural, historical context, P. Draper (1975) in her study of foraging societies found that the !Kung in bush contexts

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conceive, in principle, most individual jobs as sex-typed. However, in practice, adults of both sexes seem surprisingly willing to do the work of the opposite sex. For example, men do not lose face when they do work typically done by women, such as gathering. In contrast, as an obvious manifestation of status inequality, she claims that in the sedentary !Kung villages where sex roles are more rigidly defined, women's work is seen as unworthy of men and an unmanly thing to do.

<sup>12</sup> See Seery & Crowley (2000:120) who paint a positive picture of women in their study and their efforts to manage father-child relationships and the gate-opening strategies that they employ to promote and enhance these relationships.

<sup>13</sup> Clearly, in many different socio-cultural contexts "men's work" is seen differently than "women's work" (see Beechy & Perkins, 1987). Relevantly, Looker and Thiessen (1999: 226) suggest that work images are socially constructed and socially distributed. Thus, the images we have of work reflect our own social location and the social locations that are associated with that type of work.

<sup>14</sup> The construct of relational identity has been defined as the extent to which one views oneself in relation (or as connected) to other people (Acitelli, Rogers & Knee, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Lennon & Rosenfield (1994) in their study of over 13,000 households in the United States found that 67% men and 60% women feel that the division of housework is fair. They elucidate that so many women and men perceive their own participation in housework and childcare as fair because the presence of power dynamics within the negotiation of housework is often imperceptible. In the United Kingdom, Warde & Hetherington (1993) report that 59% of the men in their sample of 274 respondents think that they do a fair share of routine housework tasks, and this view holds irrespective of how much housework the men are doing.

<sup>16</sup> In her study of status-reversal couples, Tichenor (1999) argues that the logic of resource and exchange theories breaks down when women bring more money and status to the marital relationship. She found that variations in occupational status and income appear to have little impact on marital power because couples by 'doing gender' often hide or ignore these differences. For other studies where wives' income has little impact on husbands' domestic work see Godwin (1992) and Thompson & Walker (1989).

<sup>17</sup> Sources or agents that transmit what is 'appropriate' in terms of gender so as to promote the goals of the culture include family, peers, schools, workplace, community, media and the culture's belief system.

<sup>18</sup> In her analysis of norms and standards that concretely shaped working women's everyday housework in the urban working-class milieu of the Weimar Republic in the 1920s, Hagemann (1996:323) claims that all housework was subject to a measure of public control. One could tell a "good" housewife, among other things, by the clean and tidy clothing worn by family members when they went out, by the shining windows and freshly-washed curtains and by the "parlor" that was always ready to receive guests.

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<sup>19</sup> Feminist theorists have shown the important role of the media in (re)producing and (re)inforcing constructions of gender. 'Representations' of women in the media are often traditional and stereotypical (e.g., as caring mothers and efficient housewives) and help uphold a strict rigid gender division. As de Lauretis (1984) aptly argues the connection between women as historical subjects and representation of women produced by hegemonic discourses is not a relation of direct identity or relation of correspondence or simple implication. It is an arbitrary relation set up by particular cultures. This is well illustrated in S. Faludi's 1991 best-seller, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, which argued that women were under cultural counter-attack where the mass media and advertisers trumpeted the liberation of the '60s and '70s women's movement as the heart of women's current misery. Specifically, Faludi examines four prevalent backlash myths that explicitly advocate marriage, childbirth and domesticity in the media and popular culture of the late 1980s: 1) a man shortage exists; 2) American fertility levels have reached shocking proportions; 3) divorce economically devastates women; and 4) "burned-out" career women and mentally unhealthy single women form the basis for an epidemic of depression. Furthermore, Faludi contends that backlash exists as a historical continuity, cresting and ebbing in reaction to outside influences, yet never entirely disappearing. This 'repeating backlash' submerges itself during times of social and economic prosperity for both genders; but reemerges rapidly and vehemently during periods of social and economic upheaval for men.

<sup>20</sup> Ahlander & Bahr (1995) argue that housework is virtuous and good and women do it or want to do it for these moral reasons. They claim that women are primarily responsible for housework because it is a matter of them performing expressive roles in the nurturing environment of the home. Clearly, this motivational account ignores issues of power and does not address how it is that most housework falls to women in the first place.

<sup>21</sup> See Peterson & Gerson (1992) and Haavio-Mannila (1989:119) who report that men's involvement in domestic work increases when they work in female-dominated jobs.

<sup>22</sup> Aptly, Ferree (1987) points out that it is an oversimplification to assume that there is direct and simple correspondence between powerlessness of women as a group, and their greater involvement in family work. Clearly, attention to all 'structures of domination' i.e., gender, class, race/ethnicity is necessary to see the multidimensionality nature of power relations (Zinn & Dill, 1997).

<sup>23</sup> Although unusual even among dual-earner couples (Berardo et al., 1987), some couples do establish allocations of labour that approach an egalitarian division (see Atkinson & Boles, 1984; Coltrane, 1989). Couples studied by Risman and Johnson-Sumerford (1998) achieved more equitable relationships because of the spouses' determination to subvert traditionally gendered divisions of labour and power.

<sup>24</sup> This lack of conflict is 'doing gender' (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Contesting traditional roles is simply not gender appropriate or 'natural'.



<sup>25</sup> Studies have suggested that Swedish couples share housework more equally than couples in other countries. Kalleberg and Rosenfeld (1990) for example argue that Swedish men do a significantly greater proportion of domestic labour than men in the United States, Norway and Canada.

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## Neke konceptualizacije i značenja kućnih poslova

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U ovom se članku predlaže da definicije i konceptualizacije kućnih poslova trebaju naglašavati da su kućni poslovi produktivan rad koji uključuje mnogo različitih vrsta poslova i da je istodobno riječ o konstrukciji 'pravih' i 'prikladnih' rodni odnosa. Pregled istraživanja, uglavnom iz anglosaksonskoga konteksta, pokazuje da su neplaćeni kućni poslovi ustrajno podijeljeni po rodu i ostaju, u praksi, pretežno "ženski posao". Implikacije, značenja i posljedice takve prakse prikazani su na nekoliko primjera objašnjenja koja tumače zašto su nepravedne podjele poslova u kući smatrane poštenima. Zaključak je da dioba kućnih poslova ne nastaje na osnovi statičnoga dogovora među pojedincima, nego to treba gledati kao način "stvaranja roda" iz kojeg se proizvode prikladni rodni odnosi. Jasno, ti odnosi, kao međuosobni procesi u kombinaciji s prisutnim diskursima (u medijima, zajednici, vladinoj politici), konstituiraju, održavaju i povećavaju rodnu podjelu rada u određenim kontekstima. Da bi se izbjegle generalizacije, jer kućni poslovi izražavaju društveno značenje o muževnosti i ženstvenosti, važno je razumjeti da konceptualizacije, značenja i vrijednosti variraju prema povijesnim, sociokulturalnim kontekstima tako da je univerzalni okvir neprikladan.

## Hausarbeit. Konzeptualisierungen und Bedeutungen

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Durch Definitionen und Konzeptualisierungen von Hausarbeit soll, so der in dieser Arbeit vorgebrachte Vorschlag, unterstrichen werden, dass Hausarbeit eine produktive Tätigkeit ist und viele verschiedene Formen umfasst; zudem ist hierbei eine Konstruierung 'richtiger' und 'angemessener' Geschlechterrollen wirksam. Die vorwiegend aus dem angelsächsischen Raum stammende Fachliteratur zeigt, dass unbezahlte Hausarbeit in ihren verschiedenen Formen beharrlich nach Geschlechtern segregiert wird und in der Praxis hauptsächlich den Frauen vorbehalten ist. Implikationen, Bedeutung und Folgen der Aufteilung in "Frauen-" und "Männerarbeit" werden an mehreren Beispielen vorgeführt, welche erklären, warum die ungerechte Aufteilung von Hausarbeiten als korrekt empfunden wird. Es ergibt sich der Schluss, dass die nach Geschlechtern segregierte Aufteilung

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der Hausarbeit nicht auf festen Absprachen der Angehörigen eines Haushalts beruht; vielmehr muss dies als eine Art von "Geschlechter-Kreierung" betrachtet werden, aus der entsprechende Geschlechterrollen abgeleitet werden. Die daraus entstehenden Verhältnisse als interagierende Prozesse in Kombination mit den gegenwärtigen Diskursen in Medien, Gesellschaft und Politik konstituieren, bewahren und verstärken die nach Geschlechtern segregierte Arbeitsteilung in bestimmten Lebensbereichen. Um Generalisierungen zu vermeiden – schließlich bringen die verschiedenen Formen von Hausarbeit die gesellschaftlich anerkannte Bedeutung von Männlichkeit und Weiblichkeit zum Ausdruck –, ist es wichtig zu verstehen, dass Konzeptualisierungen, Bedeutung und Stellenwert der Hausarbeit je nach geschichtlichem und soziokulturellem Kontext variiert, sodass eine universale Sichtweise hier völlig unangemessen wäre.