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The Second Shift: Why it is Diminishing but Still an Issue

Abstract

This literature review will examine the concept of the second shift by comparing Arlie Hochschild's classic, *The Second Shift*, to more recent literature focused on the second shift. There is an obvious contradiction between the amount of work that Hochschild proposed women were performing due to the second shift in the 1970s and 1980s (15 more hours per week than their male counterparts) and the amount of work that the current literature suggests women in today's society are performing (five more hours per week than their male counterparts). Where is this contradiction coming from? This literature review will focus on concepts discussed by Hochschild and then compare these concepts to issues discussed in the current literature to try to tease out the societal factors that have led to a diminishing second shift.

The Second Shift:

Why it is Diminishing but Still an Issue

Kayla Van Gorp

Introduction

The glass ceiling, the invisible hand, pay inequality, and the second shift are social forces that women have been striving to overcome since they were welcomed into the public sphere of paid employment during the middle of the 20th century. While the first three are still prevalent forms of oppression against women in American society, current literature suggests that the second shift has diminished greatly in the past few decades (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, and Robinson 2000; Craig 2007; Mattingly and Bianchi 2003; Milkie, Raley, and Bianchi 2009; Sayer, England, Bittman, and Bianchi 2009).

According to Arlie Hochschild's classic study on the differences between the amount of work performed between men and women, *The Second Shift* (1989), women were burdened with an extra month of work a year compared to men because of the second shift in the 1970s and 1980s. The current literature (Bianchi et al. 2000; Craig 2007; Mattingly and Bianchi 2003; Milkie et al. 2009; Sayer, et al. 2009) agrees with Hochschild (1989) in that women do suffer a dual burden of paid and unpaid labor, but they offer that the leisure gap between men and women has diminished greatly from the extra month of work per year suggested just decades ago by Hochschild.

If the current literature is correct in stating that the second shift is less of a burden for modern women than it was for women 30 to 40 years ago, what has changed? This literature review will aim to uncover the societal factors that have led to this apparent diminishing second shift. Also, if the second shift is so much less of an issue

for dual-earner households in today's society than it was in the past, is it even an issue that needs to be addressed? In order to understand and answer these questions this literature review will focus on key concepts discussed by Hochschild (1989) and explore how the ideas that make up the institution of marriage have changed since the writing of her book.

Method

In order to understand how the second shift has changed, it is important to look at the differences in data collection between the current and classic literature. Hochschild and her research assistant, Anne Machung, (1989) gathered their data from a qualitative study of 50 couples in Northern California. They conducted in-depth interviews with these couples and chose 12 families to study over an extensive period of time.

Alternatively, most of the current literature gathered data from American and Australian time use surveys (Craig 2009, Milkie et al. 2009, Sayer et al. 2009). These surveys were quantitative and tracked primary as well as secondary activities performed by each subject. By taking secondary activities into account the time use surveys ensured that the amount of multi-tasking performed by women is calculated into the total number of hours worked. Since a majority of women, especially mothers, second shift occurs while multitasking, surveys that do not account for secondary activities run the risk of greatly undermining the actual amount of work performed by women in dual-earner households (Craig 2007).

These differences in data collection could pose an issue in comparing

Hochschild's findings to the findings of current literature because Hochschild's method included in-depth observations of a smaller sample while the time use surveys represent a larger sample that provides less in-depth data.

What is the second shift?

The realization of the second shift came about not long after women started working outside the home, but the term was not officially coined until 1989 when Hochschild published her book, *The Second Shift* (1989). There are many varying definitions of the second shift, but the most common definition is that the second shift is the dual burden of paid and unpaid work experienced by working women (Hochschild, 1989).

From 1950 to 1986 the amount of women in the workforce increased by 25%, from 30% to 55%, respectively (Hochschild 1989). When *The Second Shift* (Hochschild 1989) was published, dual-earner households made up nearly 60% of all married couples with children. The amount of work required of a dual-earner household increases exponentially once a child is brought into the family (Sayer et al. 2009). While the second shift affects all working women, it is especially apparent for mothers, particularly those with preschool age children (Hochschild 1989; Mattingly and Bianchi 2003; Milkie et al. 2009; Sayer et al. 2009).

Cutting Back

So what exactly happened to the second shift? If laundry still needs to be washed and folded, floors still need to be mopped and vacuumed, and dinner is still expected every night at 6 p.m., why are women performing less housework today than they did in 1989? Bianchi et al. (2000) contribute most of the credit of the diminishing second shift to the service

economy. Instead of being expected to spend hours on weeknight family dinners, mothers can now order a pizza, put a frozen meal in the oven, or stop by McDonalds on their way home from work.

Another reason for the decreased amount of household labor required of working mothers can be attributed to a decrease in standards of cleanliness and childcare (Bianchi et al. 2000, Milkie et al. 2009). Few modern women would argue that ironing sheets is still on the top of their to-do lists, even though this may have been a top priority for their grandmothers (Bianchi et al. 2000). In fact, ironing in general has largely become a thing of the past, with mothers now having the ability to send theirs and their husband's business suits to the drycleaner for special care. Bianchi et al. (2000) go so far as to claim that there was an overvaluation on housework in previous generations, whereas standards today are more realistic and allow more time for other activities.

Still considered women's work

Even though the amount of necessary housework has experienced a substantial decrease, women are still disproportionately responsible for core household work, such as cooking, cleaning, and the more tedious aspects of childcare. Milkie et al. (2009) calculate that mothers in today's generation still work five more hours overall per week than fathers when paid and unpaid work are accounted for, with mothers working 73 and fathers working 68 hours per week, respectively.

If women have now been a part of the paid labor force for at least two generations, why is the home still considered to be a "woman's domain"? According to Sayer et al. (2009), "When women change their time use in a nontraditional direction, adding employment, men do not change in a nontraditional direction by adding

housework.” The failure of men to comply with changing gender norms will be discussed in the next section.

The Stalled Revolution

Hochschild described the phenomenon of excessive amounts of work for women in dual-earner households as a stalled revolution. The stalled revolution became apparent in American society because of fast-changing women and slow-changing men, coupled with a lack of social arrangements to ease the strain of parents in dual-earner households (Hochschild 1989).

In other words, as Hochschild (1989) states, the stalled revolution arose from society’s inability to adapt to women working outside of the home. The arising of the second shift was an inevitable consequence of women joining the paid workforce with an uncooperative workplace and unchanging gender norms. According to Hochschild (1989), in order for women to have made a successful transition into the paid workforce, “The workplace would allow parents to work part time, to share jobs, to work flexible hours, to take parental leaves to give birth, tend a sick child or care for a well one...(I)t would include affordable housing closer to places of work, and perhaps community based meal and laundry services” (12-13).

Based on the recommendations put forth by Hochschild, would it be safe to say that we are still stuck in this stalled revolution in 2012? The current literature would argue that yes, for the most part, American society is still stuck in a stalled revolution (Craig 2007; Mattingly and Bianchi 2003; Milkie et al. 2009; Sayer et al. 2009). Sayer et al. (2009) points to the simple fact that modern men do not adjust the amount of time they dedicate to housework based on their wives’ employment status any more than their predecessors would have, pushing the idea

that society is still trapped in a stalled revolution.

Cultural Capital

Hochschild (1989, chapter 15) brings up the concept of cultural capital in the chapter entitled, “Men Who Do and Men Who Don’t.” Cultural capital, as it is referred to by Hochschild, means that, “Everything else equal, men whose wives had advanced degrees and professional careers...were more likely to share than men whose wives lacked such capital” (Hochschild 1989: 227). This idea of cultural capital could be a main reason for the trend towards a diminishing second shift in the current literature. With the surge of women into the paid workforce, there was also a surge of women attending college to have the ability to further themselves in a field of their choosing. An increase in educated women has brought about a society in which women hold more cultural capital than ever before, leading us to believe that more men will be willing to share household responsibilities than in previous generations.

Gender Strategy

Hochschild describes gender strategies as, “(A) plan of action through which a person tries to solve the problems at hand given the cultural notions of gender at play” (1989: 15). Along with an increase in women who hold cultural capital, modern society has simultaneously seen a shift in gender strategies. The main outcome of this shift in gender strategies is the appearance of less stringent gender roles, both inside and outside of the home (Offer and Schneider 2011).

Men in today’s dual-earner households are much more willing than their predecessors to contribute to housework (Craig 2007; Sayer et al. 2009), proving a significant change in men’s gender strategy. Housework is no longer looked at as an

emasculating task, as it has become much more socially acceptable in recent years for men to share the household responsibilities of cooking, cleaning, and childcare. In fact, many men find it more rewarding to share in the duties of the second shift so as to avoid the animosity women experience when forced to take sole responsibility for the housework and childcare (Craig 2007).

While men have become more willing to share housework, women have simultaneously found it more acceptable to put less effort into housework (Craig 2007; Mattingly and Bianchi 2003; Milkie et al. 2009; Sayer et al. 2009). These changes in gender strategies have led to a shrinking second shift as well as changes in marital role ideologies (Craig 2007; Offer and Schneider 2011; Hochschild 1989).

Marital Role Ideologies

Marital role ideologies are influenced by gender strategies in that we internalize our gender strategies as a norm for gender expectations. Hochschild (1989) distinguished between three different ideologies: traditional, transitional, and egalitarian. The main challenge associated with marital role ideologies is the contradiction between what people claim to believe and the way that couples actually run their household (Hochschild 1989). The main contradiction that Hochschild noted was that many fathers consider their home to be run in an egalitarian style while many mothers felt that their home was still run in a traditional manner. A father might feel that by taking his son to the baseball diamond three nights a week he is sharing in childcare. His wife, who spends much more time with their son than her husband, would probably not look at this so much as sharing as she would see it as a special outing and a time for father and son bonding.

Traditional

Couples who practice traditional gender strategies believe that a woman should base her identity around her home activities and a man should base his identity around his career. Traditional couples firmly believe that a man should have more power than his wife, both inside and outside the home. Traditional couples in which the husband works fulltime and the wife stays at home are where one finds the biggest discrepancies in terms of total workload between husband and wife (Milkie et al. 2009). According to the research conducted by Milkie et al. (2009), unemployed mothers work the least amount of time overall when compared to employed mothers, but unemployed mothers still take on a more traditional idea of housework and childcare, seeing as how these mothers dedicate much more time to unpaid housework than their employed counterparts.

Transitional

Transitional couples are made up of dual-earner couples that are attempting to find an identity both in the home and at work. While a transitional woman wants to help her husband earn money she also wants to be responsible for caring for the house and children. A transitional woman has a desire to work outside the home but still believes that her husband should be the primary wage earner. In the same vein, the transitional man supports his wife in her desire to enter the realm of paid work while also expecting her to take a majority of the responsibility for housework and childcare. Hochschild (1989) found most couples in her study to be transitional, a point that she believed attributed to the tensions felt in many of the marriages she observed. These tensions arose from disagreements about how much responsibility men should pick up around the house, how much women should work outside the house, who should stay

home with the children, and other common issues associated with family life in dual-earned households.

Egalitarian

An egalitarian woman wishes to identify herself within the same spheres as her husband while also desiring equal power in the marriage. This ideology often leads to women being more forceful in asking for help with housework and childcare, instead of passively accepting these activities as “women’s work” the way their predecessors did. The egalitarian ideology has largely replaced the traditional ideology in terms of which ideology is the most prevalent in today’s society.

There is an issue with the egalitarian ideology, however, in that many couples truly believe that they have an egalitarian relationship, but in practice, the amount of sharing that takes place tends to be more traditional. While it may be disheartening that egalitarianism is not practiced by all couples who feel they share a majority of the housework and childcare, it is empowering that women’s employment has led to a transition in the dominant marital role ideology, from traditional to egalitarian. Even though the transition is still a work in progress, since many couples are less egalitarian than they may believe, it is still a step in the right direction in terms of family dynamics if couples are at least attempting to share the housework.

Discussion

After reviewing the current literature associated with the second shift, it is clear that Hochschild’s assertion that women work a full month of 24-hour days more per year than their male counterparts is no longer true. Current literature (Bianchi et al. 2000; Craig 2007; Mattingly and Bianchi 2003; Milkie et al. 2009; Offer and Schneider 2011; Sayer, et al. 2009) states

that while the second shift is still apparent in modern society, it has seen a significant decrease in recent years. Milkie et al. (2009) estimate that based on current research women today work approximately five more hours per week than their male counterparts, when paid and unpaid work as well as primary and secondary activities are accounted for.

In 1989, Hochschild stated that American society was experiencing a stalled revolution, one in which society was failing to adapt to the idea of women joining the paid workforce. Even though a majority of women are now working, the current literature still points in a direction signifying that we have been unable to escape this stalled revolution (Bianchi et al. 2000; Craig 2007; Mattingly and Bianchi 2003; Milkie et al. 2009; Sayer, et al. 2009). Workplaces are no more flexible or accommodating to dual-earner households than they were when *The Second Shift* (Hochschild 1989) was first published, so why is the second shift diminishing?

The current literature suggests that gender strategies have changed overtime, leading to a less significant difference in the amount of unpaid labor performed by men and women (Bianchi et al. 2000; Craig 2007; Mattingly and Bianchi 2003; Milkie et al. 2009; Sayer, et al. 2009). Changes in gender strategies have led to more flexible gender roles, both inside and outside the home. These flexible gender roles, combined with advances in technology, make it more acceptable for men to share housework and childcare while simultaneously making it more acceptable for women to put less time and effort into these tasks.

When one puts the results of these changing gender strategies together, it is obvious why the second shift has seen such a dramatic decrease from 1989 to now. The additional help from the service sector that

can be utilized by dual-earner households, such as fast food and laundry services, has also led to a serious decrease in the time demand of the second shift (Bianchi et al. 2009).

Conclusion

A main strength of the current literature associated with the second shift is the fact that a majority of the research focuses on primary and secondary activities (Craig 2007; Milkie et al. 2009; Offer and Schneider 2011; Sayer, et al. 2009). Since most women perform a majority of second shift tasks while multitasking, it is vitally important to ensure that these secondary activities are calculated. Another major strength of the literature was the differentiation between the paid and unpaid workloads of parents and non-parents (Bianchi et al. 2009; Craig 2007; Mattingly and Bianchi 2003; Offer and Schneider 2011; Sayer et al. 2009). By differentiating between parents and non-parents, the current literature points to the fact that the second shift is still apparent in dual-earner households with children but is much less apparent in dual-earner households without children.

The biggest downfall of the current literature is the failure to collect data for same-sex dual-earner households. More and more households are headed by same-sex partners now than in the past so the current research needs to account for this change in family norms. This could be a direction for future research. The literature also could have focused more on the differences between the current findings on the second shift with Hochschild's findings on the second shift. Instead of focusing on what is happening now, the articles could have focused more on analyzing why the second shift has diminished and what steps can be taken to decrease it even further.

In conclusion, while it is true that the second shift is less of an issue for dual-earner households in today's society than it was a few decades ago, it is still an issue that needs to be addressed simply for the fact that it is still predominantly women who perform the core household tasks associated with the second shift. The amount of work that is required of those performing the second shift has diminished, but the fact that there is still an apparent contradiction in the expectations of women in today's society means that the second shift is not an idea of the past. Until household tasks are divided evenly based on the amount of time each spouse spends working outside the home, there is a fear that the second shift will continue to be an issue for women, especially mothers and wives, who work in the public sphere.

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