

**Women's work is never done: a sociological exploration of  
gender into the household division of labour and  
mothering roles and its contemporary implications for  
women in performing the "second shift"**

**By Bobana Kljajevic**

**This thesis is presented for the Honours Degree of Bachelor of Arts (Sociology) of  
Murdoch University 2011.**

**COPYRIGHT ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I acknowledge that a copy of this thesis will be held at the Murdoch University Library.

I understand that, under the provisions of s51.2 of the Copyright Act 1968, all or part of this thesis may be copied without infringement of copyright where such a reproduction is for the purposes of study and research.

This statement does not signal any transfer of copyright away from the author.

Signed: .....

Full Name of Degree: .....

Thesis Title: .....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Author: .....

Year: .....

**Statement of Presentation**

**This is original work submitted by:**

**Bobana Kljajevic**

**Signed** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Abstract**

This thesis will examine why women are still expected to perform the “second shift” of both housework and childcare within contemporary society. To discuss this, an exploration of gender and feminist literature will explain the way men and women become associated with different gender traits and roles which occur through the socialisation process. In addition, a contemporary perspective will examine the changes that have occurred for women within the public areas of work and the implications for women in combining both their work and family obligations. This thesis will demonstrate that while feminine roles have been analysed by gender theory, further work needs to be done to challenge men’s roles within the home which has reinforced women’s continued association with their familial responsibilities.

## **Table of Contents**

Copyright Acknowledgment Form	ii
Statement of Presentation	iii
Abstract	iv
Acknowledgments	vi
Introduction	1
Structure of Thesis	5
<b>Chapter 1 – The Sociology of Gender</b>	<b>8</b>
1.0 Becoming Gendered: Socialisation and the Learning of Gender Roles	8
1.1 Doing Gender: Social Interaction and Gender Relations	14
1.2 Sex, Gender and Biology: a sociological perspective	17
1.3 The Sex/Gender Distinction: a feminist approach	21
<b>Chapter 2 – Motherhood, Families and the Household Division of Labour</b>	<b>25</b>
2.0 A Theoretical Perspective of the Family and Gender Roles	26
2.1 Changes and Continued Challenges: Second Wave Feminism	31
2.2 Household Relations and the Gendered Division of Domestic Labour	34
<b>Chapter 3 – Contemporary Implications for Women in Integrating Work and Family Roles</b>	<b>41</b>
3.0 Changing Gender Attitudes, the Family and Maternal Employment	42
3.1 The Second Shift: Balancing Paid Work and Family Commitments	47
Conclusion	61
Bibliography	64

## **Acknowledgements**

**I wish to thank my supervisor Yvonne Haigh for helping me realise my potential and for her patience, guidance and invaluable advice. Her careful readings and recommendations were important at the different stages of writing.**

**For: all women, past and present and;**

**For: my family for their continued love and support during my studies; hopefully I can repay the favour. This thesis is especially dedicated to my mum, Vesna, who inspired me to research this topic and who understands the meaning of housework and raising children.**

## **Introduction**

In contemporary society, it appears that women are still expected to perform the “second shift” of both housework and mothering roles. These dominant gender attitudes have reinforced the “appropriate” gender roles women and men should fulfil. The emergence of the term the “second shift” has been accredited to Arlie Hochschild who argued that, despite the relevant changes that have occurred for women outside the private realm, women are still tied to their feminine traits and roles within the home (Hochschild 1989, 6-7, 8). Further, Hochschild referred to the unequal gender relations within the home in terms of task sharing as the “stalled revolution”. These notions have continued to pervade within mainstream society, which has sharpened the dichotomy between the private and public spheres (Oakley 2005; Crompton 2006; McRae 2008). While gender analyses and feminist theory have challenged women’s association with housework and mothering, these theoretical approaches have done little to disrupt the entrenchment of the “second shift” in contemporary life. This thesis will therefore demonstrate that after decades of theoretical engagement further work is required to balance the disproportionate level of domestic work undertaken by women.

In analysing the “second shift” and its prevalence within society, it is important to examine women’s “feminine” roles. The way women become tied to their feminine traits has been a central point of discussion within sociological and feminist theory. In effect, both women and men acquire their appropriate feminine and masculine traits which determine their roles through the socialisation process (Wharton 2005, 31). Socialisation begins at infancy which progresses through childhood as this is where young children learn and attain of what it means to be either male or female (Oakley 1972; Giddens 1990; Wharton 2005). In learning

such roles, in adulthood this presents implications for women in particular as it deems them “suited” for particular tasks such as mothering and the performance of housework.

While the socialisation process explains the way individuals learn to become either male or female, scholars such as Talcott Parsons discussed the socialisation process within the family and the way men’s and women’s traits develop differently (Parsons and Bales 1955, 22). Parsons explained that men provide the instrumental roles whilst women provide the expressive roles (Parsons and Bales 1955, 22). Women, as such, were seen as having a lesser position within the family, one that provides care and love which was pivotal as a socialising agent. The male was seen as carrying a more important function; in being responsible for helping their children into the world so to develop their survival skills and lessen their dependence within the home (Parsons and Bales 1955, 26). The different personalities that occur during the socialisation process within the family deemed women apposite for the motherhood role based on their expressive and caring traits.

The socialisation process has been critiqued by many feminists. Radical feminists such as Kate Millett saw that the socialisation process and the formation of different personalities were perpetuated within patriarchal institutions such as the family which confined women to female roles. As Millett argued “the formation of human personalities along stereotyped lines of sex categories (“masculine” and “feminine”)...is dictated by what its members cherish within themselves...which they find convenient in subordinates...(1971, 26). Her argument discussed how patriarchy exercised control over women’s lives and not men’s. In addition, other scholars challenged the socialisation process such as Ann Oakley who also believed that

caring traits were perpetuated by the family. Motherhood roles were viewed as a social construct in that each woman had an expectation to fulfil based on what it meant to be “feminine” (Oakley 1976, 186). In this sense, the mothering role was difficult to alter since women acquire these traits within the family early on in their lives and therefore become defined by such roles because of their expressive traits.

In further considering the implications of gender, sociologists and scholars have focussed on differing gender relations in terms of domestic labour. Since the 1970s, Oakley has been accredited as being the first to seriously consider the topic of housework and women’s roles as housewives. In her book, *The Sociology of Housework* Oakley found that housework is still primarily seen as “feminine” work that should be reserved for women and not men (Oakley 1974, 29). In this sense, their roles as wives and mothers were viewed as an important construction of their femininity. The women in the 1970s and 1980s did challenge patriarchal institutions in which they demanded that “women’s housework” no longer be attached to the female role (Malos 1995, 110).

Within mainstream society, although women have achieved considerable gains such as entering the workforce and establishing successful careers, it appears that women are still expected to perform the “second shift” of domestic chores. This suggests that more work is required to challenge the unequal gender relations between men and women which are still prevalent within the household. However despite the limited changes within the home, their positions within the long established dual earner income model has seen women become economically independent from men (Daniels and Weingarten 1984; Wilson 2002; Bergmann

2005). Many women who have children are able to return to full time work, in which they are still able to manage both their working careers and their family responsibilities. The changing attitudes towards women's work in the public sphere has seen women continue to attain high positions within the workplace despite becoming mothers and temporarily leaving paid employment to spend time with their children (Crompton 2006, 52).

While it is evident that women are still associated with their familial roles, men's roles within the home have not been thoroughly explored nor challenged. In terms of the tasks undertaken within the home, men and women fulfil different roles according to appropriate gender traits. Sarah Fenstermaker and Candace West argued that dominance is seen as a male trait and submission and docility is seen as a female trait which is linked to gender (2002, 7). In the instance of domestic work, most of the chores are divided into masculine and feminine tasks. Most chores such as cleaning the bathroom, "doing" the laundry are commonly seen as "womanly" tasks, in which men avoid or perform less of (Baxter 1993; Baxter 2002; Sullivan 2004). Hence men and women "do" their gender in terms of the tasks allocated within the household (Fenstermaker and West 2002, 19). This reinforces the vast power relations that see men and women perform different gender roles. Therefore "doing" housework undermines men's "dominant" trait and their perception of masculinity.

Mothering roles and motherhood itself remains primarily a woman's role within contemporary society. When women enter the workforce they are still expected to fulfil their caring duties in being a mother to their children (Wilson 2002; Crompton 2006). This however, sees men approach the roles of caring differently. The notion of fatherhood has a

different connotation and meaning than the motherhood role. Within families, patriarchal power establishes that women ought to remain responsible for children (Mathews 1984; Wearing 1984). Within mainstream society, women are still expected to balance both their work and family roles, while the man is mainly focussed on his career (Crompton and Harris 1998, Crompton 2006). By not challenging the constructed masculine traits, women's association with their expressive, mothering roles and expectation to perform the housework has resulted in the continued "second shift".

## **Structure of Thesis**

This thesis will demonstrate that despite significant gains in the public arena, women are still tied to the greater percentage of domestic work. To undertake this project, the thesis will discuss the way women and men acquire their traits and learn their roles through the process of socialisation and the way their different genders are produced. This thesis will also examine past literature in discussing the implications in acquiring such traits, especially within the family and the way women are particularly affected. Finally, an exploration into the contemporary literature will demonstrate that the feminine traits women acquire and the female roles they perform establish implications for women in which they continue to carry out the "second shift".

In this thesis, Chapter One will discuss the way individuals learn to acquire and attain different traits through the socialisation process. It will demonstrate how these traits that are learned at an early stage in life determine the roles men and women fulfil as adults. The chapter will explain the sociological approach in acquiring gender roles and it will also

outline a psychoanalytical perspective based on the scholarly work of Nancy Chodorow who discussed the Oedipus complex in the way women's mothering produces distinct personalities between girls and boys. Additionally, this chapter will employ a sociological perspective to investigate men's and women's behaviour and whether their traits stem from a sociobiological explanation. Finally, important feminist theory from Ann Oakley and Gayle Rubin will explain that men's and women's roles are not biologically determined rather they are socially constructed.

Chapter Two will discuss the implications for women through this socialisation process. Based on a sociological perspective, particularly a functionalist approach, a discussion into the different personality traits men and women acquire will be explored through men's instrumental and women's expressive roles within the family. The implications of women's expressive roles where men remain dominant reinforce women's feminine traits in being caring in which they are seen as apposite for such roles. This chapter will also explain the implications of the socialisation process and how it confines women to their mothering roles which are perpetuated by the family. In addition, this chapter will discuss the household division of labour and the explanation of different gender relations within the home. Through the sociological theory of the gender display model (Goffman 1977; Fenstermaker and West 2002), an exploration into the way men and women continue to perform appropriate roles within the home emphasise that housework is a woman's and not man's responsibility.

Finally, Chapter Three will discuss the contemporary implications for women in integrating both their work and family roles. Firstly, this chapter will highlight the changes that have

occurred for women in the public sphere, such as full time work and gaining high occupational statuses. This chapter will discuss the implications for women in commencing full time work with family responsibilities which has reinforced the established “second shift”. Hence, despite the increased presence of women in the workforce they are still expected to perform the majority of the housework and childcare roles within the private domain.

In discussing the way women learn and attain their feminine traits at an early stage in their lives, the implications of these traits are reinforced in their mothering roles and the housework they perform. In the wider context of work beyond the private realm, women have been obligated to balance both their familial and work roles, which have in turn widened the dichotomy between the public and the private spheres. While theory has challenged the implications for women based on their acquired feminine traits and roles, men’s roles and their masculine traits have not been challenged which has unendingly associated women with their family roles.