Our beliefs about gender are built into the way we use language.

- Language both reflects our ideas about gender and also shapes the way we talk and think about it.

In English, most words for women have some negative connotation:

- “Woman” and “girl” have both been used as synonyms for “prostitute.” “Girl” also connotes childishness.
- “Lady” was used in the 18th century to describe higher class females (as opposed to “women”) and may be considered polite by older generations. However, it sounds patronizing to many younger people.
- “Ma’am” connotes age in a way that “sir” doesn’t. “Gal” sounds patronizing in a way that “guy” doesn’t.
- “Female” “is now regarded as a mildly contemptuous equivalent for woman [that strong-minded female is here again]” (WNWD, 4th ed.)
Gender in the dictionary

✓ Manly: having the qualities generally regarded as those that a man should have; virile; strong, brave, resolute, honorable, etc.

✓ Womanly: like a woman, womanish

✓ Masculine: having qualities regarded as characteristic of men and boys, as strength, vigor, boldness, etc.; manly; virile

✓ Feminine: having qualities regarded as characteristic of women and girls, as gentleness, weakness, delicacy, or modesty

✓ Effeminate: 1. having the qualities generally attributed to women, as weakness, timidity, delicacy, etc. 2. characterized by such qualities; weak; soft; decadent, etc.
Through the process of *semantic derogation*, words for women are debased:

- **Spinster**: from “tender of a spinning wheel” to a derogatory term for an unmarried woman
- **Hussy**: from “female head of household” to “woman of low morals”
- **Tart**: from term of endearment to “promiscuous woman”
- **Biddy**: from term of endearment to “annoying (and usually old) woman”

Semantic derogation is evident in male-female pairs like:

- Governor-governess, master-mistress, patron-matron, sir-madam
Other examples of gender beliefs built into English include:

- Men and women are “opposite sexes”
- English uses male generic language, e.g., freshmen, mankind, “he” meaning “he or she”
- Spotlighting: unnecessarily highlighting a person’s gender, e.g., “lady doctor” and “woman lawyer” define women professionals as exceptions. Also, “male nurse.”
- Women’s names and titles draw attention to their relationships with men, e.g., Mrs., Miss, Mrs. John Smith
- Greater vocabulary (and with more negative connotations) to describe promiscuous women than promiscuous men.
Domestic division of labor

✓ With industrial revolution came idea of “two spheres”
✓ Because it wasn’t paid, women’s housework was devalued
✓ A majority of women are now in the labor force
✓ However, in two-wage earner couples, women continue to do more housework than men
  • Wives (1995): 19.4 hours per week; husbands: 10.4 hours
✓ When women marry their housework goes up
  • Non-married women (1995): 14.6 hours per week
✓ Second shift: shift of housework that married women perform in addition to shift of work outside of home
The second shift

- Research method: interviewed and surveyed 50 couples, in-depth observations of 12 families
- Some major findings:
  - Only 20% of husbands shared housework (did over 1/3)
  - Women do more of daily jobs (cooking, cleaning, childcare)
  - Men do more jobs that are occasional (repairs) or can be scheduled flexibly (changing the oil)
  - Women do more undesirable tasks (washing toilets)
  - Women do more child maintenance (feeding and bathing)
  - Men do more enjoyable activities with children (trip to park)
  - Men have more leisure time (“leisure gap”)

Effects of second shift

- Women: overworked, sleep-deprived, emotionally drained, resentful of husbands
- Men: resentment from wives, marital conflict
- Both men and women may be failing to live up to their beliefs about gender and family
- Families often develop “family myths” that obscure truth about division of labor in order to manage family tension
  - Upstairs-downstairs myth
  - Second-shift fetishes

“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 the dispute. Evan could 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.” (p. 43)
“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 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.” (p. 47)
Latest housework information

✔ Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer & Robinson (2000.) “Is Anyone Doing Housework?”

✔ Method: time diaries (1965, ‘75, ‘85, ‘95)

✔ Findings:
  • The housework gap between wives and husbands has shrunk
  • But wives still do about twice as much as husbands
  • Much of change is due to wives doing less housework
  • Majority of wives’ housework (15.8 of 19.4 hours) is core housework (e.g., meals, housecleaning, laundry)
  • Majority of husbands’ housework (6.7 of 10.4 hours) is non-core housework (e.g., outdoor chores, repairs)
Housework trends for married couples


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