

Women, Work, and Inequality in the U.S.: Revising the Second Shift

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Abstract

The second shift, coined in 1989 by Arlie Hochschild, highlights the complexity of women's roles as mothers, wives, and working women. According to Hochschild, working women perform a first shift in the paid labor force and a second shift of unpaid labor in their households. This research critiques Hochschild's second shift concept from a critical sociological perspective. The authors argue that because Hochschild's conceptualization of second shift fails to engage a comparative historical analysis, her work dismisses, devalues and omits marginalized groups of working women, who have throughout history engaged unpaid, underpaid, involuntary, devalued, and/or overlapping never ending shifts of labor long before middle-class White women joined the paid labor force.

Keywords: Second Shift; care work; working women; gender inequality; marginalized women; devalued labor; Arlie Hochschild

Introduction

In 1989, Arlie Hochschild introduced the concept of second shift to define “a specific extra burden among employed women who are in a heterosexual marriage with a working man, which includes many more hours of unpaid work, without context or qualifications” (Milkie, Raley, Bianchi 2009, 489). For Hochschild, the second shift concept grew out of a metaphor connected to the industrial life. Working women perform a first shift in the paid labor force and a second shift of unpaid labor in their households. Women's work within their home domain is care work of parenting, cooking, cleaning, and household management. De la Torre Dwyer (2012) describes this work as gendered, “ubiquitous” and “undervalued” by spouses and the broader society. Hochschild (1989) contends performance of the second shift stalled women's progress in pursuing gender equality and equity at the height of the women's movement.

This study revisits Hochschild's classic conceptualization of the second shift. We engage a comparative historical examination of women's work in the United States to deconstruct the development of the second shift concept and thus offer a more critical interpretation of the inequalities experienced by diverse working women. We argue that because Hochschild's conceptualization of the second shift fails to engage a critical comparative historical analysis, her work dismisses, devalues and omits marginalized groups of working women who have throughout history engaged unpaid, underpaid, involuntary, devalued, and/or overlapping never ending shifts of labor long before middle-class White women joined the paid labor force. In the following sections: (1) we define Hochschild's conceptualization of second shift, (2) offer a socio-historical critique of the second shift that accounts for the experiences of marginalized women, and (3) offer recommendations for progressive concepts that engage the interconnectivity of work and inequality for women at the margins of society.

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The Conceptualization of the Second-Shift

The impetus of Hochschild's 1989 work, *The Second Shift*, was the influx of women joining the paid labor force after the 1960s and her own personal experiences as a working mother. While working as a professor at the University of California-Berkeley she began bringing her three month old son to the office, but made a critical observation—her male colleagues never brought their children to the office. This observation defined her research project towards the conceptualization of the second shift. From the late 1970s to the mid-1980s, Hochschild and colleagues interviewed and observed 50 dual earning heterosexual couples in Northern California. She collected time diary data to interpret women's length of work hours in comparison to men. Hochschild concluded "women worked 15 hours longer than men, totaling almost an extra month of 24-hour work days relative to fathers" (Milkie, Raley, & Bianchi, 2009, p. 488). Based on her interviews, she argued most women worked one shift in the paid labor force and then a second shift at home. Once women joined the paid labor force, which Hochschild (1989) defines as revolutionary; women became overwhelmed and inundated with work. A first shift in the paid labor force and a second shift at home constrained their time and created unbearable stress and tension in their new lives as working women. While women's roles changed and expanded in the public sphere, their male dominated workplaces and men in general showed little to no change.

Hochschild contends:

- Women primarily engaged in traditional gender roles of cooking, housework, and caring for children;
- The work women did in the homes, such as homework and child care, was unpaid and devalued by spouses and society.
- Women were often disillusioned by their perceived desires to have equity in the relationship.

She connects time pressures, time allocation, family breakdown, and unpleasant labor to gender inequities. Hochschild asserts women's work is often devalued to rationalize the extra hours of labor they perform during the second shift. She contends the second shift is integral to the "stalled revolution" women experienced in the United States, whereby men maintain their status and power as the "breadwinner" and women, despite working in the paid labor force, continue performing traditional domestic roles.

According to Hochschild (1989) gender ideologies and expectations frame women's experience of the second shift. Women and men are socialized in their childhood to value traditional gender roles. When men and women join in marriage, they do so with preconceived gender ideologies, which impact how they operate in the relationship. In many cases, working women often times sacrifice their values and desires for the sake of saving their marriages. Thus, working mothers even more so than working women live a daily life constrained by working two shifts. Most working mothers can not outsource their "mother" and "wife" duties and obligations. They are expected to contribute to the overall household income as a dual earner of the home, while also tending to menial daily household chores and their children's needs. Men are often times excused from care work, in part, because they are able to use their socioeconomic status as breadwinner to negotiate power in the household.

The intersectionality of gender, work and family helps to define women's work and inequality in relation to social organization of women's paid and unpaid labor. According to Hochschild (1989) and Smith (1978b) studies show that women who happen to balance paid and unpaid expectations and responsibilities are more likely faced with the feeling of overburdened (Wharton 1994). Even though technology has also provided them ways to multi-task while doing work and family duties simultaneously, they still found the work of the second shift prevented them from working at their full capacity (Wharton 1994). Hochschild (1989) found some women "talk about sleep the way a hungry person talks about food" (p. 9). Particularly, since mothers are more likely to do mundane tasks of childcare, whereas fathers usually do the fun tasks.

Hochschild (1989) demonstrated when women and men reported their domestic work as equal, it turned out that it was inequitable.

"Most women without children spend much more time than men on housework; with children, they devote more time to both housework and child care. Just as there is a wage gap between men and women in the workplace, there is a "leisure gap" between them at home. Most women work one shift at the office or factory and a "second shift" at home" (Hochschild, 1989, p. 4).

While Hochschild's *Second Shifts* most noted for highlighting the significant difference of work time between working men and women, Milkie, Raley, & Bianchi (2009) argue, in spite of her small sampled qualitative study, its greatest contribution was the exploration of the strategies and myths couples use related to gender inequities. They offer three key aspects of gender inequalities that must be investigated to address challenges faced by mothers working the second shift: "leisure deficit," "parent's feelings of time pressure," and "the cultural devaluation of feminine care work (Milkie, Raley, & Bianchi 2009, p. 510). Even more important to Milkie, Raley, & Bianchi (2009) are the three recommendations made to broaden the conceptual understanding of the second-shift:

- Focus on gender inequalities in the context of the whole lives of parents with young children.
- Highlight the need to consider emotional assessment about herself, her spouse and her children to understand the reality of her context in workload performance.
- Conduct comparative studies of working full-time employed married parents with single parents and/or parents with reduced/part-time workloads by social class and race.

The recommendations attempt to enhance second shift as a more inclusive concept, however, it does not offer a serious critical analysis that addresses gender inequalities alongside issues related to power dynamics, in which social inequalities are inextricably linked.

De la Torre Dwyer (2012) offers an analysis of the second shift that attempts to rationalize its significance in terms of economic power. He posits the second shift is highly connected to unpaid labor that directly connects to care work. For De la Torre Dwyer, the rhetoric of the second shift is particularly important because it raises consciousness about care as unpaid labor, which he asserts is the cornerstone for addressing care work as unremunerated, which ultimately weakens women's power in both the public and private spheres. This is further supported by Cossman (2008/2009) in her assessment of work-family conflict.

"The family with its repetitious, socially invisible, physical tasks is a necessary part of life, but it allows for fewer opportunities for full human flourishing than public spheres like the market or the government. This less-flourishing sphere is not the natural or moral responsibility only of women. Therefore, assigning it to women is unjust. Women assigning it to themselves is equally unjust (p.412)."

Though De la Torre Dwyer (2012) and Cossman (2008/2009) both address care work as a matter of justice and consciousness-raising around women's unpaid work, neither align their arguments in a way that inextricably links care work to race or class. Thus, even if care work becomes remunerated, their solutions do not address structural inequality grounded in race, class and gender that often dictate the type of work accessed by labor participants and the wage gaps that historically impact women, particularly women of color who are most likely to do care work.

Critique of the Second Shift

The influence of second shift crosses disciplines and reaches both within and outside academia, i.e., the concept became a mainstream term familiar to many people. Almost thirty years after Hochschild's development of the second shift, scholars from various disciplines in economics, social work, nursing, sociology and women studies (to name a few) are still attempting to broaden the concept by expanding it to a third and fourth shift. Much of the research beyond the second shift is outside the area of sociology and the studies' primary goal is to point to additional shifts performed by working women that specifically relate to their field of study. Still today, women are performing dual roles as professionals in the workplace and in their personal arenas as mothers, daughters, caretakers, friends, sisters and so on. Both their professional and personal spaces and roles require them to operate in multi-shifts simultaneously going beyond second, third or fourth shifts. Juxtaposed to scholars building on the conceptualization of the second shift, some scholars suggest the second shift has diminished largely due to a more service-driven, technologically developed culture. "Since 1960, women have cut their domestic labor time in half due in part to the 'outsourcing' of chores to takeout and restaurants, dry cleaning services, and meal preparation stores (Johnson & Johnson 2008, p. 503)." Rottenberg (2017) posits while household and care work are being reduced, both types of work are "being outsourced to other women deemed disposable since they are neither considered strivers nor properly responsabilized ... [producing a continuation of] ... forms of racialized and class-stratified gender exploitation" (p. 332).

The scope of the scholarship on the second shift has highlighted the complexity of women's dual roles and burdens as mothers, wives, and working women and professional workers. While some scholars argue the second shift is still relevant, we contend that it misses the mark in addressing the plight of most women in the workforce—particularly care workers and domestics—because its conceptualization is grounded in a bourgeois feminism and neoliberal feminist framework.

Second Shift: A Novel Idea

In the same way Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* (1963) is defined as “‘earth-shattering,’ the book that changed the consciousness of the country- and the world” (Friedan 1963), Hochschild's conceptualization of the second shift went mainstream as a novel idea and described as phenomenal work on women's fight for equality in the 20th Century. Hochschild's classic, *The Second Shift*, reinvigorated middle class women and received an overwhelming amount of attention in mainstream media, popular press and introductory sociology textbooks. While she focuses on a work-family balance and its impact on women's progress in the public sphere, Hochschild's second shift emerges out of a context affecting White middle and upper-class mothers and wives, who were college educated women performing a substantial amount of unremunerated, devalued work in the private spheres. Like Friedan's argument that women's lives as housewives were mundane and unfulfilling, Hochschild states that same mundane life hindered women's ability to experience equality and equity in the workforce due to the emotional labor tied to their second shift performance.

Hochschild (1989) explains her starting point for the conceptualization of the second shift,

“Part of me felt envious of the smooth choicelessness of those male colleagues who did not bring their children to Barrows Hall but who knew their children were in loving hands. I sometimes felt this when I met one of these men jogging on the track and then met his wife taking their child to the YMCA kinder-gym. I felt it too when I saw wives drive up to the building in the evening in their station wagons, elbows on the window, two children in the back, waiting for a man briskly walking down the steps, briefcase in hand” (p. xiii).

While ignoring the history of women and work in the U.S., she locates the second shift as a problem that arises from her version of a “revolutionary” experience tied to women entering the paid labor force in larger numbers after the 1960s. Hochschild asserts in a “Washington Post” interview with Brigid Schulte's (2014):

“women have gone into the workforce, that was the revolution, but the workplace they go into and the men they come home to have changed less rapidly, or not at all. Nor has the government that could give them policies would ease the way, like paid leave, paid family medical leave, or subsidized child care the state of the art child care, that too is stalled. We what you've got are three sources of stall” (p. 3).

The emergence of Hochschild's second shift is interconnected to her lived experiences as a privileged middle-class White woman professor who researches the lives of working women. Hochschild does not structurally or historically ground the concept. Thus, ignoring the fact that marginalized working women have never had a “choice” to work. Work is a necessity for survival and they are bound by exploitative labor performed for extremely low-wages.

A historical analysis ignores the plight of these working women, and in doing so, Hochschild (1989) equates middle-class working women's entrance to the workforce as revolutionary, ignoring the women in the labor force (voluntary or involuntary) long before them and simplifying the goal of revolution—which is to bring forth complete liberation and social transformation of a system. Critical and radical feminists offer stout criticism against traditional feminists approaches that dismiss the historical-structural context of women's inequality. Critical theoretical frameworks offer a more inclusive understanding of women, work and equality in the United States. Such approaches make visible the labor of marginalized working women whose work as care takers and domestics allows upper-middle class working women to be emancipated from second shift duties.

A Historiographical Examination of Working Women in the United States

Hochschild locates second shift as a problem that arises from women entering the paid labor force in larger numbers after 1960s. She assumes that before the second shift, most women only worked one shift, which was primarily tied to the private sphere not the first shift. While the term second shift was coined in 1989 by Hochschild, the social construction of work, gender, family and inequality were certainly not new social factors for masses of women, specifically African Diasporic women who were forced slave workers in the United States.

Their slave labor was unpaid, exploitative and oppressive. African Diasporic enslaved women in the United States worked without rights, privileges, voice, visibility or resources, while laboring 24/7 in White households, the fields, and also providing care work for their own troubled families and other families due to inhumane slave laws. While little to no research highlights their cries of multiple spheres of labor - often unidentified shifts including non-consensual sex with their plantation owners and overseers - the historiographical examination of African Diasporic enslaved women in the United States illustrates the second shift was by far not a new experience or phenomenon. Juxtaposed to the second shift performed by middle-class working women in the late 1980s, the labor African Diasporic enslaved women performed was life-threatening as their work was commodified without any wages or labor policy restrictions.

Carter G. Woodson (1930, p. 1) describes the burdensome labor of enslaved African women in his classic work, *Negro Washwomen*:

“When a slave she arose with the crowing of the fowl to sweat all but blood in the employ of a despotic mistress for whose household she had to toil often until late in the night. On return home she had to tax her body further to clean a neglected hut, to prepare the meals and wash the clothes of her abandoned children.”

Enslaved African American women in the U.S. we're not allowed to experience burn-out and they certainly could not opt-out of work. The labor was so taxing they rarely had quality time for their own families. African enslaved women not only survived in one of the most systematically oppressed and exploited eras in U.S. history, but they at times thrived to become lifetime church participants, community organizers, entrepreneurs and philanthropic women even out of their powerless context. They survived as hard laborers, breadwinners, wives, family members and community volunteers with little to no recognition by society or scholars although they performed multiple shifts, which were often invisible and unrecognized, and in most cases, inhumane work. Their experiences occurred long before White middle-class women joined the paid labor force and encountered multiple responsibilities as workers, wives, and mothers.

To understand the lives of working women and their socio-economic conditions, particularly in the context of power and oppression in the U.S., scholars must consider how capitalism flourishes by maximizing profit through exploiting the cheapest labor possible. We must extend scholarship to the analysis of the unrecognized, unknown and unidentified labor performed by working women at intersecting axes. The historicity of women and work is significant in understanding gender inequality in the U.S., dating back to the experiences of native working women from slavery to present. Marginalized women have never had much choice in the labor they engaged in. Furthermore, dichotomizing labor into shifts misconstrues the lived experiences and socio-economic and political conditions of marginalized women in a capitalist society. Approaching women and labor from a critical socio-historical perspective, we problematize the legitimization of second shift as a revolutionary concept in traditional feminist discourse.

Conclusion

To avoid oversimplifying working women's experiences to merely quantifiable shifts that do not give a big picture of working women's everyday lived experiences; we must undertake a more in-depth analysis of the second shift. This paper aims to deconstruct the second shift by engaging a critical comparative historical analysis of working women. Most work on second shift highlights the struggles of working women balancing work and home life. However, critical scholarly work must acknowledge the roots of work, gender, race, and class in the U.S. workforce to develop a more inclusive and accurate picture of the experiences of diverse working women.

African American women, for example, entered the workforce with unidentifiable shifts dating back to the arrival of the first slave ship in the United States. The second shift did not emerge out of a context that gave voice and visibility to these inaugural women workers, including Native American workers in the U.S. It focused on the new difficulties White middle-class working women experienced in balancing work and family responsibilities. It was only after women of the dominant culture entered the workforce that the second shift was “introduced” as a profound and new phenomenon in the 1980s.

While Hochschild's second shift highlights women's oppression in relation to gender inequality, the flaws and shortcomings of its a historical treatment of women and work in the U.S. is problematic. We argue that because Hochschild failed to engage a critical comparative historical analysis in the development of second shift, her work ultimately dismisses, devalues and omits marginalized groups of working women. Throughout history these women have engaged unpaid, underpaid, involuntary, devalued, and/or overlapping never ending shifts of labor long before middle-class White women joined the paid labor force.

The conceptualization of second shift is primarily embedded in the context of White middle-class women who work often by "choice" and whose overall dilemma is grounded in balancing work-family life (Rottenberg 2017). Juxtaposed to "poor women and minority women, [who] have never had the financial ability to embrace the separate spheres dichotomy necessary to ... [unlock the stalling of the revolution for women]. Poor and minority women have always had to labor outside the home in support of their families" (Johnson & Johnson, 2008, p. 507).

By locating the second shift at the experiences of middle-class White women, she fails to locate the lived experiences of other marginalized women along intersecting axes. As a result, Hochschild develops the concept from a privileged standpoint that is structurally and historically void. Furthermore, by quantifying working women's lived experiences into shifts, her work does not address how (1) labor does not always operate as shifts with starting and stopping points, (2) labor intersects and overlaps and (3) that labor is more than just two temporally bound points.

Future Recommendations

Future studies should develop a linkage between "care" work and invaluable labor, illustrate the cultural capital of care work and debunk gender ideologies that are counterproductive towards bringing about change in men and women's perceptions of gender equality and equity. The traditional normative social and cultural practices of the gender-specific division of labor prohibit women from advancing in society. To ensure women's full participation in the global economy, it is important to create both economic and social discourses that create a space where women and men can envision a better world with equal and equitable housework and childcare, thus strategically reducing women's paid and unpaid obligations.

A critical comparative-historiographical examination of scholarship on women and work in the U.S. would help to discover the roots of gendered divisions of labor to debunk the devaluatization of domestic economics often tied to women's labor and powerlessness in society. We have to strive to develop concepts that are inclusive at its core. We must tell the the untold story of invisible laborers to avoid history repeating itself century to century regarding the exploitation of domestic labor. Norword (1992) asserts, "American women have come a long way in the [past] centur[ies]. There can be no turning back the tide of history" (p. 103). Missing from traditional feminist analysis is a discussion of multiple oppressions and how diverse women maneuver oppressive structures (Brewer 1993). Concepts derived from traditionalist perspectives often fail to consider how gender, race, class, and sexuality are inextricably linked systematic oppressions. According to hooks (1984) "traditional feminist discourse, who for the most part make and articulate feminist theory [with] ... little or no understanding of white supremacy as a racial politic, of the psychological impact of class, of their political status within a racist, sexist, capitalist state" (p. 4).

Consequently, traditional feminists often develop concepts that address social problems in an individualized matter, resulting in limited social change for diverse women. Considering the socio-economic conditions of working women, who consists primarily of women of color, any "revolutionary" concept will require a holistic approach to systematically address the matrix of domination confronting working women in the U.S. and the global economy. Future scholarship must extend beyond quantitative methodological methods to include the storytelling of diverse working women at the intersections of race, occupation, marital status, level of work, type of work, age, religion, and other categorical differences. Until research fully examines labor at the intersection of categorical difference, the labor shifts of many women will remain invisible and unidentified.

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