
A Woman's Place: Unpaid Work in the Home

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Household work has only recently become a valid topic of study. Feminist scholars were among the first social scientists to draw attention to women's unpaid work in the home. Although household work occupations are frequently used for assessment and treatment within practice, occupational therapy literature demonstrates a paucity in the area of these occupations. This review of the feminist literature summarizes theory and research that explore the historical, political, social, and personal meanings of household work. Feminist analysis of household work may sensitize occupational therapists to the complex interactions of these meanings and lead them to the realization that women's responsibility for unpaid work in the home may have repercussions in the daily lives of both women and men.

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A familiar statement from times past—a woman's place is in the home—still seems to contain a grain of truth. As of 1990, two thirds of married women were employed in the American labor force (Schor, 1991), yet time-use study data indicate that women continue to be responsible for 70% of unpaid work in the home (Hartmann, 1987). At the beginning of the 19th century, subsistence work, that is, work required for survival, occurred in the household and was conducted by both men and women (Cowan, 1983; Strasser, 1982). Historical changes during that century transformed household subsistence work into the paid work of men in the labor force and the unpaid work of women in the home (Gerstel & Gross, 1987).

The separation of workplace and household led to the ideology embodied in the statement that a woman's place is in the home. This ideology "made being a wife and mother an end in itself, a natural extension of womanhood. As a result, the modifier 'house' (but not 'real') attached itself to what women did in the home" (Gerstel & Gross, 1987, p. 153). Women's work, especially unpaid work, is generally taken less seriously than men's work. Oakley (1980) concluded that, when compared with men's work, "housework is not real work at all: In its unreality it is either not-work or an intrinsically trivial work activity" (p. 8).

Although home economists have been studying household work since the turn of the century, social science discourse, even within the fields of sociology of the family and sociology of work, has until recently omitted the topic of housework as an area worthy of study (Smith, 1987a). Occupational therapy has also neglected household work. A search of the occupational therapy literature published between 1980 and 1991 revealed that household work, or homemaking, as it is more commonly called, is referred to in only five articles (Larson, 1990; Soederback, 1988a, 1988b; Wahle, 1986; Wong et al., 1988). All five articles treat household work as a modality for evaluation or treatment. Household work is not included in a major historical review of the concept of work in occupational therapy (Harvey-Krefting, 1985). An article in a German rehabilitation journal includes homemaking, along with sheltered employment, in its broader interpretation of vocational reintegration (Wahle, 1986), but in general household work as an integral component of the concept of work is disregarded in the occupational therapy literature. Yet occupational therapists often use the occupations encompassed in household work for patient assessment and treatment.

Initially, feminist theory and research in social science fields focused on drawing attention to women's household work. "While by the early 1970s we knew that housework existed—it was no longer invisible or non-work—we saw the problem of housework as principally a question of unfair division of boring tasks" (Delphy, 1984, p. 16). Today, feminist theory has moved beyond the

identification of inequality in the distribution of household work to encompass several competing and complementary theories that explore the historical, political, social, and personal meanings of household work. This review of the feminist literature on household work may increase the sensitivity and efficacy of occupational therapists in their use of household work as a treatment modality or as a desired outcome. Additionally, as occupational therapists recognize the temporal demands of women's dual responsibilities in paid and unpaid work, they will enhance their interventions by considering both types of work in their patients' lives.

The Division of Household Work

The term *household work* is used to describe the occupations and activities related to the home and family (Berch, 1982; Nieva, 1985). As used in this paper, the term encompasses both housework (i.e., cleaning, cooking, and clothing care) and child care tasks. As such, household work contains not only aspects of work, leisure, and self-care, but also the unpaid labor of care for spouses and children.

As the number of women in the work force reaches an all-time high (Schor, 1991), studies of women's and men's participation in household work consistently indicate that women are responsible for most of the unpaid work in the home (Barnett & Baruch, 1988; Berk, 1988; Cowan, 1987; Googins, 1991; Hartmann, 1987; Hochschild, 1989). For working women, responsibility for household work results in a double day or second shift that requires an extra month of 24-hour days of work over the course of a year (Hochschild, 1989). Women who are employed full-time spend an additional 35 hours a week on housework; unemployed women put in 55 hours a week (Cowan, 1987). A study of corporate employees demonstrated that married mothers' combined hours spent in job, housework, and child care activities averaged 84 hours a week. Married fathers, however, spent an average of 72 hours per week in these same activities (Googins, 1991). Shaw (1985) found that responsibility for household work greatly affected women's leisure time. In her study, men had an average of 3 hr 40 min more leisure time on weekend days than did women.

Hartmann (1987) summarized the time-use study data in the form of five statements about the differences in women's and men's participation in household work. First, most of the time spent in household work (70%) is spent by the wife. Second, child care is largely the wife's responsibility. The husband's contribution to household work varies little across the family life cycle as compared with the wife's adjustments to changes in family size and children's ages. Third, the husband of an employed wife does not, on the average, spend much more time in household work than does the husband of an unemployed wife. Fourth, the wife may spend as much as 8

extra hours a week on husband care, that is, the increase in household work created by the addition of another person to the household. Fifth, on the average, an unemployed wife spends a minimum of 40 hours per week and an employed wife spends a minimum of 30 hours per week in household work. Thus, great differences exist in the participation in household work by women and men.

Theories of Household Work

Several theories have been developed within the social sciences to account for the major inequities between women and men in the division of household work. The theories reviewed here include functionalist theory, historical analyses, and socialist feminist theories.

Functionalist Theory

The functionalist school of thought led by Parsons developed in the 1940s and 1950s. Questions about the structure of the family and society, especially about the links between the family and the social system as a whole, are central to the functionalist approach (Geerken & Gove, 1983). Parsons was one of the first theorists to examine changes in family structure that occurred with the industrialization of society (Parsons & Bales, 1955). Attempting to explain the transformation of household work from the shared work of men and women in preindustrial times to the division of household labor according to gender in industrialized society, Parsons proposed that modern industrial society is sustained by a gender-based division of labor.

Parsons suggested that when industrialization removed subsistence work from the home, the contemporary nuclear family developed to meet the personality needs of its members and to socialize children. The instrumental needs of the family, such as food and shelter, were viewed as best met by the man who acted as economic provider for the family. The woman met the emotional needs of the family through her expressive work in the home (Parsons & Bales, 1955). Thus Parsons concluded that men's and women's roles within the family were complementary and inevitable. Feminist rethinking of the family began with a critique of this view of the family (Thorne, in press). Functionalist explanations for the division of household work are now rejected and alternative explanations, such as those reviewed here, have been advanced.

Historical Analyses

In response to the functionalist conceptualization of the woman's invariant role within the family, Cowan (1983, 1987) and Strasser (1982) conducted thorough historical reviews of housework over the past two centuries. According to Cowan (1987), the word *housework* was not

part of the language prior to 1940 in the United States, because most work occurred in the home during preindustrial times. Maintenance of preindustrial households required hard work by all household members. Although men and women both worked at home, their tasks were divided according to gender. The nature of the work resulted in men's and women's close proximity and cooperation to accomplish any given task. Cowan (1987) used meal preparation as an example:

Cooking was women's work, but the goal of getting any given meal to the table required the work and skills of both men and women, for the hearth had to be supplied with wood (men's work), the pig had to be butchered (men's work), the water had to be carried (androgynous work, frequently assigned to children), and the grain had to be reduced to meal or flour (men's work) before the bacon could be fried or the bread could be baked or the soup could be stirred. (p. 165)

Both Cowan (1983) and Strasser (1982) claimed that the key variable in the development of the current division of household work was the advent of technology. Technology and industrialization resulted in the development of new products and services that had profound effects on domestic life and the division of labor in the home (Cowan, 1987). Commercial milling of wheat, factory production of yard goods and shoes, an increase in the use of cast-iron stoves instead of open fireplaces, the introduction of coal for heating and cooking, and factory butchering of meat and production of breads, cereals, and canned goods are some examples of the changes wrought by industrialization (Cowan, 1983; Strasser, 1982). By 1870 such changes relieved men of household responsibilities such as making shoes, milling corn, and chopping wood, but women continued to bake, cook, clean, tend the young and ill, and do laundry.

As industrialization advanced, families began to need cash to purchase consumer goods, and fathers, sons, and, in some cases, daughters were spared to trade their labor in factories for cash (Cowan, 1987). However, industrialization and technology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries failed to produce an effective substitute for the skills of wives and mothers; therefore, they could not be spared to work outside of the home. The ideology that developed to explain these changes within family relationships prescribed the female role as one of piety, purity, domesticity, and submission within the home (Welter, 1966). According to this view, women and men were meant to function in different areas of life: A woman's place was in the home and a man's place was in the public world (Cowan, 1987). A second ideology, the *feminine mystique*, that is, the fulfillment of woman's femininity through domesticity (Friedan, 1963), began to appear in public discourse in the 1920s and continued into the years after World War II (Cowan, 1983; Smith-Rosenberg, 1985). Thus the contemporary American family was born "in which a male traded his labor for cash (because he could be spared from the home and was likely to earn higher wages) and a female did the work that was neces-

sary to turn that cash into the maintenance and the sustenance . . . of the family" (Cowan, 1987, p. 170).

The years after World War II saw an increase in the prevalence of labor-saving and time-saving technologies within the home that resulted in what Cowan (1983) called the homogenization of housework. Fifty years earlier, while working-class women completed all the labor within the home, middle- and upper-class women who could afford hired help spent a large part of their time supervising while others completed the heavy household work. The post-war years saw women in both the professional classes and the working classes being assisted in the home by machines. Consequently, the use of hired help in the middle and upper classes decreased and women from all classes were equally likely to be found down on their hands and knees scrubbing floors (Cowan, 1983).

In a national time-use study of more than 2,000 people, Robinson (1977) found that the average American woman in 1965-66 spent 54 hours per week in household work. This average does not differ significantly from the reported average of 56 hours per week spent in household work by women in 1912 (Cowan, 1983). Household technology in the 1960s, however, made it possible to achieve a better standard of living in any given amount of time than was possible 50 years earlier (Cowan, 1987). For example, the same number of hours spent in laundering in 1915 and in 1965 produced remarkably different amounts of clean clothes. A day's worth of laundry done in a washing machine in 1965 allowed a housewife and her family to change clothes daily, a luxury reserved for the very rich in 1915. For the first time in history, married women and mothers were able to go outside the home to work without suffering a loss in their family's standard of living. Rather than freeing women from work in the home, what household technologies "have given women is the ability to maintain a middle-class standard of living on thirty-five hours' work a week, squeezed in (usually) on weekends, evenings, lunch hours, and an occasional day off from work" (Cowan, 1987, p. 174). Housework has not been eliminated, but some of its physical burden has been eased so that women can work both inside and outside the home and "maintain an appropriate level of comfort and decency, if rather inappropriate levels of exhaustion" (Cowan, 1987, p. 174).

Socialist Feminist Theories

Socialist feminist theories use Marxist socioeconomic theory and analysis to account for women's responsibility for household work. A problem with Marxism, however, is that its categories of analysis are gender-blind. The classic Marxist view is that both men and women are equally oppressed in the interests of capitalism. Hartmann (1981, 1987) attempted to solve this problem by combining theories of capitalism and patriarchy into a

dual-systems theory that shows how society and its modes of production of things and people, both inside and outside the family, are organized. She demonstrated how capitalism and patriarchy work together to develop a hierarchy of class and gender. Although men of different races and classes have different places within the class hierarchy, according to Hartmann (1981), they are all united in their dominance over women.

Socialist feminist analysis of women's labor within the family reveals that men, as capitalists and as husbands, benefit from women's unpaid household work. The social structures imposed by capitalism and patriarchy enable men to control women's domestic labor (Hartmann, 1981, 1987). Capitalists benefit through the role women play in the reproduction of labor power, that is, the work necessary to support the lives of male workers for today's labor force and to shape children for tomorrow's labor force. Commodities bought by the male worker's wage require additional labor to be transformed into meals, clothing, and shelter. Women, through their domestic labor, perform subsistence tasks for men and thus reproduce labor power for the capitalist. Through this process women are placed "squarely in the definition of capitalism" (Rubin, 1975, p. 160).

However, the Marxist analysis of "the reproduction of labor power does not . . . explain why it is usually women who do domestic work in the home rather than men" (Rubin, 1975, p. 163). To explain the division of labor by gender, Hartmann (1981) introduced the concept of patriarchy. Men, through the mechanism of patriarchy, control women's labor through a social organization that restricts women's access to paid labor and controls women's sexuality through the institution of marriage. Under this system, women's economic dependence is ensured and men, as husbands, directly benefit from women's responsibility for child rearing and household work (Hartmann, 1981). The patriarchal division of labor under the system of capitalism "allows men to benefit from women's provision of personal and household services, including relief from child rearing and many unpleasant tasks both within and beyond households" (Hartmann, 1987, p. 114). In summary, Hartmann's socialist feminist theory of household work holds that capitalism and patriarchy are intertwined and mutually supportive.

Other socialist feminist theories of household work have also developed from a Marxist line of thought. They have retained the concepts of the material relations of society and of class oppression as useful in the analysis of women's condition but reject Marxism as inadequate because it fails to "account for the oppression common to all women . . . and it concentrates, not on the oppression of women, but on the consequences this oppression has for the proletariat" (Delphy, 1984, p. 57). Smith (1987b), for example, developed a socialist feminist theory that shows not only how the organization of the family under capital-

ism forms the basis of women's subordination to men in society but also how women's household work serves to maintain capitalism itself.

According to Smith (1987b), during the time of land settlement in North America, when property was owned outright and used for subsistence purposes only, men's and women's labor contributed equally to surplus value or profit. Whatever products of both men's and women's labor were left over after meeting the household's subsistence needs could be sold in the market economy for cash. Farms during this period were marked by their mixed nature, that is, livestock maintenance and agricultural production occurred on the same farm.

The next stage in the development of the political economy was that of commodity farming. Immigrant farmers were financed by mortgages on their land and equipment and their survival depended on the sale of a single cash crop. They differed from the original homesteaders who contributed relatively little to the market economy. In the context of commodity farming, with its dependence on the production of a cash crop, "women's labor is substituted for hired labor both in working the land and in the production of subsistence for the family" (Smith, 1987b, p. 29). Furthermore, property, credit, and debt laws applied only to the husband. "He is responsible for the debts on the land; he owns it insofar as he can be said to own it; the monetary income from the crops is his" (Smith, 1987b, p. 29). As a wife, the woman had no independent relation to money or any economic status. Employment opportunities for her did not exist. Her labor on the farm contributed to her husband's economic status but did nothing to further her own economic status.

With the rise of corporate-held capital, men's relation to capital changed. Their labor and loyalty now went directly to corporations. Women continued to labor for their husbands but now were even less directly related to the economy. As a corporate employee, the husband became the family business and women's labor in the home became personal service to the husband in an effort to advance his career within the corporation (Smith, 1987b).

In addition to the benefits of women's unpaid labor in the home for husbands, capital-holding corporations also stood to gain from women's work. For example, the extensive work of women as mothers sustains capitalism through its preparation for and ongoing support of children's participation in the educational system. The school system "presupposes prior and concomitant work which is done by women in the home. This work is never named as such. . . . There is a lack of recognition of the amount of actual work and thought which middle-class women, having time, opportunity, and skills, expend upon their children" (Smith, 1987b, p. 36). Smith suggested that this invisible and unrecognized work carried out by women in the home organizes and maintains class inequalities.

Glazer (1984), also a socialist feminist theorist, focused on another type of women's invisible and unrecognized work, that is, consumer work. She demonstrated how commercial capitalism reorganized the work process to use the unpaid work that women do as consumers within the retail and service sectors. As substitutes for wage-earning workers, women as consumers contribute directly to the accumulation of surplus value, or profit, for capitalists. When self-service stores appeared, work that was previously done by clerks such as locating, collecting, packaging, and delivering goods to the home was transferred to the consumer. Today it is the consumer who pushes a shopping cart through the store, locates and collects goods, unloads them at the checkout stand, and carries them home. Glazer (1984) pointed out that the majority of consumers are women and that, "in a sense, women may be said to be even more exploited than paid workers, since their labor is appropriated without a wage" (p. 65).

Delphy (1984) focused on the unpaid nature of women's work. She claimed that the exploitation of women's household work lies not in the work itself but in the conditions under which the work is performed. Household work is only unpaid when it is done within the limits "of the contract that ties the female worker—the wife—to the household of her 'master'" (Delphy, 1984, p. 88). Work can be unpaid and remunerated, as when it is done for oneself and thus is remunerated through self-consumption, or it can be unpaid and unremunerated, as when its benefits are enjoyed by someone other than the producer. According to Delphy, household work is unpaid and unremunerated because it is done for others.

In their analyses, socialist feminist theorists fail to acknowledge that women may find pleasure and satisfaction in doing household work for their families. Some women experience household work as something other than work. Social science research is beginning to address this omission through its focus on women's experience of household work.

Current Directions of Household Work Research

A new line of feminist thinking on the subject of household work seems to be emerging in social science fields. This new line of thought, influenced by radical feminism's focus on women's unique experiences, attempts to take into account the personal meaning and values women attach to their unpaid work in the home. Research conducted in the 1970s on the household work of full-time homemakers stressed the negative aspects of this work, including its repetitive, boring, and isolating nature as well as its social devaluation (Ferree, 1976; Oakley, 1974). Studies of employed women's experience of household work focused on the stresses of managing the demands of both paid work and unpaid work in the home (Pleck, 1977, 1985).

There are, however, both positive and negative dimensions of household work (Kibria, Barnett, Baruch, Marshall, & Pleck, 1990). A study that compared the work conditions and psychological effects of paid employment and household work indicated that, if done for pay, the conditions of household work (excluding socialization and emotional support tasks) would not differ greatly from those of paid employment (Schooler, Miller, Miller, & Richtand, 1984). Engagement in challenging housework such as cooking, sewing, gardening, and completing household repairs by both employed women and full-time homemakers was found to have positive effects on psychological functioning, specifically self-directed orientation and ideational flexibility (Schooler et al., 1984).

Kibria et al. (1990) found that the quality of the experience of doing household work has major effects on employed women's psychological well-being and distress. Employed women tended to experience household work, even when it is defined to exclude child care and emotional aspects of family relationships, as more rewarding than problematic. Women reported that a sense of autonomy or control and of helping or being connected to others were positive aspects of doing household work. The researchers suggested that "it is when the homemaking-role experience is characterized by such qualities that it has a positive impact on well-being and distress" (Kibria et al., 1990, p. 344).

In her analysis of the work that goes into feeding and creating family life, DeVault (1991) highlighted its meaning to the women who did it. Although the women in her study were aware of the amount of time, effort, and skill that feeding a family takes, their language when talking about their family work contained "an unlabeled dimension of caring" (DeVault, 1991, p. 10). Some of the women spoke of their effort as "love," whereas others talked about their work in the home as "something different" from a job. DeVault pointed out the difficulties inherent in describing household work. If unpaid work in the home is seen only in the context of family relationships and emotions, the actual physical and mental work of the tasks disappears. But if it is viewed in the same context as paid work, then the interpersonal aspects of household work disappear. This dilemma led DeVault to conclude that "women's own language suggests that the material and interpersonal dimensions of these tasks are joined in their lives, and that these aspects of the work should not be separated in an analysis of what they do" (1991, p. 10).

The three studies cited above indicate that household work can take on an entirely different meaning when the experience of the women doing the work is included in its analysis. The theoretical work of the feminist scholars reviewed here has contributed to the acknowledgment and acceptance of household work as a valid topic for social science research and theory development. Because occupational therapists are concerned with the ef-

fects of occupation on health and the quality of life and frequently use household work in assessment and treatment, they are in a unique position to use the emerging social science understanding of unpaid household work in women's daily lives.

Implications for Occupational Therapy

Feminist theories of household work have several applications to occupational therapy practice. First and foremost is the importance of the field's conceptualization of household work as work, rather than as nonwork, leisure, or self-care. If occupational therapists defined household work as equal in value to paid work, then the patient's performance in household work occupations might be subject to the same rigorous treatment interventions, such as work hardening, as his or her performance in paid work occupations. Pendleton (1989) surveyed occupational therapists in physical rehabilitation settings to determine their use of independent living skills training with their patients. She found that training in independent living skills accounted for only 14% of the patients' total occupational therapy treatment time. Training in specific household work occupations constituted only 5% of the total time in treatment. In contrast, 60% of treatment time was spent in the provision of other treatment interventions including therapeutic exercise, neurodevelopmental techniques, and range of motion (Pendleton, 1989).

Pendleton's study raises the question of why so little of occupational therapy treatment time is spent in independent living skills training. For the full-time homemaker in particular, the neglect of training in household work would seem to be counterproductive. Occupational therapists must ask themselves why this occurs. Has the social devaluation of household work been incorporated into insurance companies' reimbursement practices and thus into the field of occupational therapy? Or have occupational therapists themselves incorporated the social devaluation of household work into their practice so that they choose other treatment interventions over independent living skills training? Perhaps the answer is a complex interaction of these two and other unidentified factors. This review of feminist theories of household work may help occupational therapists to develop a stance of readiness to address the return of their patients to the necessary, arduous, and socially important work of the home.

A second implication of feminist scholarship on household work for occupational therapy is the realization that women continue to be responsible for the majority of household work even when employed outside the home. With the assignment of caregiving work to women within society (DeVault, 1991; "Who Cares for Our Elders," 1991), long, hard hours spent in family and household work can add up to a second work shift for

employed women (Hochschild, 1989). Occupational therapists must prepare their female patients to return not only to their paid employment but also to their responsibilities for caregiving and household work within their families. Using their authority as health care providers, occupational therapists may be able to make recommendations to the family about gradual reentry or reorganization of household work that might not otherwise be recognized as necessary by the patient or her family.

A third implication of feminist theory for occupational therapy practice concerns the repercussions of women's responsibility for household work on time management and orchestration of daily occupations. Women's responsibility for household work results in a great difference between women and men in their experiences of leisure (Henderson, 1990; Hochschild, 1989; Peiss, 1986; Shaw, 1985). Henderson (1990) found that, in contrast to men, women were more likely to have less time for leisure, to combine leisure with their family and home responsibilities, and to believe that they do not deserve to have leisure. These gender differences should be understood by occupational therapists who counsel patients regarding time management and the balance of daily activities. For example, the dysfunctional use of leisure time by people with alcoholism (Mann & Talty, 1990) may be further complicated in the case of a wife and mother with alcoholism. In addition to addressing her passivity in making leisure choices and her avoidance of active leisure involvement (Mann & Talty, 1990), occupational therapists may have to deal with the reality of her lack of time and opportunity for leisure activities and her internalized belief that she does not have a right to leisure time of her own.

The feminist theories reviewed in this paper may also provide female occupational therapists with the opportunity to reflect on their own life-styles. An understanding of the historical, political, social, and personal meanings that have shaped women's work in the home may offer female occupational therapists insight into their beliefs, feelings, and behaviors arising from their own responsibility for household work. Self-awareness that includes knowledge of personal attitudes and values can enhance therapeutic interactions with patients. In a manner similar to the processes of transference and countertransference encountered in psychiatric practice, in which the patient and therapist unconsciously react and respond to each other on the basis of attitudes and feelings derived from past experiences (Schroder, 1985), occupational therapists' values about division of household work according to gender may unconsciously color their therapeutic interventions. For example, an occupational therapist performing a major second shift of household work with little enjoyment or assistance from family members might not recognize the potential in her patient's situation for life satisfaction in household work or for redistribution of household work to other family

members or paid workers. Once countertransference issues and values are made conscious, occupational therapists may be better able to develop therapeutic interventions that are clearly based on the patient's needs, feelings, and values.

Conclusion

I hope that this paper, through its discussion of the historical, political, social, and personal meanings of household work, will provide the knowledge and stimulate the self-reflection required for occupational therapists to present their patients with a broad perspective on household work. Armed with self-awareness and a new sensitivity to the gender issues of household work, occupational therapists may be freed to offer increasingly effective therapeutic options and alternatives that fit their patients' belief and value systems without imposing their own values and judgments. ▲

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