

Bringing The Second Shift to Work¹

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It is often assumed that the dramatic rise in women's labor force participation over the last thirty years has prompted women to approach the world of work in similar fashion to men—thinking of their own needs, of how to get ahead, of how to break the glass ceiling. Certainly the business advice literature and magazines of the new economy make no distinction between the interests of men and women. However, many women take a different approach toward the workplace. Rather than accepting definitions of paid work as inherently cold, contractual obligations, they implicitly or unconsciously bring with them into the workplace some version of “familism” and the “second shift.” And by so doing they are approaching the workplace differently from their male coworkers.

In their book, *The Minimal Family*, Jan Dizard and Howard Gadlin define “familism” as “a reciprocal sense of commitment, sharing, cooperation, and intimacy” embedded in “both material and emotional dependency and obligation.... Familism embraces solicitude, unconditional love, personal loyalty, and willingness to sacrifice for others.”² In *The Second Shift*, sociologist Arlie Hochschild demonstrates how so many working women today have two work shifts: their paid job and their unpaid job at home doing housework and child care. She calculates that, because of these two shifts, “women worked roughly fifteen hours longer each week than men. Over a year, they worked an *extra month of twenty-four-hour days a year.*” She concludes:

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.³

Based on clinical case studies of women who have come to psychotherapy with work-related problems, I have discovered that many women refuse to leave commitment, sharing, cooperation, material and emotional obligation, personal loyalty, and a willingness to sacrifice for others at home. They transport these qualities into the workplace. Surprisingly, they also bring with them aspects of the second shift: they routinely bake and cook for coworkers, buy food and candy for them, run personal errands for their supervisors, and vacuum the office and clean the bathrooms secretly after work.

Since 1993, 164 women have participated in a group psychotherapy program I run in Berkeley, California, for women who have work-related problems. Primarily focused on interpersonal difficulties with supervisors or coworkers, these groups offer a supportive atmosphere to discuss emotional involvement in the workplace that is often intense and ultimately conflictual.

These women are demographically diverse (e.g., 53 percent are black; 61 percent are single) and largely hold pink-collar jobs, although other occupations such as social worker, electrician, middle manager, and police officer are represented as well. The average age is forty-three, and they range from twenty-six to sixty-three years of age.

Most of the women who have participated in my groups have given themselves completely, unselfconsciously, and unselfprotectively to work. They tend to idealize their companies or supervisors without restraint. They exhibit almost a Calvinist approach to working hard and being personally productive. They often believe wholeheartedly that their company is a “family” and/or that their coworkers or supervisors are fictive family members or friends. They represent an extreme end of a continuum in our current national obsession with work. They not only work excessive hours, but look for the satisfaction of unmet emotional needs in their workplaces. Their self-esteem, sense of belonging, identity, and purpose seem to revolve around work. In many ways, they are married to their jobs. And as part of their implicit marriage contract, many have a willingness, actually an eagerness, to infuse the workplace with familism and the second shift.

In the mid-1990s, one of my psychotherapy groups began calling itself “the muffin club.” Its eight members assumed this identity when they realized that each of them had routinely brought to work bagels or muffins purchased with their own money and on their own initiative. As the women became more open and self-revealing in group, they began sharing all the ways in which they brought the second shift to work. Office cleanliness emerged as a significant topic of conversation. Most of them found aspects of their workplaces’ janitorial services substandard and took it upon themselves to vacuum, dust, wash kitchen sinks, and clean the toilets in the bathrooms. Many of them brought in their own cleaning supplies to accomplish these tasks even though none of them had anything remotely approaching cleaning offices as part

of their job descriptions. In one session, each of the women discussed the amount of time she spent every week thinking about what treats to bring to work (e.g., muffins, candy, bagels) and how best to supply them. Should she go to Costco and get the most muffins for the least amount of money? Or should she buy from the local bakery, spending more money, but providing better muffins? Perhaps people were getting sick of muffins. Maybe she should bring in bagels this week. Or maybe she should just spend the time baking. People always preferred home-baked goods. But bagels were less fattening, and when was she going to find time to bake anyway? Cleaning and supplying food for coworkers were clearly not part of these women's job descriptions, but they nonetheless assumed these tasks as an intrinsic part of their work lives.

Similarly, they and so many other women I have seen enacted rituals of familism throughout their workweek. They organized celebrations of coworkers' and supervisors' birthdays and circulated greeting cards acknowledging births, deaths, anniversaries, children's graduations, and promotions. They often brought coworkers videotapes of TV programs and exchanged CDs, baby clothes, and recipes. They organized office potlucks, parties, and off-site get-togethers. They gossiped, listened to others' problems, and often continued workplace conversations on e-mail or the telephone at night or over the weekend. And they frequently ran errands for their bosses—picking up dry cleaning, walking dogs, housesitting, and buying food. Through these acts, they demonstrated care, obligation, loyalty, reciprocity, solicitude, and a willingness to sacrifice for others.

In bringing familism and the second shift to work, my patients are making their workplaces more homey, more familiar, and more female, insofar as women have been historically identified with domesticity. In part, they are responding to the very recent and dramatic transformation in women's lives whereby full-time, lifelong work in the paid labor force has become the rule rather than the exception. They are implicitly creating ways of working that incorporate values and practices founded in the home. Often only a single generation away from mothers who had identities exclusively constructed around domesticity, my patients are blurring the distinctions between home and work, private and public that offer them both emotional fulfillment and continuity between their lives at home and their lives at work, between the legacy of domesticity and the workplace of the twenty-first century.

Arlie Hochschild notes that today “many women of every social class and in every kind of job are faced with a common problem: how shall I preserve the domestic culture of my mother and grandmother in the age of the nine-to-five or eight-to-six job?” She concludes that women accomplish this through the second shift: “On weekends and holidays most working women revert to being housewives. . . battl[ing] to carry forward a domestic culture—a culture of homemade apple pie, home-sewn Halloween costumes, hand-ironed shirts.”⁴

But since Hochschild made this observation in 1989, fewer women have the opportunity to “revert to being housewives.” With the increasing hours spent at work and the decreasing investment in home as anything more than a refueling station, many women are attempting to preserve domestic culture through bringing that culture to work with them each morning. Rather than carrying on their mothers’ and grandmothers’ traditions at home, they are baking homemade apple pie for their coworkers, orchestrating company Halloween pumpkin carving contests, and picking up hand-ironed shirts at the cleaners for their boss.

Beginning in the second half of the eighteenth century and continuing throughout the nineteenth, men left farms, an agrarian way of life, for factories, offices, and the city. Industrialization cut them off from domesticity, a sphere that became the province of women alone. As work life became more alienated, competitive, anonymous, and contractual, the home emerged as a “haven in a heartless world.” And it was women who preserved this haven, who continued “an orientation toward life that was closer to what had been,” as Arlie Hochschild points out.⁵ Through protecting and maintaining values and practices founded in an agrarian way of life, women ideally provided their husbands and sons with a buffer, a respite from the new, heartless world that increasingly enveloped their lives.

Today, women themselves are increasingly leaving the home for the workplace. They are encountering a world that is based in autonomy, competition, and the marketing of the self. In order to cope with this transition, many women are bringing with them into their jobs *an orientation toward life that is closer to what has been*. They are transporting familism and elements of the second shift into their jobs, making the workplace more domestic, more caring, and providing themselves and their coworkers and supervisors with a buffer as so many of us move from living at home to living at work.

“Sarah” is an example of a woman who married her job. A thirty-three-year-old single mother, Sarah had worked at “PeoplePoint” for six years.⁶ She adored her job as office manager. She worked six days a week, often twelve hours a day because she was “needed” and “felt so appreciated.” Her appreciation certainly did not consist of a high salary or a generous vacation. Sarah earned about \$36,000 a year and never took a day off. The appreciation she experienced was the accolades management would shower on her, the roses she was sent by the various teams with which she interfaced, and the leftovers her direct supervisor would bring her from his lunches with clients. “I honestly thought that I was so special because *I* got the Chinese food in those little white boxes.”

Sarah would bring her two small sons to work with her at night and over the weekends. She would dress them in PeoplePoint clothes, which were available in the company logo store. She covered her house with PeoplePoint items and had her sons saying they wanted to work at PeoplePoint when they grew up. She routinely used her own money to buy muffins and bagels for the staff, remembered coworkers’ and supervisors’ birthdays, and planned various company activities, such as pumpkin carving contests and holiday parties.

After some serious mistakes in acquiring two smaller companies, PeoplePoint began laying off employees for the first time in its history. Sarah was asked to take on departed coworkers’ tasks, and she acquiesced without thinking. But as her job responsibilities grew, Sarah found herself unable to keep up with the workload. She couldn’t sleep and felt perpetually anxious and exhausted. After a couple of months spent in this state of chronic stress, Sarah gently approached her supervisor and asked if she might be relieved of some of her new duties. Her supervisor responded with a single admonition: “if you can’t stand the heat, get out of the kitchen.” Sarah states that she “nearly passed out when he said that. I couldn’t believe my ears. After all I had done for them, and this is what I get. I mean, they didn’t care that I was falling apart, that my kids didn’t really have a mother.” Two weeks later Sarah received a layoff notice and shortly thereafter walked into my office. She says that separating herself from PeoplePoint is far more difficult than her divorce: “My husband was just a man, and I know there’ll be other ones out there. But I know there’ll never be another PeoplePoint.”

Sarah describes a lifelong desire to be needed and to help others. She grew up in a large family and found her place, her identity, through being supportive and useful. She felt close to her sisters, always surrounded herself with friends, and never had difficulty attracting male attention. After three years of college, Sarah dropped out of school to marry her boyfriend. Shortly thereafter she moved with him to a community about an hour and a half from where she had lived her whole life so that he could enter a residency program at a teaching hospital. She then became pregnant and stayed home to take care of her first and then second son. Sarah looks back at this time in her life as a lonely one, separated from family and friends. She had worked part-time through high school and college and found taking care of her home and children unchallenging and insufficiently engaging.

When her sons were two and four, Sarah took the job at PeoplePoint and quickly discovered the challenge and emotional engagement for which she had been longing. As an expanding company that was continually reinventing itself, PeoplePoint made great use of Sarah's seemingly endless willingness to work at whatever task she was assigned. Sarah reflexively responded to the total company culture that emphasized the "PeoplePoint family" and "PeoplePoint values." She was appreciated for how "homey" she made the workplace. Coworkers and supervisors would flock to her office because of her warm personality, her eagerness to listen to anyone's problems, and the candy bowl on her desk well stocked with treats. She actively transformed the workplace into a more homelike environment not only by bringing in cut flowers and bagels, but by binding people together through having them sign greeting cards when coworkers were ill or had babies, planning lunches for employees' birthdays, and soliciting input for how the next party or company social event should be structured.

Once Sarah started working long hours at PeoplePoint, she and her husband simply never saw one another. His long hours as a physician took him away from home much of the time. Their children were in full-time child care and often in the evenings would sleep in sleeping bags next to Sarah in her PeoplePoint cubicle as she toiled to finish whatever project she had been given. After about two years of this thoroughly alienated family life, Sarah's husband announced he was in love with another woman and requested a divorce.

Sarah states that her life as a single mother does not feel appreciably different from that as a married woman, given the high degree of emotional disconnection she experienced from her husband. Her real love was and is PeoplePoint, a company that provided her with a sense of family, community, self-esteem, and a sense of purpose for which she longed. The conundrum that Sarah's story, and so many others, reflects is that the more we invest in work, the less time and emotional resources we have to invest in family and community. In turn, this decline in investment depletes our small family units still further, causing us to rely more heavily on work in an attempt to satisfy our unmet longings and needs.

Although it is certainly possible to recognize the ways in which my patients' second shift activities benefit the workplace, it is important also to recognize that familism and the new economic order are fundamentally at loggerheads. A system founded in profit maximization, competition, contractual relationships, and continual risk and change is antithetical to the loyalty, obligation, cooperation, and sacrifice by which familism is defined. Because their acts and ways of being in the workplace identify them with more domestic, feminine, or maternal qualities, women who bring the second shift to work represent something attractive on the one hand and anachronistic and diminished on the other. Certainly, they are sought out by coworkers for companionship and support and by supervisors for extra work and personal favors. But I they are also taken for granted, as most maternal figures are. Their care is seen as unconditional, offered perhaps too freely. The fact that they seem so eager to please makes them vulnerable to exploitation. And their acting out of more traditional feminine roles seems to make some other women in their workplaces anxious, uneasy.

In today's workplace, to be too identified with a traditional female role is tantamount to not being taken seriously, diminishing one's chances for advancement and achievement in a work world defined in opposition to familism. Therefore, as much as my patients make their workplaces more homey and comfortable, their activities evoke ambivalence, an ambivalence is rooted in our conflicts over dependence and autonomy. In bringing familism to work, they highlight a predicament succinctly illustrated on the cover of *True* magazine for November 1970 and summarized by Arlie Hochschild:

[A] commuter train is filled with businessmen reading morning newspapers and office memos. A bewildered middle-aged housewife in bathrobe and furry

slippers, hair in curlers, searches the aisles for her husband, his forgotten briefcase in hand. Her husband is hiding behind his seat, embarrassed that his wife looks so ridiculous, so out of place. In their suits, holding their memo pads, reading their newspapers, the men of the commuter car determine what is ridiculous. They represent the ways of the city; the housewife represents those of the peasant.⁷

Although my patients are clearly not housewives, their ways of being in the workplace can be viewed as *out of place* insofar as familism and the second shift are identified with home. And ultimately *home* brings up issues of dependence, being cared for, bathrobes, and furry slippers. Few of us don suits to go to work these days, but our tee shirts and jeans are not bathrobes. To some degree, we all must deny our needs to be cared for, to be dependent, in order to work. And in this process of denial, many of us may not wish to be too closely identified with anything or anyone that reminds us of our warded-off dependency needs.

Thus, bringing familism and the second shift to work may be seen as having two possible outcomes. First, over time, it may actually transform the workplace. As women's labor force participation continues to rise and as people spend less time at home and more time on the job, the familism many women bring with them gradually may be incorporated into workplace practices. In some ways, this is already happening. Teamwork, recognition ceremonies, bringing pets to work, and "caring" amenities such as free food, massage, and concierge services can be viewed as features of the new economy that "piggyback" on the culture many women are bringing with them into the workplace.⁸ In order to attract and retain female employees, who are expected to account for 48 percent of the workforce in the US by 2005, employers simply may have to make their job environments more appealing to women. And if we all continue to work longer hours than any industrialized nation on earth, both women and men's needs to have aspects of home transported to work may increase.

Conversely, bringing the second shift to work may backfire—both for the individual women who attempt it and for the workplace in general. In the case of my patients, enacting familism at work typically obscures the distinctions between what is really home and what is work, between an ideal marriage based in mutuality, unfeigned care, and reciprocity and "marriage" to a job that is based in inequality, power, and demonstrations of "care" that are implemented for instrumental reasons (i.e., attracting and retaining employees and inducing them

to work longer hours). This obfuscation results in my patients being astounded when they discover that their second shift efforts are not recognized or appreciated. They feel betrayed, unable to comprehend why their employers don't care. Often dwelling within their own cultures of familism, they are blind to the realities of the bottom line, rendered unable or unwilling to continue in their jobs.

Those of my patients who withdraw from the workforce take with them the contributions made by extremely hard working, highly committed employees. Their departure not only negatively affects productivity, but diminishes the quality of workplace culture. Suddenly there is no one organizing parties, supplying muffins, or generously listening to a coworker's problem. Although my patients may be ambivalently regarded by some, many the sorely miss familism they bring to work.

After some months, PeoplePoint tried to rehire Sarah. Her former supervisor sent her an e-mail indicating that there had been some changes in management and that "she was sorely missed." "More than anything," he wrote, "we miss your smile and the way you made us feel at home." Sarah had spent weeks in my psychotherapy group that called itself "the muffin club" by the time she received this e-mail. She read it to the group amidst roaring laughter and shouts of "No way!" and "You've got to be kidding!" One of the group members treated Sarah's supervisor's entreaty much as that of a spurned lover's: "he had his chance; let him see what he does without you." Another suggested Sarah return, but only under conditions she set, such as earning a much higher salary. But ultimately, Sarah decided to not return because she wished that her supervisor "missed me for my skills, not because I made the office into a home."

After another six months in group, Sarah applied to return to college to earn her BA. She vowed that she would never work as she had before, never make her job into her life, and never spend her time organizing pumpkin carving contests for her workplace. Sarah was launched on the road so many of us have already traveled, leaving domesticity, women's culture, familism, and the second shift at home, in exchange for the ambiguous rewards of competing in a paid labor force that eschews commitment, sharing, cooperation, dependency, and care.

Notes

1. Excerpt from *Married to the Job* (New York: Free Press, 2002).
2. Jan Dizard and Howard Gadlin, *The Minimal Family* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), pp. 6-7.
3. Arlie Hochschild, *The Second Shift* (New York: Avon Books, 1989), pp. 3-4.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 247.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 241.
6. I've changed the company's and my patient's names to preserve their anonymity.
7. Arlie Hochschild, *The Second Shift* (New York: Avon Books, 1989), p. 244.
8. See Arlie Hochschild, *The Time Bind* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1997), p. 20.