THE SECOND SHIFT

Working Families and the Revolution at Home

ARLIE HOCHSCHILD
WITH ANNE MACHUNG

PENGUIN BOOKS
Contents

Preface xi
Acknowledgments xix
Introduction xxiii

CHAPTER 1 The Family Speed-up 1
CHAPTER 2 Marriage in a Stalled Revolution 11
CHAPTER 3 The Cultural Cover-up 22
CHAPTER 4 Joey's Problem: Nancy and Evan Holt 34
CHAPTER 5 The Family Myth of the Traditional: Frank and Carmen Delacorte 61
CHAPTER 6 A Notion of Manhood and Giving Thanks: Peter and Nina Tanagawa 77
CHAPTER 7 Having It All and Giving It Up: Ann and Robert Myerson 96
CHAPTER 8 A Scarcity of Gratitude: Seth and Jessica Stein 111
CHAPTER 9 An Unsteady Marriage and a Job She Loves: Anita and Ray Judson 129
When I was thirty-one, a moment occurred that crystallized the concern that drives this book. At the time, I was an assistant professor in the sociology department at the University of California, Berkeley, and the mother of a three-month-old child. I wanted to nurse the baby—and to continue to teach. Several arrangements were possible, but my solution was a pre-industrial one—to reintegrate the family into the workplace, which involved taking the baby, David, with me for office hours on the fourth floor of Barrows Hall. From two to eight months, he was nearly the perfect guest. I made him a little box with blankets where he napped (which he did most of the time) and I brought along an infant seat from which he kept a close eye on key chains, colored notebooks, earrings, and glasses. Sometimes waiting students took him out into the hall and passed him around. He became a conversation piece with shy students, and some returned to see him rather than me. I put up a fictitious name on the appointment list every four hours and fed him alone.

The baby’s presence was like a Rorschach test for people entering my office. Older men, undergraduate women, and a few younger men seemed to like him and the idea of his being there. In the next office there was a seventy-four-year-old distinguished emeritus professor; it was our joke that he would stop by when he heard my son crying and say, shaking his head, “Beating the baby again, eh?” Textbook salesmen with briefcases and striped suits
As a result, women tend to talk more intently about being overtired, sick, and "emotionally drained." Many women I could not tear away from the topic of sleep. They talked about how much they could "get by on"—six and a half, seven, seven and a half, less, more. They talked about who they knew who needed more or less. Some apologized for how much sleep they needed—"I'm afraid I need eight hours of sleep"—as if eight was too much. They talked about the effect of a change in babysitter, the birth of a second child, or a business trip on their child's pattern of sleep. They talked about how to avoid fully waking up when a child called them at night, and how to get back to sleep. These women talked about sleep the way a hungry person talks about food.

All in all, if in this period of American history, the two-job family is suffering from a speed-up of work and family life, working mothers are its primary victims. It is ironic, then, that often it falls to women to be the "time and motion expert" of family life. Watching inside homes, I noticed it was often the mother who rushed children, saying, "Hurry up! It's time to go," "Finish your cereal now," "You can do that later," "Let's go!" When a bath was crammed into a slot between 7:45 and 8:00 it was often the mother who called out, "Let's see who can take their bath the quickest!" Often a younger child will rush out, scurrying to be first in bed, while the older and wiser one stalls, resistant, sometimes resentful: "Mother is always rushing us." Sadly enough, women are more often the lightning rods for family aggressions aroused by the speed-up of work and family life. They are the "villains" in a process of which they are also the primary victims. More than the longer hours, the sleeplessness, and feeling torn, this is the saddest cost to women of the extra month a year.

Marriage in a Stalled Revolution

Each marriage bears the footprints of economic and cultural trends which originate far outside marriage. The offshoring of industrial jobs and decline of unions which erode the earning power of men, an expanding service sector which opens up jobs for women, new cultural images—like the woman with the flying hair—that make the working mother seem exciting, all these changes do not simply go on around marriage. They occur inside marriage, and transform it. Problems between husbands and wives, problems which seem "individual" and "marital," are often individual experiences of powerful economic and cultural shock waves that are not caused by one person or two. Quarrels that erupt, as we'll see, between Nancy and Evan Holt, Jessica and Seth Stein, and Anita and Ray Judson result mainly from a friction between faster-changing women and slower-changing men, rates of change which themselves result from the different rates at which the industrial economy has drawn men and women into itself.

There is a "his" and "hers" to the economic development of the United States. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, it was mainly men who were drawn off the farm into paid, industrial work and who changed their way of life and identity. At that point in history, men became more different from their fathers than women became from their mothers. Today the economic arrow points at women; it is women who are being drawn into wage work, and women who are undergoing changes in their way of life.
and identity. Women are departing more from their mothers’ and grandmothers’ way of life, men are doing so less.*

Both the earlier entrance of men into the industrial economy and the later entrance of women have influenced the relations between men and women, especially their relations within marriage. The earlier increase in the number of men in industrial work tended to increase the power of men, and the present growth in the number of women in such work has somewhat increased the power of women. On the whole, the entrance of men into industrial work did not destabilize the family whereas in the absence of other changes, the rise in female employment has accompanied a rise in divorce.

The influx of women into the economy has not been accompanied by a cultural understanding of marriage and work that would make this transition smooth. Women have changed. But most workplaces have remained inflexible in the face of the family demands of their workers, and at home, most men have yet to really adapt to the changes in women. This strain between the change in women and the absence of change in much else leads me to speak of a stalled revolution.

A society which did not suffer from this stall would be a society humanely adapted to the fact that most women work outside the home. The workplace would allow parents to work part time, to share jobs, to work flexible hours, to take parental leaves to give birth, tend sick children, and care for well ones. As Dolores Hayden has envisioned in *Redesigning the American Dream*, it would include affordable housing closer to places of work, and perhaps community-based meal and laundry services. It would include men whose notion of manhood encouraged them to be active parents and householders. In contrast, a stalled revolution lacks social

* This is more true of white and middle-class women than it is of black or poor women, whose mothers often worked outside the home. But the trend I am talking about—an increase from 20 percent of American women in paid jobs in 1900 to 55 percent in 1986—has affected a large number of women.

arrangements that ease life for working parents, and lacks men who share the second shift.

If women begin to do less at home because they have less time, if men do little more, if the work of raising children and tending a home requires roughly the same effort, then the questions of who does what at home and of what “needs doing” become key. Indeed, they may become a source of deep tension in marriage, tensions I explore here one by one.

The tensions caused by the stall in this social revolution have led many men and women to avoid becoming part of a two-job couple. Some have married but clung to the tradition of the man as provider, the woman as homemaker. Others have resisted marriage itself. In *The Hearts of Men*, Barbara Ehrenreich describes a “male revolt” against the financial and emotional burden of supporting a family. In *Women and Love*, Shere Hite describes a “female revolt” against unsatisfying and unequal relationships with men. But the couples I focused on are not in traditional marriages and are not giving up on marriage. They are struggling to reconcile the demands of two jobs with a happy family life. Given this larger economic story and the present stalled revolution, I wanted to know how the two-job family was doing.

As I drove from my classes at Berkeley to the outreaching suburbs, small towns, and inner cities of the San Francisco Bay to observe and ask questions in the homes of two-job couples, and back to my own two-job marriage, my first question about who does what gave way to a series of deeper questions: What leads some working mothers to do all the work at home themselves—to pursue what I call a supermom strategy—and what leads others to press their husbands to share the load at home? Why do some men genuinely want to share housework and child care, others facilely acquiesce, and still others resist?

What do each husband’s ideas about manhood lead him to think he “should feel” about what he’s doing at home and at work? What does he really feel? Do his real feelings conflict with what he thinks he should feel? How does he resolve this
conflict? The same questions apply to wives. What influence does each person's strategy for handling the second shift have on his or her children, job, and marriage? Through this line of questioning, I was led to the complex web of ties between a family's needs, the sometime quest for equality, and happiness in modern marriage.

We can describe a couple as rich or poor and that will tell us a great deal about their marriage. We can describe them as Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, black, Chicano, Asian, or white and that will tell us something more. We can describe their marriage as a combination of two personalities, one "obsessive compulsive," say, and the other "narcissistic," and again that will tell us something. But knowledge about class, ethnicity, and personality takes us only so far in understanding who does and doesn't share the second shift, and whether or not sharing makes marriage happier.

When I sat down to compare one couple that shared the second shift with another three that didn't, many of the answers that would seem obvious—a man's greater income, his longer hours of work, the fact that his mother was a housewife or his father did little at home, his ideas about men and women—all these factors didn't really explain why some women work the extra month a year and others don't. They didn't explain why some women seemed content to work the extra month, while this made others deeply unhappy. When I compared a couple who was sharing and happy with another couple who was sharing but miserable, it was clear that purely economic or psychological answers were not enough. Gradually, I felt the need to explore how deep within each man and woman gender ideology goes. For some, men and women seemed to be egalitarian "on top" but traditional "underneath," or the other way around. I tried to sensitize myself to the difference between shallow ideologies (ideologies which were contradicted by deeper feelings) and deep ideologies (which were reinforced by such feelings). I explored how each person reconciled ideology with the rest of life. I felt the need to explore what I call gender strategies.

---

THE TOP AND BOTTOM OF GENDER IDEOLOGY

A gender strategy is a plan of action through which a person tries to solve problems at hand, given the cultural notions of gender at play. To pursue a gender strategy, a man draws on beliefs about manhood and womanhood, beliefs that are forged in early childhood and usually anchored to deep emotion. He makes a connection between how he thinks about his manhood, what he feels about it, and what he does. It works in the same way for a woman. Each person's gender ideology defines what sphere a person wants to identify with (home or work) and how much power in the marriage one wants to have (less, more, or the same amount).

I found three types of ideology of marital roles: traditional, transitional, and egalitarian. Even though she works, the "pure" traditional woman wants to identify with her activities at home (as a wife, a mother, a neighborhood mom), wants her husband to base his identity on work, and wants less power than he has. The traditional man wants the same. The "pure" egalitarian wants to identify with the same spheres her husband does, and to have an equal amount of power in the marriage. Some want the couple to be jointly oriented to the home, others to their careers, or both of them to jointly hold some balance between the two. Between the traditional and the egalitarian is the transitional, any one of a variety of types of blending of the two. But, in contrast to the traditional, a transitional woman wants to identify with her role at work as well as at home, but she believes her husband should base his identity more on work than she does. A typical transitional wants to identify both with the care of the home and with helping her husband earn money, but wants her husband to focus on earning a living. A typical transitional man is all for his wife working, but expects her to do the lion's share at home too. Most people I talked with were transitional in their beliefs.

In actuality, I discovered contradictions between what people
said they believed about their marital roles and how they seemed to feel about those roles. Some men seemed to me egalitarian on top but traditional underneath. Others seemed traditional on top and egalitarian underneath. Often a person's deeper feelings were a response to the cautionary tales of childhood as well as to life as an adult. Sometimes these feelings reinforced the surface of a person's gender ideology. For example, the fear Nancy Holt was to feel of becoming a submissive "doormat," as she felt her mother had been, infused emotional steam into her belief that her husband, Evan, should share the second shift.

On the other hand, the dissociation Ann Myerson was to feel from her successful career undermined her ostensible commitment both to her career and to a shared second shift. She wanted to feel as engaged with her career as her husband was with his. She thought she should love her work. She should think it mattered. In fact, as she confessed in a troubled tone, she didn't love her work and didn't think it mattered. She felt a conflict between what she thought she ought to feel and did feel. Among other things, her gender strategy was a way of trying to resolve that conflict.

The men and women I am about to describe seem to have developed their gender ideology by unconsciously synthesizing certain cultural ideas with feelings about their past. But they also developed their ideology by taking opportunity into account. Sometime in adolescence they matched their personal assets against the opportunities available to men or women of their type; they saw which gender ideology best fit their circumstances, and—often regardless of their upbringing—they identified with a certain version of manhood or womanhood. It "made sense" to them. It felt like "who they were." For example, a woman sizes up her education, intelligence, age, charm, sexual attractiveness, type of sexuality, her dependency needs, her aspirations, and she matches these against her perception of how women like her are doing in the job and marriage market. What jobs could she get? What men? If she wishes to marry, what are her chances for an equal marriage, a traditional marriage, a happy marriage, any marriage? Her courtship pool has very traditional men? She takes these into account. She looks at job prospects with the same eye. Then a certain gender ideology, let's say a traditional one, "makes sense." She will embrace the ideology that suits her perception of her chances. She holds to a certain version of womanhood (the "wilting violet," say). She identifies with its customs (men opening doors), and symbols (lacy dress, long hair, soft handshakes, and lowered eyes). She tries to develop its "ideal personality" (deferential, dependent), not because this is what her parents taught her, not because this corresponds to how she naturally is, but because these particular customs make sense of her resources and of her overall situation in a stalled revolution. The same principle applies to men. However wholehearted or ambivalent, a person's gender ideology tends to fit their situation.

**Gender Strategies**

When a man tries to apply his ideas about gender to the life unfolding before him, unconsciously or not he pursues a gender strategy. He outlines a course of action. He might become a "superdad"—working long hours and keeping his child up late at night to spend time with him or her. Or he might cut back his hours at work. Or he might scale back housework and spend less time with his children. Or he might actively try to share the second shift.

The term "strategy" refers both to his plan of action and to his emotional preparation for pursuing it. For example, he may require himself to suppress his career ambitions to devote himself more to his children, or suppress his responsiveness to his children's adoring appeals in the course of steeling himself for struggles at work. He might harden himself to his wife's appeals, or he might be the one in the family who "lets" himself see when a child is calling out for help.

I have tried to attune myself to fractures in gender ideology,
conflicts between thought and feeling and to the emotional work it takes to fit a gender ideal when inner needs or outer conditions make it hard.

As this social revolution proceeds, the problems of the two-job family will not diminish. If anything, as more and more women do paid work, these problems may well increase. If we can’t return to traditional marriage, and if we are not to despair of marriage altogether, it becomes vitally important to understand marriage as a magnet for the strains of the stalled revolution, and to understand gender strategies as the basic dynamic of marriage.

THE ECONOMY OF GRATITUDE

The interplay between a man’s gender ideology and a woman’s implies a deeper interplay between his gratitude toward her, and hers toward him. For how a person wants to identify himself or herself influences what, in the back and forth of marriage, will seem like a gift and what will not. If a man doesn’t think it fits his male ideal to have his wife earn more than he, it may become his gift to her to “bear it” anyway. But a man may also feel like the husband I interviewed, who said, “When my wife began earning more than me I thought I’d struck gold!” In this case his wife’s salary is the gift, not his capacity to accept it “anyway.” When couples struggle, it is seldom simply over who does what. Far more often, it is over the giving and receiving of gratitude.

FAMILY MYTHS

As I watched couples in their own homes, I began to realize that they often improvise family myths—versions of reality that ob-
summed up this new blend of idea and reality. She eagerly explained to me that she and her husband, Dan, "shared all the housework," and that they were "equally involved" in raising their nine-month-old son, Timothy. Her husband, a refrigerator salesman, applauded her career and was more pleased than threatened by her high salary; he urged her to develop such skills as reading ocean maps and calculating interest rates (which she'd so far resisted learning) because these days "a woman should." But one evening at dinner, a telling episode occurred. Dorothy had handed Timothy to her husband while she served us a chicken dinner. Gradually, the baby began to doze on his father's lap. "When do you want me to put Timmy to bed?" Dan asked. A long silence followed during which it occurred to Dorothy—then, I think, to her husband—that this seemingly insignificant question hinted to me that it was she, not he or "they," who usually decided such matters. Dorothy slipped me a glance, put her elbows on the table, and said to her husband in a slow, deliberate voice, "So, what do we think?"

When Dorothy and Dan described their "typical days," their picture of sharing grew even less convincing. Dorothy worked the same nine-hour day at the office as her husband. But she came home to fix dinner and to tend Timmy while Dan fit in a squash game three nights a week from six to seven (a good time for his squash partner). Dan read the newspaper more often and slept longer.

Compared to the early interviews, women in the later interviews seemed to speak more often in passing of relationships or marriages that had ended for some other reason but in which it "was also true" that he "didn't lift a finger at home." Or the extra month alone did it. One divorcée who typed part of this manuscript echoed this theme when she explained, "I was a potter and lived with a sculptor for eight years. I cooked, shopped, and cleaned because his art took him longer. He said it was fair because he worked harder. But we both worked at home, and I could see that if anyone worked longer hours, I did, because I earned less with my pots than he earned with his sculpture. That was hard to live with, and that's really why we ended."

Some women moved on to slightly more equitable arrangements in the early 1980s, doing a bit less of the second shift than the working mothers I talked to in the late 1970s. Comparing two national surveys of working couples, F. T. Juster found the male slice of the second shift rose from 20 percent in 1965 to 30 percent in 1981, and my study may be a local reflection of this slow national trend. But women like Dorothy Sims, who simply add to their extra month a year a new illusion that they aren't doing it, represent a sad alternative to the woman with the flying hair—the woman who doesn't think that's who she is.
Joey’s Problem: Nancy and Evan Holt

NANCY Holt arrives home from work, her son, Joey, in one hand and a bag of groceries in the other. As she puts down the groceries and opens the front door, she sees a spill of mail on the hall floor, Joey’s half-eaten piece of cinnamon toast on the hall table, and the phone machine’s winking red light: a still-life reminder of the morning’s frantic rush to distribute the family to the world outside. Nancy, for seven years a social worker, is a short, lithe blond woman of thirty who talks and moves rapidly. She scoops the mail onto the hall table and heads for the kitchen, unbuttoning her coat as she goes. Joey sticks close behind her, intently explaining to her how dump trucks dump things. Joey is a fat-cheeked, lively four-year-old who chuckles easily at things that please him.

Having parked their red station wagon, Evan, her husband, comes in and hangs up his coat. He has picked her up at work and they’ve arrived home together. Apparently unready to face the kitchen commotion but not quite entitled to relax with the newspaper in the living room, he slowly studies the mail. Also thirty, Evan, a warehouse furniture salesman, has thinning pale blond hair, a stocky build, and a tendency to lean on one foot. In his manner there is something both affable and hesitant.

From the beginning, Nancy describes herself as an “ardent feminist”; she wants a similar balance of spheres and equal power. She began her marriage hoping that she and Evan would base their identities in both parenthood and career, but clearly tilted toward parenthood. Evan felt it was fine for Nancy to have a career, if she could handle the family too.

As I observe in their home on this evening, I notice a small ripple on the surface of family waters. From the commotion of the kitchen, Nancy calls, “Eva-an, will you please set the table?” The word “please” is thick with irritation. Scurrying between refrigerator, sink, and oven, with Joey at her feet, Nancy wants Evan to help; she has asked him, but reluctantly. She seems to resent having to ask. (Later she tells me, “I hate to ask; why should I ask? It’s begging.”) Evan looks up from the mail and flashes an irritated glance toward the kitchen, stung, perhaps, to be asked in a way so barren of respect. He begins setting out knives and forks, asks if she will need spoons, then answers the doorbell. A neighbor’s child. No, Joey can’t play right now. The moment of irritation has passed.

Later as I interview Nancy and Evan separately, they describe their family life as very happy—except for Joey’s “problem.” Joey has great difficulty getting to sleep. They start trying to put him to bed at 8:00. Evan tries but Joey rebuffs him; Nancy has better luck. By 8:30 they have him on the bed where he crawls and bounds playfully. After 9:00 he still calls out for water or toys, and sneaks out of bed to switch on the light. This continues past 9:30, then 10:00 and 10:30. At about 11:00 Joey complains that his bed is “scary,” that he can only go to sleep in his parents’ bedroom. Worn down, Nancy accepts this proposition. And it is part of their current arrangement that putting Joey to bed is “Nancy’s job.” Nancy and Evan can’t get into bed until midnight or later, when Evan is tired and Nancy exhausted. She used to enjoy their lovemaking, Nancy tells me, but now sex seems like “more work.”

The Holts consider their fatigue and impoverished sex life as results of Joey’s Problem.

The official history of Joey’s Problem—the story Nancy and Evan give me—begins with Joey’s fierce attachment to Nancy, and Nancy’s strong attachment to him. On an afternoon walk through
Golden Gate Park, Nancy devotes herself to Joey's every move. Now Joey sees a squirrel; Nancy tells me she must remember to bring nuts next time. Now Joey is going up the slide; she notices that his pants are too short—she must take them down tonight. The two enjoy each other. Off the official record, neighbors and Joey's baby-sitter say that Nancy is a wonderful mother, but privately they add how much "like a single mother."

For his part, Evan sees little of Joey. He has his evening routine, working with his tools in the basement, and Joey always seems happy to be with Nancy. In fact, Joey shows little interest in Evan, and Evan hesitates to see that as a problem. "Little kids need their moms more than they need their dads," he explains philosophically; "All boys go through an oedipal phase."

Perfectly normal things happen. After a long day, mother, father, and son sit down to dinner. Evan and Nancy get the first chance all day to talk to each other, but both turn anxiously to Joey, expecting his mood to deteriorate. Nancy asks him if he wants celery with peanut butter on it. Joey says yes. "Are you sure that's how you want it?" "Yes." Then the fidgeting begins. "I don't like the strings on my celery." "Celery is made up of strings." "The celery is too big." Nancy grimly slices the celery. A certain tension mounts. Every time one parent begins a conversation with the other, Joey interrupts. "I don't have anything to drink." Nancy gets him juice. And finally, "Feed me." By the end of the meal, no one has obstructed Joey's victory. He has his mother's reluctant attention and his father is reaching for a beer. But talking about it later, they say, "This is normal when you have kids."

Sometimes when Evan knocks on the baby-sitter's door to pick up Joey, the boy looks past his father, searching for a face behind him: "Where's Mommy?" Sometimes he outright refuses to go home with his father. Eventually Joey even swats at his father, once quite hard, on the face, for "no reason at all." This makes it hard to keep imagining Joey's relationship to Evan as "perfectly normal." Evan and Nancy begin to talk seriously about a "swatting problem."

Evan decides to seek ways to compensate for his emotional distance from Joey. He brings Joey a surprise every week or so—a Tonka truck, a Tootsie Roll. He turns weekends into father-and-son times. One Saturday, Evan proposes the zoo, and hesitantly, Joey agrees. Father and son have their coats on and are nearing the front door. Suddenly Nancy joins them, and as she walks down the steps with Joey in her arms, she explains to Evan, "to help things out."

Evan gets few signs of love from Joey and feels helpless to do much about it. "I just don't feel good about me and Joey," he tells me one evening, "that's all I can say." Evan loves Joey. He feels proud of him, this bright, good-looking, happy child. But Evan also seems to feel that being a father is vaguely hurtful and hard to talk about.

The official history of Joey's Problem was that Joey felt the normal oedipal attachment of a male child to his mother. But Evan and Nancy add the point that Joey's problems are exacerbated by Evan's difficulties being an active father, which stem, they feel, from the way Evan's own father, remote and inexpressive self-made businessman, had treated him. Evan tells me, "When Joey gets older, we're going to play baseball together and go fishing."

As I recorded this official version of Joey's Problem through interviews and observation, I began to feel doubts about it. For one thing, clues to another interpretation appeared in the simple pattern of footsteps on a typical evening. There was the steady pacing of Nancy, preparing dinner in the kitchen, moving in zigzags from counter to refrigerator to counter to stove. There were the lighter, faster steps of Joey, running in large figure eights through the house, dashing from his Tonka truck to his motorcycle man, reclaiming his sense of belonging in this house, among his things. After dinner, Nancy and Evan mingled footsteps in the kitchen as they cleaned up. Then Nancy's steps began again: click, click, click, down to the basement for laundry, then thud, thud, thud up the carpeted stairs to the first floor. Then to the bathroom where she runs Joey's
bath, then into Joey’s room, then back to the bath with Joey. Evan moved less—from the living room chair to Nancy in the kitchen, then back to the living room. He moved to the dining room to eat dinner and to the kitchen to help clean up. After dinner he went down to his hobby shop in the basement to sort out his tools; later he came up for a beer, then went back down. The footsteps suggest what is going on: Nancy is working second shift.

**BEHIND THE FOOTSTEPS**

Between 8:05 a.m. and 6:05 p.m., both Nancy and Evan are away from home, working a “first shift” at full-time jobs. The rest of the time they deal with the varied tasks of the second shift: shopping, cooking, paying bills; taking care of the car, the garden, and the yard; keeping harmony with Evan’s mother, who drops over quite a bit, concerned about Joey, with neighbors, their invaluable babysitter, and each other. And Nancy’s talk reflects a series of second-shift thoughts: “We’re out of barbecue sauce. . . . Joey needs a Halloween costume. . . . Joey needs a haircut. . . .” and so on. She reflects a certain second-shift sensibility, a continual attunement to the task of striking and restriking the right emotional balance between child, spouse, home, and outside job.

When I first met the Holts, Nancy was absorbing far more of the second shift than Evan. She said she was doing 80 percent of the housework and 90 percent of the child care. Evan said she did 60 percent of the housework, 70 percent of the child care. Joey said, “I vacuum the rug, and fold the dinner napkins,” finally concluding, “Mom and I do it all.” A neighbor agreed with Joey. Clearly, between Nancy and Evan, there was a leisure gap: Evan had more than Nancy. I asked both of them, in separate interviews, to explain to me how they had dealt with housework and child care since their marriage began.

One evening in the fifth year of their marriage, Nancy told me that when Joey was two months old (and almost four years before I met the Holts), she first seriously raised the issue with Evan. “I told him: ‘Look, Evan, it’s not working. I do the housework, I take the major care of Joey and I work a full-time job. I get pissed. This is your house too. Joey is your child too. It’s not all my job to care for them.’ When I cooled down I put to him, ‘Look, how about this: I’ll cook Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. You cook Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. And we’ll share or go out Sundays.’ ”

According to Nancy, Evan said he didn’t like “rigid schedules.” He said he didn’t necessarily agree with her standards of housekeeping, and didn’t like that standard imposed on him, especially if she was “sluffing off” tasks on him, which from time to time he felt she was. But he went along with the idea in principle. Nancy said the first week of the new plan went as follows. On Monday, she cooked. For Tuesday, Evan planned a meal that required shopping for a few ingredients, but on his way home he forgot to shop for them. He came home, saw nothing he could use in the refrigerator or in the cupboards, and suggested to Nancy that they go out for Chinese food. On Wednesday, Nancy cooked. On Thursday morning, Nancy reminded Evan, “Tonight it’s your turn.” That night Evan fixed hamburgers and French fries and Nancy was quick to praise him. On Friday, Nancy cooked. On Saturday, Evan forgot again.

As this pattern continued, Nancy’s reminders became sharper. The sharper they became, the more actively Evan forgot—perhaps anticipating even sharper reprimands if he resisted more directly. This cycle of passive refusal followed by disappointment and anger gradually tightened, and before long the struggle had spread to the task of doing the laundry. Nancy said it was only fair that Evan share the laundry. He agreed in principle, but, anxious that Evan would not share, Nancy wanted a clear, explicit agreement. “You ought to wash and fold every other load,” she had told him. Evan experienced this plan as a yoke around his neck. On
many weekdays, at this point, a huge pile of laundry sat like a
disheswashed guest on the living-room couch.

In her frustration, Nancy began to make subtle jabs at Evan. “I
don’t know what’s for dinner,” she would say with a sigh. Or “I
can’t cook now, I’ve got to deal with this pile of laundry.” She
tensed at the slightest criticism about household disorder; if Evan
wouldn’t do the housework, he had absolutely no right to criticize
how she did it. She would burst out angrily: “After work my feet
are just as tired as your feet. I’m just as wound up as you are. I
come home. I cook dinner. I wash and I clean. Here we are, plan-
ing a second child, and I can’t cope with the one we have.”

About two years after I first began visiting the Holts, I started
to see their problem in a certain light: as a conflict between their
two views of gender, each with its load of personal symbols.
Nancy wanted to be the sort of woman who was needed and ap-
preciated both at home and at work. She wanted Evan to appreci-
ate her for being a caring social worker, a committed wife, and a
wonderful mother. But she cared just as much that she be able to
appreciate Evan for what he contributed at home, not just for how
he supported the family. She would feel proud to explain to
women friends that she was married to such a man.

A gender ideology is often rooted in early experience and fu-
ced by motives traced to some cautionary tale in early life. So it
was for Nancy:

My mom was wonderful, a real aristocrat, but she was also
terribly depressed being a housewife. My dad treated her like a
doomsday. She didn’t have any self-confidence. And growing
up, I can remember her being really depressed. I grew up
bound and determined not to be like her and not to marry a
man like my father. As long as Evan doesn’t do the housework,
I feel it means he’s going to be like my father—coming home,
putting his feet up, and hollering at my mom to serve him.
That’s my biggest fear. I’ve had bad dreams about that.

Nancy thought that women friends her age in traditional mar-
rriages had come to similarly bad ends. She described a high school
friend: “Martha barely made it through City College. She had no
interest in learning anything. She spent nine years trailing behind
her husband [a salesman]. It’s a miserable marriage. She hand
washes all his shirts. The high point of her life was when she was
eighteen and the two of us were running around Miami Beach in
a Mustang convertible. She’s gained seventy pounds and hates her
life.” To Nancy, Martha was a younger version of her mother, de-
pressed, lacking in self-esteem, a cautionary tale whose moral was
“If you want to be happy, develop a career and get your husband to
share at home.” Asking Evan to help again and again felt like hard
work but it was an effort to escape Martha’s fate and her mother’s.

For his own reasons, Evan imagined things very differently. He
loved Nancy and if Nancy loved being a social worker, he was
happy and proud to support her in it. He knew that because she
took her caseload so seriously, it was draining work. But at the
same time, he did not see why, just because she chose this de-
manding career, he had to change his own life. Why should her
personal decision to work outside the home require him to do
more inside it? Nancy earned about two-thirds as much as Evan,
and her salary was a big help, but as Nancy confided, “If push
came to shove, we could do without it.” Nancy was a social
worker because she loved it. Doing daily chores at home was
thankless work, and certainly not something Evan needed her to
appreciate about him. Equality in the second shift meant a loss in
his standard of living, and despite all the high-flown talk, he felt
he hadn’t really bargained for it. He was happy to help Nancy at
home if she needed help; that was fine. That was only decent. But
it was too sticky a matter committing himself to some formal
even-steven type plan.

Two other beliefs probably fueled his resistance as well. The
first was his suspicion that if he shared the second shift with
Nancy, she would dominate him. Nancy would ask him to do
this, ask him to do that. It felt to Evan as if Nancy had won so many small victories that he had to draw the line somewhere. Nancy had a declarative personality; and as she confided, “Evan’s mother sat me down and told me once that I was too forceful, that Evan needed to take more authority.” Both Nancy and Evan agreed that Evan’s sense of career and self was in fact shakier than hers. He had been unemployed. She never had. He had had some bouts of drinking in the past. Drinking was foreign to her. Evan thought that sharing housework would upset a certain balance of power that felt culturally right. He held the purse strings and made the major decisions about large purchases (like their house) because he “knew more about finances” and because he’d chipped in more inheritance than she when they married. His job difficulties had lowered his self-respect, and now as a couple they had achieved some ineffable balance—tilted in his favor, she thought—which, if corrected to equalize the burden of chores, would result in his giving in “too much.” A certain driving anxiety behind Nancy’s strategy of actively renegotiating roles had made Evan see agreement as “giving in.” When he wasn’t feeling good about work, he dreaded the idea of being under his wife’s thumb at home.

Underneath these feelings, Evan perhaps also feared that Nancy was avoiding taking care of him. His own mother, a mild-mannered alcoholic, had by imperceptible steps phased herself out of a mother’s role, leaving him very much on his own. Perhaps a personal motive to prevent that happening in his marriage—a guess on my part, and unarticulated on his—underlay his strategy of passive resistance. And he wasn’t altogether wrong to fear this. Meanwhile, he felt he was offering Nancy the chance to stay home or cut back her hours, and that she was refusing his gift, while Nancy felt that, given her feelings, this offer was hardly a gift.

In the sixth year of their marriage, when Nancy again intensified her pressure on Evan to commit himself to equal sharing, Evan recalled saying, “Nancy, why don’t you cut back to half time, that way you can fit everything in.” At first Nancy was baffled:

“We’ve been married all this time, and you still don’t get it. Work is important to me. I worked hard to get my MSW. Why should I give it up?” Nancy also explained to Evan and later to me, “I think my degree and my job has been my way of reassuring myself that I won’t end up like my mother.” Yet she’d received little emotional support in getting her degree from either her parents or her in-laws. (Her mother had avoided asking about her thesis, and her in-laws, though invited, did not attend her graduation, later claiming they’d never been invited.)

In addition, Nancy was more excited about seeing her elderly clients in tenderloin hotels than Evan was about selling couches to furniture salesmen with greased-back hair. Why shouldn’t Evan make as many compromises with his career and his leisure as she’d made with hers? She couldn’t see it Evan’s way, and Evan couldn’t see it her’s.

In years of alternating struggle and compromise, Nancy had seen only fleeting mirages of cooperation, visions that appeared when she got sick or withdrew, and disappeared when she got better or came forward.

After seven years of loving marriage, Nancy and Evan had finally come to a terrible impasse. They began to snap at each other, to criticize, to carp. Each felt taken advantage of: Evan, because his offer of a good arrangement was deemed unacceptable, and Nancy, because Evan wouldn’t do what she deeply felt was fair.

This struggle made its way into their sexual life—first through Nancy directly, and then through Joey. Nancy had always disdained any form of feminine williness or manipulation. She felt above the underhanded ways traditional women used to get around men. Her family saw her as a flaming feminist and that was how she saw herself. “When I was a teenager,” she mused, “I vowed I would never use sex to get my way with a man. It is not self-respecting; it’s demeaning. But when Evan refused to carry his load at home, I did, I used sex. I said, ‘Look, Evan, I would not be this exhausted and asexual every night if I didn’t have so much to face every morning.’” She felt reduced to an old strategy, and her modern ideas
made her ashamed of it. At the same time, she'd run out of other modern ways.

The idea of a separation arose, and they became frightened. Nancy looked at the deteriorating marriages and fresh divorces of couples with young children around them. One unhappy husband they knew had become so uninvolved in family life (they didn't know whether his unhappiness made him uninvolved, or whether his lack of involvement made his wife unhappy) that his wife left him. In another case, Nancy felt the wife had nagged her husband so much that he abandoned her for another woman. In both cases, the couple was less happy after the divorce than before. Both wives took the children, fought with their exes about them, and struggled desperately for money and time. Nancy took stock. She asked herself, "Why wreck a marriage over a dirty frying pan?" Is it really worth it?

UPSTAIRS-DOWNSTAIRS:
A FAMILY MYTH AS "SOLUTION"

Not long after this crisis in the Holts' marriage, there was a dramatic lessening of tension over the second shift. It was as if the issue was closed. Evan had won. Nancy would do it. Evan expressed vague guilt but beyond that he had nothing to say. Nancy had wearied of continually raising the topic, wearied of the lack of resolution. Now in the exhaustion of defeat, she wanted the struggle to be over too. Evan was "so good" in other ways, why debilitate their marriage by continual quarreling? Besides, she told me, "Women always adjust more, don't they?"

One day, when I asked Nancy to tell me who did which tasks from a long list of household chores, she interrupted me with a broad wave of her hand and said, "I do the upstairs, Evan does the downstairs." What does that mean? I asked. Matter-of-factly, she explained that the upstairs included the living room, the dining room, the kitchen, two bedrooms, and two baths. The downstairs meant the garage, a place for storage and hobbies—Evan's hobbies. She explained this as a "sharing" arrangement, without humor or irony—just as Evan did later. Both said they had agreed it was the best solution to their dispute. Evan would take care of the car, the garage, and Max, the family dog. As Nancy explained, "The dog is all Evan's problem. I don't have to deal with the dog." Nancy took care of the rest.

For purposes of accommodating the second shift, then, the Holts' garage was elevated to the full moral and practical equivalent of the rest of the house. For Nancy and Evan, "upstairs and downstairs," "inside and outside," was vaguely described like "half and half," a fair division of labor based on a natural division of their house.

The Holts presented their upstairs-downstairs agreement as a perfectly equitable solution to a problem they "once had." This belief is what we might call a family myth, even a modest delusional system. Why did they believe it? I think they believed it because they needed to believe it, because it solved a terrible problem. It allowed Nancy to continue thinking of herself as the sort of woman whose husband didn't abuse her—a self-conception that mattered a great deal to her. And it avoided the hard truth that, in his stolid, passive way, Evan had refused to share. It avoided the truth, too, that in their showdown, Nancy was more afraid of divorce than Evan was. This outer cover to their family life was jointly devised. It was an attempt to agree that there was no conflict over the second shift, no tension between their versions of manhood and womanhood, and that the powerful crisis that had arisen was temporary and minor.

The wish to avoid such a conflict is natural enough. But their avoidance was tacitly supported by the surrounding culture, especially the image of the woman with the flying hair. After all, this admirable woman also proudly does the "upstairs" each day without a husband's help and without conflict.
agreement, their confrontations ended. They were nearly forgotten. Yet, as she described their daily life months after the agreement, Nancy's resentment seemed alive and well. For example, she said:

Evan and I eventually divided the labor so that I do the upstairs and Evan does the downstairs and the dog. So the dog is my husband's problem. But when I was getting the dog outside and getting Joey ready for child care, and cleaning up the mess of feeding the cat, and getting the lunches together, and having my son wipe his nose on my outfit so I would have to change—then I was pissed! I felt that I was doing everything. All Evan was doing was getting up, having coffee, reading the paper, and saying, "Well, I have to go now," and often forgetting the lunch I'd bothered to make.

She also mentioned that she had fallen into the habit of putting Joey to bed in a certain way: he asked to be swung around by the arms, dropped onto the bed, nuzzled and hugged, whispered to in his ear. Joey waited for her attention. He didn't go to sleep without it. But, increasingly, when Nancy tried it at eight or nine, the ritual didn't put Joey to sleep. On the contrary, it woke him up. It was then that Joey began to say he could only go to sleep in his parents' bed, that he began to sleep in their bed and to encroach on their sexual life.

Near the end of my visits, it struck me that Nancy was putting Joey to bed in an exciting way, later and later at night, in order to tell Evan something important: "You win. I'll go on doing all the work at home, but I'm angry about it and I'll make you pay." Evan had won the battle but lost the war. According to the family myth, all was well: the struggle had been resolved by the upstairs-downstairs agreement. But suppressed in one area of their marriage, this struggle lived on in another—as Joey's Problem, and as theirs.

Nancy's "Program" to Sustain the Myth

There was a moment, I believe, when Nancy seemed to decide to give up on this one. She decided to try not to resent Evan. Whether or not other women face a moment just like this, at the very least they face the need to deal with all the feelings that naturally arise from a clash between a treasured ideal and an incompatible reality. In the age of a stalled revolution, it is a problem a great many women face.

Emotionally, Nancy's compromise from time to time slipped; she would forget and grow resentful again. Her new resolve needed maintenance. Only half aware that she was doing so, Nancy went to extraordinary lengths to maintain it. She could tell me now, a year or so after her decision, in a matter-of-fact and noncritical way: "Evan likes to come home to a hot meal. He doesn't like to clear the table. He doesn't like to do the dishes. He likes to go watch TV. He likes to play with Joey when he feels like it and not feel like he should be with him more." She seemed resigned.

Everything was "fine." But it had taken an extraordinary amount of complex emotion work—the work of trying to feel the right feeling, the feeling she wanted to feel—to make and keep everything fine. Across the nation at this particular time in history, this emotion work is often all that stands between the stalled revolution on the one hand, and broken marriages on the other.

It would have been easier for Nancy Holt to do what some other women did: indignantly cling to her goal of sharing the second shift. Or she could have cynically renounced all forms of feminism as misguided, could have cleared away any ideological supports to her indignation, so as to smooth her troubled bond with Evan. Or, like her mother, she could have sunk into quiet depression, disguised perhaps by overbusyness, drinking, overeating.
She did none of these things. Instead, she did something more complicated. She became *benignly accommodating*.

How did Nancy manage to accommodate graciously? How did she really live with it? In the most general terms, she had to bring herself to believe the myth that the upstairs-downstairs division of housework was fair, and that it had resolved her struggle with Evan. She had to decide to accept an arrangement which in her heart of hearts felt unfair. At the same time, she did not relinquish her deep beliefs about fairness.

Instead, she did something more complicated. Intuitively, Nancy *avoided* all the mental associations linked to this sore point: the connections between Evan’s care of the dog and her care of their child and house, between their share of family work and equality in their marriage, and between equality and love. In short, Nancy refused to consciously recognize the entire chain of associations that made her feel that something was wrong. The maintenance program she designed to avoid thinking about these things and to avoid the connections between them was, in one way, a matter of denial, and in another way, it was a matter of intuitive genius.

First, it involved dissociating the inequity in the second shift from the inequity in their marriage, and in marriages in general. Nancy continued to care about sharing the work at home, about having an “equal marriage” and about other people having them too. For reasons that went back to her “doormat” mother, and to her own determination to forge an independent identity as an educated, working woman for whom career opportunities had opened up, Nancy cared about these things. Feminism made sense of her biography, her circumstances, and the way she had forged the two. How could she not care? But to ensure that her concern for equality did not make her resentful in her marriage to a man remarkably resistant to change, she “recentered” this anger-inducing territory. She made that territory smaller: only if Evan did not take care of the dog would she be indignant. Now she wouldn’t need to be upset about the double day in general. She could still believe in fifty-fifty with housework, and still believe that working toward equality was an expression of respect and respect the basis of love. But this chain of ideas was now anchored more safely to a more minor matter: how lovingly Evan groomed, fed, and walked the dog.

For Evan, also, the dog came to symbolize the entire second shift: it became a fetish. Other men, I found, had second-shift fetishes too. When I asked one man what he did to share the work of the home, he answered, “I make all the pies we eat.” He didn’t have to share much responsibility for the home; “pies” did it for him. Another man grilled fish. Another baked bread. In their pies, their fish, and their bread, such men converted a single act into a substitute for a multitude of chores in the second shift, a token. Evan took care of the dog.

Another way in which Nancy encapsulated her anger was to think about her work in a different way. Feeling unable to cope at home, she had with some difficulty finally arranged a half-time schedule with her boss at work. This eased her load, but it did not resolve the more elusive moral problem: within their marriage, her work and her time “mattered less” than Evan’s. What Evan did with his time corresponded to what he wanted her to depend on him for, to appreciate him for; what she did with her time did not.

To deal with this, she devised the idea of dividing all of her own work into “shifts.” As she explained; “I’ve been resentful, yes. I was feeling mistreated, and I became a bitch to live with. Now that I’ve gone part-time, I figure that when I’m at the office from eight to one, and when I come home and take care of Joey and make dinner at five—all that time from eight to six is my shift. So I don’t mind making dinner every night since it’s on my shift. Before, I had to make dinner on time I considered to be after my shift and I resented always having to do it.”

Another plank in Nancy’s maintenance program was to suppress any comparison between her hours of leisure and Evan’s. In this effort she had Evan’s cooperation, for they both clung hard to the notion that they enjoyed an equal marriage. What they did
was to deny any connection between this equal marriage and equal access to leisure. They agreed it couldn’t be meaningfully claimed that Evan had more leisure than Nancy or that his fatigue mattered more, or that he enjoyed more discretion over his time, or that he lived his life more as he preferred. Such comparisons could suggest that they were both treating Evan as if he were \textit{worth more} than Nancy, and for Nancy, from that point on, it would be a quick fall down a slippery slope to the idea that Evan did not love and honor her as much as she honored and loved him.

For Nancy, the leisure gap between Evan and herself had never seemed to her a simple, practical matter of her greater fatigue. Had it been just that, she would have felt tired but not indignant. Had it been only that, working part time for a while would have been a wonderful solution, as many other women have said, “the best of both worlds.” What troubled Nancy was the matter of her worth. As she told me one day: “It’s not that I mind taking care of Joey. I love doing that. I don’t even mind cooking or doing laundry. It’s that I feel sometimes that Evan thinks his work, his time, is worth more than mine. He’ll wait for me to get the phone. It’s like his time is more sacred.”

As Nancy explained: “Evan and I look for different signs of love. Evan feels loved when we make love. Sexual expression is very important to him. I feel loved when he makes dinner for me or cleans up. He knows I like that, and he does it sometimes.” For Nancy, feeling loved was connected to feeling Evan was being considerate of her needs, and honoring her ideal of sharing. To Evan, “fairness” and respect seemed impersonal moral concepts, abstractions rudely imposed on love. He thought he expressed his respect for Nancy by listening carefully to her opinions on the elderly, on welfare, on all sorts of topics, and by consulting her on major purchases. But who did the dishes had to do with a person’s role in the family, not with fairness or love. In my interviews, a surprising number of women spoke of their fathers helping their mothers “out of love” or consideration. As one woman said, “My dad helped around a lot.

He really loved my mom.” But in describing their fathers, not one man made this link between help at home and love.

\section*{Suppressing the Politics of Comparison}

In the past, Nancy had compared her responsibilities at home, her identity, and her life to Evan’s, and had compared Evan to other men they knew. Now, to avoid resentment, she seemed to compare herself more to \textit{other working mothers}—how organized, energetic, and successful she was compared to them. By this standard, she was doing great: Joey was blooming, her marriage was fine, her job was all she could expect.

Nancy also compared herself to single women who had moved further ahead in their careers, but who fit another mental category. There were two kinds of women, she thought—married and single. “A single woman could move ahead in her career but a married woman has to do a wife’s work and mother’s work as well.” She did not make this distinction for men.

When Nancy decided to stop comparing Evan to men who helped more around the house, she had to suppress an important issue that she had often discussed with Evan: How \textit{unusually} helpful was Evan? How unusually lucky was she? Did he do more or less than men in general? Than middle-class, educated men? What was the going rate?

Before she made her decision, Nancy had claimed that Bill Beaumont, who lived two doors down the street, did half the housework without being reminded. Evan gave her Bill Beaumont, but said Bill was an exception. Compared to \textit{most men}, Evan said, he did more. This was true if most men meant Evan’s old friends. Nancy felt upwardly mobile compared to the wives of those men, and she believed that they looked upon Evan as a model for their own husbands, just as she used to look up to
women whose husbands did more than Evan. She also noted how much the dangerous unionizer she had appeared to a male friend of theirs:

One of our friends is a traditional Irish cop whose wife doesn't work. But the way they wrote that marriage, even when she had the kid and worked full time, she did everything. He couldn't understand our arrangement where my husband would help out and cook part time and do the dishes once in a while and help out with the laundry. We were banned from his house for a while because he told Evan, “Every time your wife comes over and talks to my wife, I get in trouble.” I was considered a flaming liberal.

When the wife of Dennis Collins, a neighbor on the other side, complained that Dennis didn’t take equal responsibility, Dennis in turn would look down the invisible chain of sharing, half-sharing, and non-sharing males to someone low on his wife’s list of helpful husbands and say, “At least I do a hell of a lot more than he does.” In reply, Dennis’s wife would name a husband she knew who took half the responsibility of caring for child and home. Dennis would answer that this man was either imaginary or independently wealthy, and then cite the example of another male friend who, though a great humorist and fisherman, did far less at home.

I began to imagine the same evening argument extending down the street of this middle-class Irish neighborhood, across the city to other cities, states, regions, wives pointing to husbands who did more, husbands pointing to men who did less. I imagined it extending to Chinese, Mexican, Indian, Iranian families, to unmarried, and in a different but equally important way to lesbian and gay families. Comparisons like these—between Evan and other men, between Nancy and other women—reflect a semiconscious sense of the going rates for a desirable attitude or behavior in an available member of the same and opposite sex. If most of the men in their middle-class circle of friends had been given to drinking heavily, beating their wives, and having affairs, Nancy would have considered herself “lucky” to have Evan, because he didn’t do those things. But most of the men they knew weren’t like that either, so Nancy didn’t consider Evan above the going rate in this way. Most of those men only halfheartedly encouraged their wives to advance at work, so Nancy felt lucky to have Evan’s enthusiastic encouragement.

This idea of a going rate indicated the market value, so to speak, of a man’s behavior or attitudes. If a man was really rare, his wife intuitively felt grateful, or at least both of them felt she ought to. How far the whole culture, and their particular corner of it had gotten through the feminist agenda—criminalizing wife battery, disapproving of a woman’s need for her husband’s permission to work, and so on—became the cultural foundation of the judgment about how rare and desirable a man was.

The going rate was a tool in the marital struggle, useful in this case mainly on the male side. If Evan could convince Nancy that he did as much or more than most men, she couldn’t as seriously expect him to do more. Like most other men who didn’t share, Evan felt the male norm was evidence on his side: men “out there” did less. Nancy was lucky he did as much as he did.

Nancy thought men out there did more at home but were embarrassed to say so. Given her view of men out there, “Nancy felt less lucky than seemed right to Evan, given his picture of things. Besides that, Nancy felt that sheer rarity was not the only or best measure. She felt that Evan’s share of the work at home should be assessed not by comparing it to the real inequalities in other people’s lives but to the ideal of sharing itself.

The closer to the ideal, the more credit. And the harder it was to live up to the ideal, the more pride-swallowing it took, or the more effort shown, the more credit. Since Evan and Nancy didn’t see this going rate the same way, since they differed in their ideals, and since Evan hadn’t actually shown much effort in changing, Nancy had not been as grateful to Evan as he felt she should have been. Not only had she not been grateful, she’d resented him.
But now, under the new maintenance program to support the necessary myth of equality in her marriage, Nancy set aside the tangles in the give and take of credit. She thought now in a more segregated way. She compared women to women, and men to men, and based her sense of gratitude on that way of thinking. Since the going rate was unfavorable to women, Nancy felt she should feel more grateful for what Evan gave her (because it was so rare in the world) than Evan should feel for what she gave him (which was more common). Nancy did not have to feel grateful because Evan had compromised his own views on manhood; actually he had made few concessions. But she did feel she owed him gratitude for supporting her work so wholeheartedly. That was unusual.

For his part, Evan didn’t talk much about feeling grateful to Nancy. He avoided an Evan-Nancy comparison. He erased the distinction between Nancy and himself: his “I” disappeared into “we,” leaving no “me” to compare to “you.” For example, when I asked him if he felt that he did enough around the house, he laughed, surprised to be asked point-blank and replied mildly: “No, I don’t think so. No, I would have to admit that we probably could do more.” Then using “we” in an apparently different way, he went on: “But I also have to say that I think we could do more in terms of the household chores than we really do. See, we let a lot more slide than we should.”

Nancy made no more comparisons to Bill Beaumont, no more unfavorable comparisons to the going rate. Without these frames of reference, the deal with Evan seemed fair. This did not mean that Nancy ceased to care about equality between the sexes. On the contrary, she cut out magazine articles about how males rose faster in social welfare than females, and she complained about the condescending way male psychiatrists treat female social workers. She pushed her feminism “out” into the world of work, a safe distance away from the upstairs-downstairs arrangement at home.

Nancy now blamed her fatigue on “everything she had to do.”

When she occasionally spoke of conflict, it was conflict between her job and Joey, or between Joey and housework. Evan slid out of the equation. As Nancy spoke of him now, he had no part in the conflict.

Since Nancy and Evan no longer conceived of themselves as comparable, Nancy let it pass when Evan spoke of housework in a “male” way, as something he “would do” or “would not do,” or something he did when he got around to it. Like most women, when Nancy spoke of housework, she spoke simply of what had to be done. The difference in the way she and Evan talked seemed to emphasize that their viewpoints were naturally different and again helped push the problem out of mind.

Many couples traded off tasks as the need arose; whoever came home first started dinner. In the past, Evan had used flexibility in the second shift to camouflage his retreat from it; he hadn’t liked “rigid schedules.” He had once explained to me: “We don’t really keep count of who does what. Whoever gets home first is likely to start dinner. Whoever has the time deals with Joey or cleans up.” He had disparaged a female neighbor who kept strict track of tasks as “uptight” and “compulsive.” A couple, he had felt, ought to be “open to the flow.” Dinner, he had said, could be anytime. The very notion of a leisure gap disappeared into Evan’s celebration of happy, spontaneous anarchy. But now that the struggle was over, Evan didn’t talk of dinner at “anytime.” Dinner was at six.

Nancy’s program to keep up her gracious resignation included another tactic: she would focus on the advantages of losing the struggle. She wasn’t stuck with the upstairs. Now, as she talked she seemed to preside over it as her dominion. She would do the housework, but the house would feel like hers. The new living-room couch, the kitchen cabinet, she referred to as “mine.” She took up supermom-speak and began referring to my kitchen, my living-room curtains; and, even in Evan’s presence, to my son. She talked of machines that helped her, and of the work-family conflict itself as hers. Why shouldn’t she? She felt she’d earned that
right. The living room reflected Nancy's preference for beige. The upbringing of Joey reflected Nancy's ideas about fostering creativity by giving a child controlled choice. What remained of the house was Evan's domain. As she remarked: "I never touch the garage. Evan sweeps it and straightens it and arranges it and plays with tools and figures out where the equipment goes—in fact, that's one of his hobbies. In the evening, after Joey has settled down, he goes down there and putzes around; he has a TV down there, and he figures out his fishing equipment. The washer and dryer are down there, but that's the only part of the garage that's my domain."

Nancy could see herself as the winner—the one who got her way, the one whose kitchen, living room, house, and child these really were. She could see her arrangement with Evan as more than fair—from a certain point of view.

As a couple, Nancy and Evan together explained their division of the second shift in ways that disguised their struggle. Now they rationalized that it was a result of their two personalities. For Evan, especially, there was no problem of a leisure gap; there was only the continual, fascinating interaction of two personalities. "I'm lazy," he explained. "I like to do what I want to do in my own time. Nancy isn't as lazy as I am. She's compulsive and very well organized." The comparisons of his work to hers, his fatigue to hers, his leisure time to hers—comparisons that used to hurt—were melted into freestanding personal characteristics, his laziness, her compulsiveness.

Nancy now agreed with Evan's assessment of her, and described herself as "an energetic person" who was amazingly "well organized." When I asked her whether she felt any conflict between work and family life, she demurred: "I work real well overnight. I pulled overnightsers all through undergraduate and graduate school, so I'm not too terribly uncomfortable playing with my family all evening, then putting them to bed, making coffee, and staying up all night [to write up reports on her welfare cases] and then working the next day—though I only go into overdrive when I'm down to the wire. I don't feel any conflict between my job and Joey that way at all."

Evan was well organized and energetic on his job. But as Nancy talked of Evan's life at home, he neither had these virtues nor lacked them; they were irrelevant. This double standard of virtue reinforced the idea that men and women cannot be compared, being "naturally" so different.

Evan's orientation to domestic tasks, as both described it now, had been engraved in childhood, and how could one change a whole childhood? As Nancy often reminded me, "I was brought up to do the housework. Evan wasn't." Many other men, who had also done little housework when they were boys, did not talk so fatally about "upbringing," because they were doing a lot of it now. But the idea of a fate sealed so very early was oddly useful in Nancy's program of benign resignation. She needed it, because if the die had been cast in the dawn of life, it was inevitable that she should work the extra month a year.

This, then, was the set of mental tricks that helped Nancy reconcile believing one thing and living with another.

### How Many Holts?

In one key way the Holts were typical of the vast majority of two-job couples: their family life had become the shock absorber for a stalled revolution whose origin lay far outside it—in economic and cultural trends that bear very differently on men and women. Nancy was reading books, newspaper articles, and watching TV programs on the changing role of women. Evan wasn't. Nancy felt benefited by these changes; Evan didn't. In her ideals and in reality, Nancy was more different from her mother than Evan was from his father. Nancy had gone to college; her
mother hadn't. Nancy had a professional job; her mother never had. Nancy had the idea that she should be equal with her husband. In her mother's youth, that had seemed like a strange, dreamlike idea. Nancy felt she and Evan should have similar responsibilities. Her mother hadn't imagined that was possible; Evan went to college, his father, and the other boys, had gone too. Work was important to Evan's identity as a man as it had been for his father before him. Indeed, Evan felt the same way about family roles as his father had felt in his day. The new job opportunities and the feminist movement of the 1960s and '70s had transformed Nancy but left Evan pretty much the same. And the friction created by this difference between them moved to the issue of the second shift as metal to a magnet. By the end, Evan did less housework and child care than most men married to working women—but not much less. Evan and Nancy were also typical of nearly 40 percent of the marriages I studied in their clash of gender ideologies and their different ideas about sacrifice. By far the most common form of mismatch was like that between Nancy, an egalitarian, and Evan, a transitional.

But for most couples, the tensions between strategies did not so quickly tense up. Nancy pushed harder than most women to get Evan to share, and she lost more overwhelmingly than the few other women who fought that hard. Evan pursued his strategy of passive resistance with more quiet tenacity than most men, and he allowed himself to become far more marginal to his son's life than most fathers. The myth of the Holts' equal arrangement also seemed more odd than other family myths that encapsulated equally powerful conflicts.

Beyond their upstairs-downstairs myth, the Holts tell us a great deal about the subtle ways a couple can encapsulate the tension caused by a struggle over the second shift without resolving the problem or divorcing. Like Nancy Holt, many women struggle to avoid, suppress, obscure, or mystify a frightening conflict over the second shift. They do not struggle like this because they started off wanting to, or because such struggle is inevitable or because women inevitably lose, but because they are forced to choose between equality and marriage. And they choose marriage. When asked about ideal relations between men and women in general, about what they want for their daughters, about what they'd like in their own marriage, most working mothers wished their men would share the work at home.

But many wish it instead of want it. Other goals—like keeping peace at home—come first. Nancy Holt did some extraordinary behind-the-scenes emotion work to prevent her ideals from clashing with her marriage. In the end, she had confined and miniaturized her ideas of equality successfully enough to do two things she badly wanted to do: feel like a feminist, and live at peace with a man who was not. Her program had worked. Evan won on the reality of the situation, because Nancy did the second shift. Nancy won on the cover story; they would talk about it as if they shared.

Nancy wore the upstairs-downstairs myth as an ideological cloak to protect her from the contradictions in her marriage and from the cultural and economic forces that press upon it. Nancy and Evan Holt were caught on opposite sides of the gender revolution occurring all around them. Through the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s masses of women entered the public world of work—but went only so far up the occupational ladder. They tried for equal marriages, but got only so far in achieving it. They married men who liked them to work at the office but who wouldn't share the extra month a year at home. When confusion about the identity of the working woman created a cultural vacuum in the 1970s and 1980s, the image of the supermom quietly glided in. She made the "stall" seem normal and happy. But beneath the happy image of the woman with the flying hair are modern marriages like the Holts', reflecting intricate webs of tension, and the huge, hidden emotional cost to women, men, and children of having to
manage inequality. Yet on the surface, all we might see would be Nancy Holt bounding confidently out the door at 8:30 a.m., briefcase in one hand, Joey in the other. All we might hear would be Nancy's and Evan's talk about their marriage as happy, normal, even equal—because equality was so important to Nancy.

As he begins his interview with me, Frank Delacorte is speaking from his personal chair, a lounger with armrests and a footrest that extends when he leans back. In this modest living room, it is the only chair with armrests. Some men I interviewed sat in chairs turned closely toward the television, suggesting a desire for solitary retreat and recovery. Frank's chair faced outward toward the room, suggesting membership, its size and prominence suggesting authority. It is the centerpiece of the room, the provider's chair. I am seated on the sofa, tape recorder beside me, interviewing a man who, as it was to turn out, holds more traditional views on men and women than Evan Holt, but who does more work at home with far less struggle.

Frank is a slender man of twenty-nine with long, ropey, muscular arms, neatly groomed dark hair, and thoughtful brown eyes. In a modest but deliberate way, he describes himself and his marriage: "I look at myself as pretty much of a traditionalist. It's the way I am inside. I feel the man should be the head of the house. He should have the final say. I don't think he should have the only say; my father was the head but a lot of times my mother got her way. But I feel like this is my role in life, and I don't see any reason to want to change it." He pauses and gives a small but not apologetic shrug of the shoulders. He has chosen his words slowly—as if saying something so fundamental it is normally beyond words.
Beneath the Cover-up: Strategies and Strains

In the ten marriages I've described, the second shift became a forum for each person's ideas and feelings about gender and marriage. When Evan Holt fixed dinner, Nancy Holt felt Evan was saying he loved her. When Robert Myerson cooked dinner, Ann half the time felt guilty she was failing to protect his more valuable career from family demands. When Frank Delacorte made the pesto sauce for the pasta, it meant Carmen "couldn't." When Peter Tanagawa roasted the chicken, it meant he was "helping Nina." When Ray Judson barbecued the spare ribs, Anita imagined he did it because he liked to, not to help her out. When Seth and Jessica ate the meal the housekeeper cooked, Jessica figured it was her salary that paid the housekeeper, Seth's salary that paid for the food. The personal meanings of the second shift differed greatly, but to most people they either meant "I am taken care of" or "I am taking care of someone."

Some personal meanings leaned toward a traditional ideal of caring, and others toward a gender equal ideal. Indeed, a split between these two ideals seemed to run not only between social classes, but between partners within marriages and between two contending voices inside the conscience of a single person. The blue collar tended toward a traditional ideal, and the white collar tended toward a 50-50 one. Men tended toward the first ideal, women toward the second. And Ann Myerson flipped to the one and flopped to the other. Most marriages were either torn by, or a settled compromise between, these two ideals. In this sense, the split between them ran through every marriage I came to know.

To be sure, I saw important differences in social class. And in the world at large there are far more couples who spend their Saturdays doing laundry, like the Delacortes or the Judsons, and fewer who spend them making out checks to the help like the Steins or the Myersons. The problems of the two-job family are tougher in the working class, but they are difficult in a different way among the affluent as well. What exacerbates the strain in blue-collar marriage is the absence of money to pay for services they need, economic insecurity, poor day care, and lack of dignity and boredom in each partner's job. What exacerbates it in the upper-middle class is the instability of paid help and the enormous demands of careers in which both partners become willing believers. But the tug between two ideals of manhood and womanhood runs from top to bottom of the class ladder.

Regardless of the ideal to which a couple aspires, the strain of working shifts often affects men nearly as much as women. It affects women who work the extra month a year in obvious ways—through fatigue, sickness, and emotional exhaustion. But one important finding of this study is that the strain clearly extends to men as well. If men share the second shift it affects them directly. If they don't share, it affects them through their wives. Michael Sherman shared the emotional responsibility and time it took to do the work at home. He had to redefine his career ambitions, confront the high hopes of his family, and detach himself from the competition of his colleagues. Evan Holt and Seth Stein made no such adjustments, but they paid an enormous price nonetheless—Evan Holt through the resentments so woven into his sexual life and bond with his son, Joey, Seth through the disappearance of his wife and children into lives of their own.
GENDER IDEOLOGY, FEELING RULES,
AND COPING WITH FEELINGS

When I began this research, I naively imagined that a person's view of gender would cohere as a cognitive and emotional "piece." I imagined this view would go with how he or she wanted to divide the second shift. Couples who believed in 50-50 would share more, those who believed in 70-30 would share less. But I discovered amazing fractures. Peter Tanagawa supported his wife's career "a hundred percent," but grew red in the face at the idea that she would mow the lawn, or that his daughters, when teenagers, would drive a car to school. Many men like Evan Holt lauded their wives' careers. They pointed out that their wives wanted to work. It made their wives more interesting, and it gave the couple more in common. But when it came to a man's part in the work at home, the underlying principle changed. For Robert Myerson the principle seemed to be that a man should share the work at home "if his wife asks him." For Peter Tanagawa, a man should pitch in so long as she's doing a bit more.

More important were the contradictions between what a person said they believed about men and marital roles, and what they seemed to feel about them. Some people were egalitarian "on top" and traditional "underneath" like Seth Stein or traditional on top and egalitarian underneath like Frank Delacorte.

Sometimes the deep feelings that evolved in response to early cautionary tales reinforced the surface of a person's gender views. For example, Carmen Delacorte's dread—that she would face the same struggles her mother had as a disparaged single mother—strongly reinforced her idea that women should find male protection through submission to them. On the other hand, Nancy Holt's fear of becoming a "doormat," like her mother, infused emotional steam into her belief that Evan ought to share 50-50 at home. Ray Judson's childhood loss of his mother and his current fear of losing his wife reinforced his idea that a man needs to get a woman dependent on him so that she won't take off.

For other people, covert feelings seemed to subvert the surface of their gender ideology. For example, Ann Myerson described herself growing up as a tomboy who believed girls were "just as good as boys." A hard-driving career woman who didn't begin to consciously want children until she was thirty-two, Ann felt similar to her husband, Robert, in her needs and desires. Yet for some reason, her role at the office didn't feel real while her role at home did. Rather than reinforcing her surface attitudes, this underlying feeling prompted her ambivalent "flip-flop" syndrome.

Similarly, on the surface, John Livingston had always been for sharing the provider and homemaker role. But when his daughter Cary was born, he felt that Barbara withdrew her attention from him, leaving him abandoned, dependent, and angry. When Barbara returned to her job, he resented her working. But, he felt guilty about resenting her work. In this way his ideology established a certain feeling rule—you shall feel good about your wife working. Yet this feeling rule clashed with his actual feeling—anger that Barbara was so unavailable. Since it was John's habit to withdraw when he was angry, he withdrew. This withdrawal and Barbara's upset in response to it spiraled into the conflict which, in their "overbusyness," they avoided.

The first year of Cary's life, John withdrew emotionally from Barbara and established himself as second to Barbara in the care of Cary, and as champion of the idea that "someone" needed to care for her more. Insofar as work permitted, he did not resist sharing the second shift; he did it, but he resisted forgiving Barbara for her emotional withdrawal from him. All the minute ways in which John sought to interrelate what he thought (his gender ideology), what he felt (upset by Barbara's withdrawal), and what he did (to work long hours and to cut back on time for the marriage)—this complex of thought, feeling, and action together constitute his "gender strategy." And the interplay of his gender
strategy and that of his wife determined how they actually divided the second shift.

Everyone I interviewed, in one way or another, developed a gender strategy. In some, the surface of a gender ideology strongly conflicted with underlying feelings, in others they didn't. In some, the feeling rule was “We should want to share the second shift,” “We shouldn't be angry about having to share, or angry at the deprivations it might entail” (for example, the Shermans). In others, the feeling rule was to feel ashamed to “have to” share it (the Delacortes). But what a man or woman wanted to do usually did not completely explain what they did. For always a dance was in motion with another.

**WOMEN’S STRATEGIES:**
**THE DIRECT APPROACH**

Most women who wanted 50-50 did one of two things. They married men who planned to share at home or they actively tried to change him afterward. Before she had children, Adrienne Sherman took the risky step of telling her husband, “It’s share or it’s divorce.” She staged a sharing showdown and won. After she had Joey, Nancy Holt initiated a major crisis in the marriage but backed away from a showdown. Both women confronted their husbands, and caused great upheaval as a result. Other women initiated a series of smaller prods. When she was eight months pregnant and her husband was working nearly all the time, Carol Alston recalls sitting her husband down on the front stairs and saying, “I won’t have this baby if you don’t emotionally prepare for it with me.” Though she didn’t really mean she wouldn’t have the baby, she was making an important point. Still other women initiated exhaustive talks, which brought their men around.

Over half the working mothers I interviewed had tried one way or another to change roles at home. One reason the effort is so common among women is that they bear the weight of a contradiction between traditional views about men and women and modern cir-

stances. Unless they assume the extra work of trying to change a common habit, it is usually they who work the extra month a year. If women lived in a culture that presumed active fatherhood, they wouldn't need to devise personal strategies to bring it about.

**INDIRECT WAYS TO CHANGE ROLES**

Women also tried to change marital roles indirectly. This was a primary strategy for traditional working mothers who desperately needed help at home but who couldn't call on a husband to share the load because they didn't believe in such a thing. Facing such a dilemma, Carmen Delacorte “played helpless” at cooking rice, paying bills, and sewing. Some women, like Nina Tanagawa, used physical illness as a half-conscious signal of distress. One highly successful businesswoman, Susan Pillsbury (a woman who described herself as “sharing equally” with her husband), told this story:

*When I was pregnant we were trying to think what to name the baby and we couldn't think of a name. My husband, Jerry, wanted to have the baby but he wasn't interested in what to name it. I didn't want to ask him to be interested. So, you know he's a consultant in decision analysis; that's his specialty. I suggested that we set out “decision criteria,” like the name should be a family name, or the first name should fit the last name well, it should be a certain length... Once I posed it as a problem in decision making, he got so into it he couldn't stop. I always like to tell that story. Now he tells it.*

Even women who abhorred “female wiles” sometimes resorted to them. Nancy Holt felt it demeaned women to withhold sex from their husbands in order to angle for something they wanted. But when Evan persistently refused to share, Nancy did withhold sex, and felt remorse about doing so.
SUPERMOMING

In contrast to strategies designed to change roles, supermoming was a way of doing both shifts without imposing on their husbands. About a third of mothers pursued this strategy. They put in long hours at the office but kept their children up very late at night to get time with them. Many believed that the extra month was theirs to work. Others wished their husbands would share but didn't feel they had enough moral credits in the "marital bank" to persuade them to do more.

Supermoming was a way of absorbing into oneself the conflicting demands of home and work. To prepare themselves emotionally, many supermoms develop a conception of themselves as "on-the-go, organized, competent," as women without need for rest, without personal needs. Both as a preparation for this strategy and as a consequence of it, supermoms tended to seem out of touch with their feelings. Nina Tanagawa reported feeling "numb." And Barbara Livingston said again and again, "I don't know what I feel."

CUTTING BACK AT WORK

After trying hard to change Evan, Nancy Holt reluctantly cut back her hours at work. As she'd all along planned to do after her second child, Carol Alston willingly cut back hers. After a hopeless succession of quarrelsome baby-sitters, Ann Myerson quit her job. To some women, cutting back felt like a defeat, as it did to Nancy Holt and Ann Myerson. To others, it felt like a great triumph.

Women often prepared emotionally for cutting back by detaching themselves from work-centered friends, renewing friendships with family-centered friends, and generally gathering support for entering a more solitary life at home.

Especially for women in high-powered careers but really for most women who cut back, one major emotional task was to buoy flagging self-esteem. After taking time off for her first baby, Carol Alston felt depressed, "fat," "just a housewife," and wanted to call down the supermarket aisles, "I'm an MBA! I'm an MBA!"

CUTTING BACK ON HOUSEWORK, MARRIAGE, SELF, AND CHILD

Yet another set of strategies involved cutting back on ideas about "what needs to be done" for the house, the child, the marriage, or oneself, and on efforts to meet those needs.

Cutting back on housework was clear, intentional, and almost across the board for those without maids. Traditional working mothers often began the interview with apologies for the house and felt its state reflected on themselves personally. They either felt badly when the house was messy, or thought they should and it was a wrench to disaffiliat their self-esteem from the look of it.

Egalitarian women did the opposite. They tried hard not to care about the house, and proudly told me about things they'd let go. As Anita Judson said with a triumphant laugh, "I'm not the type to wash walls." Others questioned the need to make beds, vacuum, clean dishes, pick up toys, or even make meals. As Carol Alston explained, "We eat big lunches, and I'm trying to diet, so dinner's not a big deal."

On the whole, women cared more about how the house looked than men did. When they didn't care, they exerted more effort in trying not to care.

After the birth of their first child, every couple I interviewed devoted less attention to each other. Most couples felt as if they were "waiting" to get more time together. As Robert Myerson commented: "We have no time together alone. We're hanging on until the girls get older." But when marriage became the main or only way of healing past emotional injuries—as it was for John Livingston—it was hard to wait.
In the race against time, parents could inadvertently cut back on children's needs as well. For one thing, they cut corners in physical care. One working mother commented: “Do kids have to take a bath every night? We bathe Jeremy every other night and then otherwise wash his face and hands. Sort of sponge him off. He's surviving.” Another mother questioned a child’s need to change clothes every day: “Why can't kids wear the same pants three or four days in a row? When I was a girl, I had to change into fresh clothes every day, and my favorite clothes went by so quickly.” Another mother shared her philosophy of eating greens: “Joshua doesn’t eat greens anyway. So we fix something simple—soup and a peanut butter sandwich. He won’t die.” Another mother sheepishly complained of housewifely standards for preparing Halloween costumes: “God, these mothers that have their Halloween costumes sewn in September! I go ‘Oh no! It’s Halloween,’ and I dash out and buy something.” Another working mother lowered the standard for considering a child sick: “I send James to day care when he has a cold. I don’t have backup and the other mothers are in the same boat. All the kids there have colds. So he gets their colds. He might as well give them his.”

Sadly enough, a few working parents seemed to be making cuts in the emotional care of their child. Especially when parents received more from their own parents than they are giving their children, they were managing guilt. Trying to rationalize her child’s long hours in day care, one working mother remarked about her nine-month-old daughter that she “needed kids her age” and “needs the independence.” It takes relatively little to cut back on house care, and the consequences are trivial. But not so the needs of a baby.

**Seeking Help**

Some couples who could afford it hired a housekeeper. Others called on mothers, mothers-in-law, or other female relatives for child care though in many cases these women worked as well. Surprisingly few called on their older children, as Ray Judson did, to share house cleaning or care of younger children.

The main outside help, of course, came from baby-sitters. Sometimes mothers tried to make the baby-sitter “part of the family” or at least to create a strong friendship with her, unconsciously perhaps to assure her loyalty and goodwill. Carol Alston left her six-month-old baby with a “wonderful baby-sitter” for eleven hours a day, and gave the sitter a great deal of credit: “My son should call her ‘mother.’ She’s earned it.” Carol often invited her sitter and husband to dinner and on outings and exchanged birthday and Christmas gifts. But it was hard for Carol to allay the sitter’s doubts that Carol befriended her only because she baby-sat the children.

Finally, most women cut back on their own needs. They gave up reading, hobbies, television, visits with friends, exercise, time alone. When I asked her what she did in her leisure; Ann Myerson replied, “Pay bills.” When I asked a bank clerk about her “leisure,” she answered “time at my terminal.” I interviewed no working mothers who maintained hobbies like Evan Holt or Robert Myerson. It was part of the culture of the working mother to give up personal leisure.

Over time, most women combined several strategies—cutting back, seeking outside help, supermoming. There was a big divide between wives who urged their husbands to share the second shift (like Nancy Holt and Adrienne Sherman) and wives who didn’t (like Nina Tanagawa and Ann Myerson).

**Men’s Strategies**

In part, men’s strategies parallel women’s, and in part they differ. Some men are superdads, the full or near equivalent to supermoms—John Livingston, for example. When their children were young, other men cut back their emotional commitment or hours at work—like Michael Sherman and Art Winfield. Many men let
the house go more, lowered their expectations about time alone with a wife, cut out movies, seeing friends, hobbies. In these ways, some men’s strategies paralleled women’s.

But for men, the situation differed in one fundamental way. By tradition, the second shift did not fall to them, and it was not a “new idea” that they should do paid work. In the eyes of the world, they felt judged by their capacity to support the family and earn status at work, and got little credit for helping at home, so most men were not pressuring their wives to get more involved at home. They got pressured. That was the big difference. Of the 80 percent of men in this study who did not share the work at home, a majority mentioned some pressure from their wives to do so.

Most men resisted. But their wives’ pressure often evoked a number of underlying feelings. “Underneath” Ray Judson’s objections to sharing was the fear of losing control of his wife if he wasn’t the number one earner. Beneath Peter Tanagawa’s resistance was his fear of losing status as a man with the guys back in the valley. Evan Holt feared Nancy was trying to boss him around and get out of caring for her.

For some men, avoiding work at home was a way of “balancing,” the scales with their wives. A man may decline to pitch in at home to compensate for his wife’s more rapid advance at work, or in other ways gaining “too much” power. (Women do this “balancing” too.) Underlying all these extra reasons to resist sharing was, finally, the basic fact that it was a privilege to have a wife tend the home. If a man shared the second shift, he lost that privilege.

At least at first, most men gave other reasons for not wanting to share: their career was too demanding. Their job was more stressful. When these rationales didn’t go over, resistant men resorted to the explanation that they weren’t “brought up” to do housework.

Some 20 percent of men expressed the genuine desire to share the load at home, and did. A few men expressed the genuine desire to share but said their wives “took over” at home. As a teacher, and mother of two, put it, “My husband does all the baking. He’d share everything, if I let him.” Some men who shared resisted at first but grew into it later. But most of these men ended up feeling like Art Winfield: “I share housework because it’s fair and child-rearing because I want to.”

Other men resisted, and in a variety of ways. Some did tasks in a distracted way. Evan Holt forgot the grocery list, burned the rice, didn’t know where the broiler pan was. Such men withdrew their mental attention from the task at hand so as to get credit for trying and being a good sport, but so as not to be chosen next time. It was a male version of Carmen Delacorte’s strategy of playing dumb.

Many men also waited to be asked, forcing their wives to take on the additional chore of asking itself. Since many wives disliked asking—it felt like “begging”—this often worked well. Especially when a man waited to be asked and then became irritated or glum when he was, his wife was often discouraged from asking again.

Some men made “substitute offerings.” Peter Tanagawa supported Nina in her every move at work and every crisis at work, and his support was so complete, so heartfelt, that it had the quality of a substitute offering.

Consciously or not, other men used the strategy of “needs reduction.” One salesman and father of two explained that he never shopped because “he didn’t need anything.” He didn’t need to take clothes to the laundry to be ironed because he didn’t mind wearing a wrinkled shirt. When I asked who bought the furniture in their apartment, he said his wife did, because “I could really do without it.” He didn’t need much to eat. Cereal was fine. Seeing a book on parenting on his desk, I asked if he was reading it. He replied that his wife had given it to him, but he didn’t think one needed to read books like that. Through his reduction of needs, this man created a great void into which his wife stepped with her “greater need” to see him wear clean, ironed shirts, to eat square meals, live in a furnished home, and be up on the latest word on child-rearing.

Many men praised their wives for how well organized they were. The praise seemed genuine but it was also convenient. In the context of other strategies, like disaffiliating from domestic
tasks or reducing needs, appreciating the way a wife bears the second shift can be another little way of keeping her doing it.

How much a working father actually shares housework and parenting depends on the interaction between a husband’s gender strategy (with all its emotional meanings) and the wife’s gender strategy (with all of its emotional meanings). What he does also, of course, depends on outer circumstances as well—shift hours, commute time, lay-off scares—and the meanings these hold for each.

Many couples now believe in sharing, but at this point in history few actually do. A new marriage humor targets this tension between promise and delivery. In Gary Trudeau’s “Doonesbury” comic strip, a “liberated” father is sitting at his word processor writing a book about raising his child. He types: “Today I wake up with a heavy day of work ahead of me. As Joannie gets Jeffrey ready for day care, I ask her if I can be relieved of my usual household responsibilities for the day. Joannie says, ‘Sure, I’ll make up the five minutes somewhere.’”

But what often tips the balance between a wife’s gender strategy and her husband’s is the debts and credits in their marital economy of gratitude. Ann Myerson, Nina Tanagawa, Carol Alston, and most wives I talked with seemed to feel more grateful to their husbands than their husbands felt toward them. Women’s lower wages, the high rate of divorce, and the cultural legacy of female subordination together created a social climate that made most women feel lucky when their husbands shared “some.” Beneath the cultural “cover-up,” the happy image of the woman with the flying hair, there is a quiet struggle going on in many two-job marriages today. Feeling that change might add yet another strain to their overburdened marriage, feeling already “so lucky,” many women kept cautiously to those strategies that avoid much change in men.

Tensions in Marriage in an Age of Divorce

The two-job marriages I came to know seemed vulnerable to three kinds of tension. One tension was between the husband’s idea of what he and his wife should do at home and work, and his wife’s idea about that. Gender strategies clashed—as did those of the Holts and the Steins. Another existed as a shared desire to live an old-fashioned life—the wife at home, the husband working—and the real need for her salary. The Delacortes, for example, did not clash in their vision of life or ways of trying to realize it, but both suffered a conflict between ideal and reality. The third tension is more invisible, nameless, and serious: that between the importance of a family’s need for care and the devaluation of the work it takes to give that care.

One Behind, One Ahead: Couples Who Clash

Two-thirds of couples in this study, most of them married for seven to ten years, shared views on how men and women should be. Two-thirds were both traditional, both transitional, or both egalitarian. But a third had important differences of feeling—especially about who should do how much work at home. (And
The movement of millions of women into paid jobs constituted the major revolution in the twentieth-century American family. But the stories I heard told of “stalls” in that revolution. An old-fashioned view of fatherhood—that was one stall. No family-friendly policies at work—that was another stall. Too little value on the importance of the small acts of paying attention that constitute care or appreciation for others—yet another stall. I began to realize I was talking to couples trapped within the stalled gender revolution of the 1980s.

But are working parents in America today better off? A 2010 online post by Katrina Alcorn on the Huffington Post Web site, both hilarious and serious, gives one woman’s answer and points to a misguided search for answers. Alcorn describes how she balanced a demanding job, a daily commute, and care for her young children. Then just before the first birthday of her youngest child, she collapsed with insomnia and panic attacks. For these problems, she goes to a psychiatrist who prescribes an antidepressant. The antidepressant caused her to undergo night sweats, headaches, cotton mouth, and further sleeplessness, for which the psychiatrist then prescribes sleeping pills. Alcorn still can’t sleep and now suffers an eye twitch.

For her sleeplessness, she is now sent to a “sleep lab,” where specialists diagnose her with apnea and outfit her with the latest artificial breathing machine. This she describes as “the size of a lunch-
box... with a corrugated hose that looped over my head and three slim black straps that held rubber nose plugs snug to my face... Oxygen flowed up the vacuum cleaner hose on top of my head and through the nose plugs. When I opened my mouth, air came whooshing out like I was some kind of human leaf blower.” After two weeks, Alcorn finds herself with a fierce headache, unable to breathe through her nose, and on the verge of a cold. Finally a sensible pulmonary specialist points out that long-term use of sleeping pills can hinder breathing, antidepressants can cause insomnia, and artificial breathing machines can dry out nasal passages and so induce colds.

In the end, Katrina Alcorn quits her pills, gives up her Darth Vader breathing machine, feels better, and wisely concludes: “It is crazy to put working parents in impossible situations where they are bound to go crazy, and then act like there’s something wrong with them for going crazy.” Many working parents look fine on the outside, smiling, well-groomed, bright-eyed, she argues, but I feel close to an inner, emotional edge doing what Tina Fey describes as “a tap-dance recital in a minefield.” Indeed, just as many Americans live with great financial debt—unpaid school loans, heavily mortgaged homes, a drive-now-pay-later car—so many may be overloaded with emotional debt. In these times of a stalled revolution, the cultural ideal of the breezily confident woman with the flying hair may be leading many to live beyond their emotional means. So it is to the ultimate causes—the larger “stall”—that we must look.

And how far have we come since 1989? To begin with, more American couples are doing the Tina Fey tap dance. In 1975, for example, half of mothers with kids under age eighteen were working. But by 2009, that had risen to nearly three-quarters. In 1975, a third of moms with children under age three were in the labor force; in 2009 it was nearly two-thirds—of whom 73 percent worked full time. And for many, the workday also stretches longer.

So if more mothers are working outside the home, are more men picking up the workload at home? Compared to the 1980s, more American men believe in sharing the second shift and fewer men hold to traditional roles. In the 1970s, 70 percent of men born before the baby boom agreed: “It’s better for everyone if the man works and the woman cares for home and family.” But by the 1990s, half of those same men agreed and among post-baby boom men, a quarter did. Fewer men also disapproved of high-earning wives.

Still, many couples also feel that however much a dad helped at home, his job came before his wife’s. Then came the Great Recession of 2008. The higher-paying jobs of welders, machinists, auto assembly-line workers—all jobs usually filled by men—proved more vulnerable to cost-cutting automation and offshoring than the lower-paid but steadier jobs women held as health aides, administrators, or day-care workers. So while over the past twenty-five years more men have come to believe in sharing the second shift, economic trends caused them to keep an anxious eye on their potentially runaway jobs.

So do the husbands of working moms actually share the second shift more than the men of the 1980s I describe in this book? Since the publication of The Second Shift in 1989, a startling two hundred studies published in the decade between 1989 and 1999 provide some answers. The most recent, careful, and detailed study by Melissa Milkie, Sara Raley, and Suzanne Bianchi—based on two nationwide surveys—reported the present-day story of married two-job parents of preschool children, just like those in this book. In one survey conducted in 2003–5, 3,500 mothers and 3,000 fathers agreed to receive periodic telephone calls during a twenty-four-hour day. During each call parents were asked what they were doing, how long it took, where they were, and who they were with. A second survey, conducted in 2000, simply asked parents how they used their time, including such activities as taking naps.
Compared to working dads, researchers found, full-time working moms with preschool kids put in an extra five hours a week (in the first study) and seven hours a week at home (in the second). This created a weekly leisure gap of five to seven hours, or an extra two weeks a year of twenty-four-hour days. In my 1980s study, I'd found that compared to their husbands, working moms put in an extra four weeks a year. So twenty-five years didn't rid women of an extra shift. But it did cut the length of it in half.

In 1989, I had found that working moms felt more rushed than working dads. And that's what the new research found to be true: half of moms (52 percent) and a third of dads (34 percent) “always felt rushed.” I had also found that women did two or three things at once more often. Women still feel that way more than men but don't actually do it more than men. I had found that women slept fewer hours than their husbands and did fewer things for “pure fun” with the kids. Their counterparts today sleep as long as their husbands and do fun things with their kids as often too. But husbands watch 2.7 more hours of television a week and get 7.5 more hours a week of adults-only leisure.

So are couples happier as a result of these changes? This matters, of course, for if couples aren't enjoying life at home, we haven't really uninstalled this stalled revolution. The Milkie et al. findings on this issue are unsettling. The researchers compared mothers with full-time jobs (thirty-five hours or more) with those who worked part time or stayed home. Moms with full-time jobs reported laughing with their children less often than anyone else in the study—part-time moms, unemployed moms, and all of the fathers. Surprisingly, fathers married to full-time workers—fathers whose help was most needed—read to, laughed with, and praised their children less often than fathers married to part-time or stay-at-home moms. And mothers in full-time jobs (25 percent) were less likely to say they were “completely satisfied with how well their children are doing in life” than were part-time (35 percent) or nonworking (58 percent) moms. About a third of dads were “satisfied,” a proportion that did not vary with the hours their wives worked. Overall, most parents—59 percent of mothers, 66 percent of fathers—were not “completely satisfied with how their children were doing.”

So why would that be? Could such worried parents be responding to a more widespread reality of American life? One clue lies in a 2007 UNESCO report comparing American children with those in twenty other advanced nations. The report focuses on the health, schooling, social relationships, and self-reported happiness of children ages eleven to fifteen, and it offers sobering news: out of twenty-one countries, the United States ranked twentieth. It was at or near the bottom, researchers found, in rankings on children's health, poverty, family, and peer relations, chances of risky behavior (drinking alcohol, drugs, fighting, for example), and personal relationships.

Children were also given a picture and told, “Here is a picture of a ladder. The top of the ladder, 10, is the best possible life for you and the bottom is the worse possible life for you. In general where on the ladder do you feel you stand at the moment? Tick the box next to the number that best describes where you stand.” In terms of the proportion of children marking a box above the middle rung, the United States—the world's richest country—ranked eighteen out of twenty-one countries.

So why, in the welfare of its children, does the United States rank so far lower than most other advanced nations? Could it be that so many American mothers work? It is, after all, common for guilty American parents to worry that a mother's job itself makes for unhappy children. But if so, we couldn't understand Norway, which boasts both the world's highest rates of maternal employment and one of the world's highest rates of child well-being. Seventy-five percent of all working-age Norwegian women work for pay while Norway also ranks seventh out of twenty-one nations in the overall welfare of its children. In short, Norway has undergone a gender revolution, but avoided a stalled revolution. Norwegian parents of new or newly adopted babies enjoy an eleven-month paid leave, and new fathers are offered a month's paid leave, exclusive to them,
to be forfeited if they decline. Parents receive cash benefits for children ages one to three who lack a full-time place at a public day-care center. Should an elderly parent fall ill, a person with a job can sign up at the local municipality for a “care salary,” and take leave from work to care for the parent. And to top it off, a full-time workweek in Norway is thirty-five hours.

Americans shake their heads in disbelief at Norway’s wonderland of limited hours and family-friendly benefits. The country is so small, detractors point out. And its economy is thriving, blessed as it is with the well-spent revenue from North Sea oil. But larger surrounding countries—Sweden, Denmark, and Finland—have no such oil, yet enjoy both thriving economies and family-friendly state policies. France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, and other European nations are not far behind. In short, women can both work and raise thriving children in societies determined to remove the “stall” from a stalled revolution.

For the United States to catch up with its more successful neighbors, we’d need to reconsider some of our beliefs about community and government. Many Americans resist the idea of government help in the abstract; they want to fix the stalled revolution privately. But when you get down to specifics, a light appears in their eyes. Paid family and medical leave for new parents or those coping with family illness? Good idea. Affordable subsidized child care? Good idea. A neighborhood toy exchange, or a skill bank that allows neighbors to exchange unpaid services—computer help for mowing a lawn, math tutoring for fresh lasagna? Good idea. Government incentives for companies offering flexible hours and job shares? Sure. But no one of us can accomplish all these reforms alone.

In celebration of National Telework Week, Joan Blades, the founder of the Internet-driven organization MomsRising, recently renewed the call for flexi-place—work from home or neighborhood workstations. Compared to office-based workers, research shows, home-based workers get more done and save companies money. Working from home, we also unclog freeways, save gas, and green our nation while saving precious time for giggling children at home.

But at the very root of a successful gender revolution is, I believe, a deep value on care—making loving meals, doing projects with kids, emotionally engaging family and friends. Most women in America are no longer homemakers. But the choice arises—do we devalue that role, or do we value its emotional core and share that now with men? And here we must address a strange imbalance between two values associated with the early women’s movement. As that movement rolled forward—during the days I first jotted notes envisioning this book—it put forward two big ideas. One was female empowerment—the idea that women should express their talents, be all they can be, and stand equal to men. The second big idea was valuing—and sharing—the duties of caring for others.

Without our noticing, American capitalism over time embraced empowerment and sidetracked care. So in the absence of a countermovement, care has often become a hand-me-down job. Men hand it to women. High-income women hand it to low-income women. Migrant workers who care for American children and elderly, hand the care of their own children and elderly to paid caregivers as well as grandmothers and aunts back in the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Mexico, and other countries of the global South. And those Filipina, Sri Lankan, or Mexican paid caregivers at the end of this care chain pass child-care duties to oldest daughters. The big challenge in the years ahead—and the challenge at the heart of this book—is to value and share the duties of caring for loved ones. Facing it, we could—and why not in our lifetimes?—finally celebrate a world beyond this stalled revolution.
For more details on the hours working men and women devote to housework and child care, see the Appendix of this book.


Chapter 2

1. In a 1978 national survey, Joan Huber and Glenna Spitze found that 78 percent of husbands think that if husband and wife both work full time, they should share housework equally (See *Stratification: Children, Housework and Jobs*. New York: Academic Press, 1983). In fact, the husbands of working wives at most average a third of the work at home.

2. The concept of "gender strategy" is an adaptation of Ann Swidler's notion of "strategies of action." In "Culture in Action—Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986): 273–86. Swidler focuses on how the individual uses aspects of culture (symbols, rituals, stories) as "tools" for constructing a line of action. Here, I focus on aspects of culture that bear on our ideas of manhood and womanhood, and I focus on our emotional preparation for and the emotional consequences of our strategies.


Chapter 3


2. In her book *Redesigning the American Dream* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984), p. 91, Dolores Hayden describes how, in 1935, General Electric and Architectural Forum jointly sponsored a competition for who could design the best house for "Mr. and Mrs. Bliss"—the model couple of the period (Mr. Bliss was an engineer, Mrs. Bliss was a housewife with a college degree in home economics. They had one boy, one girl). The winner proposed a home using 322 electrical appliances. Electricity, the contest organizers proposed, was Mrs. Bliss's "servant."


5. Ibid., p. 112. All quotes within this paragraph are from ibid.


2. One study found that male workers enjoy longer coffee breaks and longer lunches than female workers. According to Frank Stafford and Greg Duncan, men average over an hour and forty minutes more rest at work than women do each week. See Frank Stafford and Greg Duncan, "Market Hours, Real Hours and Labor Productivity," Economic Outlook USA, Autumn 1978, pp. 103-19.


Chapter 10


Chapter 13

1. Of the 100 men and women in the 50 “mainstream” couples I studied, 18 percent of the husbands were traditional, 62 percent transitional, and 20 percent egalitarian. Among the wives, 12 percent were traditional, 40 percent were transitional, and 48 percent were egalitarian. (Berkeley couples were omitted because they probably reflect an untypically liberal subculture.) Below, I’ve shown how husbands’ gender ideologies match those of their wives.

Chapter 14


**Afterword**

3. Compared with the 1980s, fewer mothers are married, have preschool kids, and work full time. If we follow the statistics, it seems more have quit, cut back hours, or divorced. Still, whether married, cohabiting, or divorced, most mothers of preschool children—six out of ten mothers of children under three—are in the labor force. And of those, only a quarter (27 percent) work part time. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, Table 6, “Employment Status of Mothers with Own Children Under 3 Years Old by Single Year of Age of Youngest Child, and Marital Status, 2007–2009 Annual Averages.”
5. Teresa Ciabattari, *Gender and Society*, August 2001, 15(4): 574–91, Table 3. Another study based on the nationwide General Social Survey showed a similar rise in the acceptance of the equality of the sexes between 1974 and 2004. But it also revealed a pause in 1994 and subsequent flattening of the upward trend through 2004. This pause did not signal, the authors surmise, a return to 1950s domesticity, but rather a shift that Maria Charles and David Grusky call “egalitarian essentialism.” This view mixes the new (women should have equality of choice) with old (women are better with children and should choose to stay home when they can). Women can be equal, this view holds, and stay home with the children because they’ve freely chosen to do so. These choices are often premised, of course, on the assumption that we can’t reshape jobs, get more government support, and alter the prevailing notion of manhood.
8. Ibid., p. 502. If the researchers added in what they call “secondary activities”—tasks one did while also doing other things—they found women working an extra 9.3 hours per week, or extra 20 days a year. Ibid., Table 2, p. 517.
10. Ibid., p. 2, for overall rankings. The United States, along with the United Kingdom ranked in the bottom third in five out of the six dimensions reviewed. The Netherlands won highest marks. There was no rela-
relationship between how rich a country was and the welfare of its children.
The Czech Republic outranked the United States, for example.