

Case Study

Chapter 10

A Canadian woman who works full time, is married, and has two young children is also doing most of the housework in her home. She has a demanding career and a happy marriage, but the demands of the housework are making her feel overwhelmed.

She has talked to her partner about this. He insists that he does a fair share of the work by taking care of the lawn and maintaining the household budget. When he grew up, his mom did the housework and child care, so he expects his wife to do the same, thinking of it as “women’s work.”

The woman would like to hire a cleaner, but after paying for child care, the family is unable to afford it.

- 1. When and why did women begin to be defined as homemakers and full-time mothers who worked at home?**
- 2. Does the attitude that women should do the housework and raise children still exist today in Canada? Are women still taking on more of these responsibilities?**
- 3. What does technology have to do with this shift?**
- 4. Why are sociologists concerned about housework and families?**
- 5. Who does more of the housework in your family? Is there an equitable distribution of the workload? Why or why not?**

Sample Answers:

1. Starting with the Industrial Revolution and people moving increasingly to urban centres, we see a demarcation between home and work whereas in pre-industrial times both women and men worked at home and away from home on the land. In the industrial age, women began to be defined as homemakers and full-time mothers who worked exclusively in the home. Thus, the responsibility for housework and child care shifted almost exclusively to women.
2. The attitude still remains and statistics show that even though women are working more and more in demanding jobs and careers, some full-time, they nonetheless complete more responsibilities at home, spending many more hours than their male partners on housework and child care.
3. New technology, such as vacuum cleaners and dishwashers, allowed women to enter the workforce more easily since they had to spend less time on housework. Unfortunately, the amount of hours of housework did not decrease, but rather the expectations of women and mothers increased.
4. Sociologists using the feminist theoretical framework would argue that this unequal division of labour is unfair to women, as is the lack of attention to this issue of unpaid and low-status labour.
5. Answers will vary. It's important to allow students to explore the division of labour in their family after reading the textbook chapter and case study.