



HOME RENAISSANCE FOUNDATION
RENEWING THE CULTURE OF THE HOME

Home Renaissance Foundation

Working Papers

Number 26

Homework on Housework
Impact for the Present and the Future

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March 2011

Homework on Housework – Impact for the Present and the Future

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The term 'homework' in the title is used on purpose to stress the focus of the content of this paper. Firstly that housework is not only about the practical issues of running a building, but is also homemaking, building something much further than what is contained within four walls. Secondly, and this is essentially what this paper is trying to demonstrate, greater and deeper research is needed to stimulate study into the effects and impact of the work within the home on individuals, the family and society as a whole.

If exile is to be in flight from, then home is to move forwards. In the continuum individualism, then home incorporates connection, relocation, and community.¹

Initially an overview of the historical context of housework is included. This paper then explores the aspects of which housekeeping is composed. These are analysed into themes, according to the specific attributes required to carry them out effectively. By studying the tasks required to carry out this work in the home, a clearer definition will be obtained of the skills required in these tasks. The study will then investigate the effects of these acquired skills on three groups: the individual carrying out the task, the family unit benefiting from these skills and society as a whole.

The paper further aims to demonstrate how housework promotes sustainable living by the application of acquired skills to other aspects of personal life and by the transmission of those same skills to the next generation through example, training and education. Housework also fosters concern for the environment by care of the material aspects of the building, inside and externally and the practice of disposing of household waste in an ecologically responsible manner.

The study was undertaken initially based on personal experience of many years working professionally in housekeeping in my own home and also in training and teaching young people who aspire to a career in housekeeping. Initially the paper was a summary of notes developed to teach basic housekeeping skills and to train supervisors in this theme. Housekeeping can be an uninspiring subject and one in which it is challenging to enthuse people. The aim was to make the subject and the classes as enjoyable and as informative as possible and in this way to help the students to appreciate the full impact on themselves, on the proximate recipients of their housekeeping and on the wider environment and social sphere.

Further research into literature written on this topic revealed a range of material from the more practical material related to how to care for the home (e.g. S. Donaldson, *Household Wisdom*, London, Collins & Brown, 2005), through feminist theories and gender issues relating to the work of the home (e.g. Ann Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1985) to studies of the relationship between a women's professional life and how it impacts on the homemaking skills (e.g. Cheryl S. Granrose, *Women's Employment and Homemaking Careers: a lifespan perspective*, New York, Edward Elgar Publications inc., 2010).

¹ Catherine Wiley, Fiona Barnes, Ed. *Homemaking: Women Writers and the Politics of Home*, New York, Garland, 1996, p.3

While these themes are important and well documented and researched they are not addressed in this paper. One theme which recurred is the paucity of research, and hence literature, on the actual impact of housekeeping and the skills acquired when carrying out these activities. In many places there is evidence that an interest is being aroused in the theme, as for example can be seen from the following quotes:

*An entire book could be written about the importance of homemaking - about homemakers.*²

and

But I retained a long-held sense.....that housekeeping - cooking, cleaning, laundry, all the large and small tasks that go into keeping a household humming along - was not a trivial matter but a serious one. People need to eat, to sleep, to have clothes to wear; they need a place to read, a place to play, a place into which to welcome guests and from which to go forth into the world. These are the needs that housework exists to meet. Good academic that I was, I wondered, "Where are the books about this? Where are the books that might describe and unpack and explore the significance - both practical and spiritual - of this kind of work?"³

A further result of research and reading articles and books on this topic led to an informal questionnaire to a range of women of various ages, nationalities and marital status in order to obtain more views of current perceptions of housework. These views are summarised in Annexe 1 and while they are not a scientific analysis and do not form part of the actual content of this paper, they do contribute to provide a range of views, ideas and perceptions which can only be enriching.

Hopefully the content of this paper will stimulate interested parties to further this area of research, one which can be demonstrated as not only being important but which can have an impact on a wide area of society. An integrated approach is needed to carry out these studies as so many disciplines are involved. As will be seen, a study of housekeeping would include: anthropology, sociology, psychology, economics, technology, environmental studies and politics, apart from the practical skills required. In other words – definitely some ‘homework’ is needed to fully understand what is meant by ‘housework’.

Historical overview of housework

Most preindustrial cultures in different countries existed on a system of unpaid household labour producing goods and services for the use of the household members. In some cultures, such as in Britain, this evolved into cottage industries, specialised skills developed by the family unit to produce goods which could be used for bartering or selling in order to buy required commodities.

With the beginning of industrialisation, much of the production work of the household moved from the domestic to the public realm and the character of housework changed. Men and unmarried women moved from homes into factories in increasing numbers and demographic changes occurred

² André R. *Homemakers: the Forgotten Workers*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981, introduction.

³ Margaret K. Peterson, *Keeping House: the Litany of Everyday Life*, San Francisco, California, Jossey-Bass 2007, p. 2-3.

with people moving towards the industrialised towns and cities and becoming a paid labour force. Within the home, housework became more family focused.

A gradual change has taken place in the sociological role of the family in more recent history. A comparison of life in the year 1000 A.D. and then in year 1800 A.D. shows many similarities in attitudes to family life and especially in the role of women in the home. By the middle of the 19th century, many of the tasks previously performed in the home had moved into the commercial, and even in some cases the industrial, sphere.

In the latter part of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century the declining importance of housework was counterbalanced by the rise in home economics, which advocated industrial-like efficiency in running a household. Technological advancements such as running water, gas, and electricity encouraged the development of labour-saving equipment and machines.

In the past 100 years attitudes have changed radically. Factors such as, in Europe, the two world wars, mean that women have needed to take on more external working roles and they have developed new skills and interests. Modern economic and social pressures have meant that in many families both parents are working and as a result less time is available for the practical care of the house. At the same time standards of cleanliness and hygiene have risen which means there is more pressure to maintain a high standard in the home. Newer 'market-based' conveniences such as fast food restaurants, supermarkets and internet shopping have reduced the time that is spent on housework.⁴

Attitudes to and perceptions of housework

Linked into the historical viewpoint, it is necessary here to say something briefly about attitudes to and perceptions of this work. The historical and sociological influences meant that as the man, initially the main breadwinner, sought paid labour, the woman remained at home and housework was seen in many cultures as the role of women.

*The assumption of women's primacy in taking on domestic responsibilities is firmly rooted in traditional gender role expectations.*⁵

Women of the older generations were extremely 'house-proud', because importance was given to appearances, but they also understood the consequences of cleanliness and hygiene for the physical health of the family. Domestic Science was part of the school curriculum which not only gave people, usually girls, basic training in this field, but also meant it was seen as important. Gradually the emphasis has changed and little or no training for caring for the home is covered in schools, at least in the UK.

As more women now also work externally, the balance has been altered and in many cultures men now take some share of this responsibility. Gender is still the best single predictor of the time spent in doing housework and women were reported to be doing the majority of the housework in every

⁴ Ideas taken from <http://family.jrank.org/pages/806/Housework-History-Housework.html>

⁵ C. Geist. 'One Germany, two worlds of housework? Examining employed single and partnered women within the decade after Unification.' *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, Vol 40, No. 3, 2009

nation apart from Russia in a 13-nation study.⁶ The proportionate time spent by men and women, the financial circumstances, the educational backgrounds and current trends of feminist ideology also influence attitudes to housework.

The perceived lack of social prestige of this work in the modern era has meant that housework is seen as unskilled, temporary labour which has neither impact nor value.

Housekeeping was esteemed and valued up until the 1960's, but then entered a wilderness period with no professional recognition or focus.⁷

The attitude of present day society in most Western cultures is that housework is seen as something which has to be done, a necessity to get out of the way quickly in order to get to more 'important' matters. Opinions range from hating it to loving doing it, from finding it boring and tiring to a means of stress relief and therapeutic. The standard of housework need not be meticulous and great emphasis is given to superficial appearance.

We live in an age when we are constantly bombarded with images of immaculate homes on television, in colour supplements and advertising; and yet this is also an age when we have less time than ever to do basic housework, let alone the finishing touches that turn a house into a home.⁸

A minority may be more particular about the care of the home and those who can afford it may employ someone else to do the housework for them. Unfortunately in the commercial environment a comparatively negative view of housework is reflected often resulting in high staff turnover, low wages, little opportunity for training and poor career prospects. Employers are unwilling to spend resources on training people to carry out this work professionally and career prospects are few, although they do exist⁹. These attitudes need to and should be challenged and hopefully in the context of this conference some of these matters can be addressed.

Analysis of housework

In order to look at what is meant by the term 'housework' firstly it would be helpful to define the term 'house' versus 'home'. The house is the dwelling place, the building, shelter where a person lives. This can take many forms but is basically some structure to defend the family group from the elements and to enable them to define and protect themselves and their property.

⁶ Shannon N. Davis and Theodor N. Greenstein. 'Cross-national Variations in the Division of Household Labor' *Journal of Marriage and the family*, Vol. 66, no 5, 2004, pp 1260-1271

⁷ Philippe Rossiter, FIH, quoted in *Hospitality Journal*, Issue 19/2010, p. 10 Editorial: 'UK Housekeeping Recruitment Crisis'.

⁸ Stephanie Donaldson, *Household Wisdom: Traditional Homemaking Tips for Modern Living*, London, Collins & Brown, 2005, p.4

⁹ Ideas taken from José Ramón Pin (ed.), 'La rotación en el sector de la restauración en España', Madrid/Barcelona/Pamplona: IESE/INSEDNETWORK, March 2010

Home, on the other hand is a refuge, the place where the person feels safe and where they belong. Home provides an emotional tie with other members of the family group and therefore home is more of a function: the place where the person belongs.

“Home is the place where, when you go, they have to take you in”¹⁰

It is clear that there is a difference between these two concepts. A house is a building but a building does not make it a home; a house is something material, physical; a home is something spiritual, emotional. The ‘house’ is a physical container and the home means essentially the content, atmosphere and interpersonal relationships that take place within that container.

The term ‘home’ however can also have less positive connotations, for instance: ‘They couldn’t look after their mother any more, so they put her in a home’ – i.e., an institution, a care home for the elderly. It can also happen that the home and relationships within the home have broken down or have become threatening or dangerous.

As current battles over the definition of home indicate, there is no one concept of ‘home’, nor is home a static ‘safe place’ that can exist unchanged by shifts in time or space. The concept of home, much like the concept of identity, is a fertile site of contradictions demanding constant renegotiation and reconstruction.¹¹

These factors are relevant as there are varying definitions of what exactly is meant by housework from the limited perception of keeping a house clean and tidy to the wider and more accurate view of creating a home:

When you are at home, you can let down your guard and take off your mask. Home is the one place in the world where you are safe from feeling put down or out, unentitled or unwanted. It’s where you belong, or as the poet said, the place where, when you go there, they have to take you in. Coming home is your major restorative in life.’¹²

Housework can thus be considered as any essential activity which provides the members of the household with a healthy, safe and hygienic environment in which they can live and grow as human beings. For the purposes of this study, seven aspects have been identified. These are by no means exhaustive but at least provide us with a framework to see what can be included in the term housework. The seven aspects are: homemaking, cleaning fixtures and fittings, linen and household items, nutrition, decorative aspects, finances and home maintenance. Briefly these are defined as the following:

1. **Homemaking:** *a dwelling is the physical and material site that meets a person’s need for shelter – it is a ‘container’. The home, however is that which provides all the other needs such as security, nurture, safety – it is a ‘container with integral content’.*

¹⁰ Robert Frost, poem, *Death of the hired man*

¹¹ Wiley and Barnes, op. cit., p.5

¹² Cheryl Mendelson, *Home Comforts : The Art & Science of Keeping House*, New York: Scribner, 2001, p.7

2. **Cleaning fixtures and fittings:** the process by which the home is maintained at a clean, safe, and hygienic standard. In the narrow sense this is what most people equate with housework – the cleaning of the place they inhabit. Cleaning involves removal of dust, litter, grime from all surfaces and fabrics by means of suction cleaning, washing and wiping. A variety of manual, electrical and chemical materials and equipment are available to facilitate this process and at the same time preserve the fabric and surfaces of the building.

Any household can maintain a semblance of being clean with a basic routine, but in order to guarantee a high standard, attention needs to be given to periodic tasks which are more time consuming, but which ensure levels of hygiene are constant.

3. **Linen and household items:** care of fabrics, personal and household linen for use of people within the home. The importance of this aspect is very often overlooked in consideration of housework, and yet it contributes considerably to the maintenance of high hygiene and human standards.

4. **Nutrition:** ensuring that people within the home have a well-balanced and healthy diet, presented in an attractive and palatable manner. In order to ensure that this is the case, factors such as the age, sex, and occupation of the family members need to be taken in to account as well as seasonal and financial factors. A basic knowledge of menu planning, buying, food preparation and cooking and presentation skills is needed.

5. **Decorative aspects:** the home needs to be pleasing to the senses, restful and conducive to relaxation and renewal. Again this will be influenced by the type and age of the building and the needs of the inhabitants.

6. **Finances:** economic management of the home involves the provision of services for the building, budgeting, buying and financial control to enable the home to function adequately.

7. **Home maintenance:** any dwelling requires regular maintenance and restoration both internally and externally, in order to keep it functioning for its required purposes.

Specific attributes and skills required in housework

If the above categorisation of the tasks required for effective housework is accepted, the skills required for implementation can subsequently be identified. The activity of creating a home demands abilities relating to organisation and planning, and a determination and desire to make this a success. Most people would agree that physical stamina is essential and linked to this is the strength to be demanding on oneself, as often housework is carried out alone. The ability to manage one's time is an essential attribute, coupled with the ability to prioritise appropriately. One skill which is very important is an eye for detail in order to notice what is needed, and the flexibility and common sense to act on this information productively. In the survey on which these conclusions are based, older people also added that the ability to see well is very helpful.

The more practical aspects of cleaning and care of household items demand skills in terms of technical and professional competence. A good knowledge of products, methods, resources and storage is essential. These attributes link in with financial and maintenance aspects as money can be wasted on unnecessary equipment and materials and surfaces can be damaged permanently by inappropriate or poor cleaning techniques.

In order to meet the requirements of nutrition in order to feed the people within the family unit, the skills of knowledge of food science, the combination of nutritional value, food appearance, cooking, texture and presentation need to be acquired. Also important are the tasks of buying and storing food and disposing of waste.

The decorative aspect of housework is related to the décor and furnishings, bought and provided in accordance with the role and purpose of the dwelling and the needs of the people within it. The decoration of the house of an older, professional couple would be different from that of a family with young children for example.

The last two points, financial and maintenance of the house are closely related. The whole topic of budgeting, control of spending, saving, planning and forecasting affects all the other aspects mentioned. The overall upkeep of the home is, however, an essential facet of the housework portfolio and repairs and maintenance skills are key in knowing when to do repairs oneself, when to call in specialists and where to obtain consultation and advice.

The standard of each aspect will be set at the level required by the individual household. These standards will be dictated by cultural and economic influences. They will also be affected by the homemaker's time, resources and professional dedication to these tasks, the skills developed and the understanding of the role and importance of housework.

Research on domestic labor has established that although essentially a private activity, housework is shaped by context.¹³

Consideration should also be given however to the negative effects of not possessing houseworking skills: stress and heart problems, family conflicts and poor achievement. When asked the question about the impact on housework on her personally, one respondent replied: *I find I'm stressed but I put it off until the stress of not doing it is too much!* Gradually people are becoming more aware of these influences as can be seen from recent research.

New research shows worrying about household chores such as cleaning, getting the car services and paying the bills may be even worse for your heart. Scientists in the US tested over 1000 working men and women and found those who took on most of the responsibility for running the home had significantly higher blood pressure readings than those who left it to their partners. The findings, published in the journal Psychosomatic Medicine, suggests it's not the workload itself but the stress about how to cope with it that causes the damage.¹⁴

There is empirical evidence of the interrelation between family and achievement levels in people,¹⁵ however there is little statistical evidence available linking the actual tasks in the home with

¹³ Geist, op. cit.

¹⁴ Richard Alleyne 'Why the stress of household chores is bad for your heart', *The Telegraph* 13th January 2011. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/healthnews/8258193/Why-the-stress-of-household-chores-is-bad-for-your-heart.html>

¹⁵ (1) Marjoribanks, K. 'Correlations among family environment, academic achievement, and academic attainment in a large sample of Australian adults'. University of Adelaide, Australia, 2005. *Psychol Rep*, 2005 Oct; 97(2): 639-44.

performance, stability and sociability in individuals. Common sense seems to indicate that a correlation should exist but again further in-depth study would be necessary to establish the relationship.

One other fundamental characteristic which is reflected in all the aspects identified is that of service. Housework is carried out to create an environment for oneself and for those sharing the household within an atmosphere of well-being. This attitude of service is essentially a social need as the majority of actions develop from a strong sense of solidarity and transcendence; they are actions which are devised not only to satisfy personal needs but usually the needs of others.

Effects on individuals

The overall theme of this conference is essentially about 'people'; their lives, how they relate to each other and their home life. When considering the work done to manage and run a home it is important to identify the practical aspects as opposed to the home as fulfilling social needs. In this part of the paper we will look at how the home affects the 'person' carrying out the housework and the 'person' who is the recipient of this activity both in terms of the practical aspects and social implications.

The reliance on external signs, ones which are picked up with the senses, can indicate a basic point about the external environment as affecting the person. Individuals judge and formulate an impression of a situation, a person, an event, by the external signs, the way people dress, the physical environment, the temperature, décor etc. This is particularly important today when there exists a school of thought in which it is considered impossible to know the truth of things and that good is measured in terms of subjective factors. Beauty then is reduced to utilitarian aspects and a superficial concept based on appearance rather than an objective view of truth rooted in the being of things.

Our homes should be arranged for the pleasure and comfort of those who live within, rather than as a showcase for those we wish to impress.¹⁶

In professional work many people may not appreciate a deeper meaning of truth and goodness and are attracted only by superficial appearances. Taken to the extreme, we can see that people may give excessive importance to their personal appearance, the cult of the body, material possessions and on the other hand give little or no importance to creating a homely atmosphere. Usually these people are at home just to sleep and live the rest of their lives outside 'enjoying themselves'.

Cheryl Mendelson, talks about this precisely:

Inadequate housekeeping is part of an unfortunate cycle. As people turn more and more to outside institutions to have their needs met (for food, comfort, clean laundry, relaxation,

(2) Rani Mohanraj, Latha, 'Perceived Family Environment in relation to adjustment and Academic Achievement'. *Journal of the Indian Academy of Applied Psychology*, Jan-Jul 2005, Vol 31, no.1-2, 18-23

¹⁶ Donaldson, op. cit., introduction

entertainment, society, rest), domestic skills and expectations further diminish, in turn decreasing the chance that people's homes can satisfy their needs.¹⁷

On the other hand when housework is well done, appreciated and enjoyed, it develops the personal dignity and self respect both of the person carrying out the tasks and of those for whom it is being done. The recipients feel valued and recognize that their needs are being met. These individuals will be healthier and less subject to illness and so able to fulfil their role in society more effectively. The skills learnt in the exercise of houseworking tasks can be applied to personal finance, personal accountability, responsibility and ownership. These are all beneficial to the individual carrying out the tasks.

From the point of view of the person receiving the benefits of housework, if done satisfactorily, their 'home' will fulfil their basic physical and social needs. Practically they will live in a clean, healthy and attractive environment, with well cooked, nutritional meals, provided with clean and suitable clothing and linen in a building which is safe and in a good state of repair, with adequate economic management in order to maintain the required standard and this is recognised as having a social impact.

'This sense of being at home is important to everyone's wellbeing. If you do not get enough of it, your happiness, resilience, energy, humour and courage will decrease.....It includes familiarity, warmth, affection and a conviction of security. Being at home feels safe; you have a sense of relief when you come home and close the door behind you, reducing the fear of social and emotional dangers as well as of physical ones.¹⁸

In other words by fulfilling the care of the home adequately the effect on a person is that: all the five senses are satisfied and so the home will be restful. It creates a sense of belonging and it helps them to know who they are as an individual. At the same time it helps them to recognise themselves as part of a family unit and a society and to feel secure and happy.

Having identified some of the attributes and skills needed to carry out housekeeping, the persons carrying out these tasks are acquiring those aptitudes in a practical way. Not only do they benefit personally from the household environment but also they have an executive role in implementing the effects. The social impact for these persons is their contribution to the group benefiting from their work in the home and subsequently the impact on the family unit and society as a whole.

Every organisation has its own force and its own decision-making body, which is very often a single individual working within a corporate structure. The managing of a home is much the same, but with the powerful addition of the fact that what the home creates can make a fundamental difference to the future of society..... Just as individual human beings can change the world, even alter the ecology of their environment, so too can change in emphasis of the homelife alter society.¹⁹

Impact on the family

¹⁷ Mendelson., op cit. p. 8

¹⁸ Mendelson. op cit., p.7

¹⁹ Veronika Van Duin, 'Homemaking as a Social Art' London, Sophia, 2000, p. 5

In present day society, the word 'family' can be interpreted in many different ways. In order not to diversify, for the purpose of this paper, family will be considered as the traditional nuclear unit, although many of the observations will be transferable to the wide variety of family units existent in the modern western world.

As a tool to look at the impact on the family, one of the theories of motivation is used as a basis. In 1943, Abraham H. Maslow developed his pyramid of needs²⁰ to demonstrate the way in which each level of human need is a prerequisite in order to advance to the next level. The application at the organisational level is used in motivational theory and practice. The theory can be represented graphically in the following way.



By way of summary:

- **Physiological needs** – i.e. basic needs such as to satisfy hunger, to be clothed and sheltered. Only when these are met can the individual aspire to the next level;
- **Safety needs** – being secure and protected against losing the physiological needs;
- **Social needs** – these are those which motivate the person to enter actively into the social environment in which he or she is placed e.g. family, school, work, and friends;
- **Esteem** – comes from personal achievements, earning respect and learning to respect others. Each person is treated with dignity which encourages independence;

²⁰ E.C. Eyre & R. Pettinger, 'Mastering Basic Management', Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999, p.127-128, quoting Maslow, 'A Theory of Human Motivation' *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 1943, 370-96.

- **Self- fulfilment needs** – only once the previous four have been achieved can the person achieve their full potential.

When applied to the home environment the pyramid of needs reflects closely the facets of housework identified earlier in this paper. The work put in to meet these basic human needs is precisely the housework which creates the atmosphere in which they can evolve. The family, defined usually within the definition of the ‘home’ can become identified as a unit. This in turn provides a place for this sense of identity to grow and develops and strengthens the family bond.

*Our homes have always had a great influence on our wellbeing, and at a time when many of us lead fast-paced and stressful lives, it is particularly important to have a calm, ordered environment that provides peace and tranquillity.*²¹

The physiological needs of each person will be met if the cleaning, linen and nutrition aspects are provided. The safety needs will be met by the economic stability and maintenance of the building. Having a healthy and safe environment will safeguard each of the family members and will contribute positively in developing shared values and interests. The decorative aspects, while also fulfilling to some extent physiological needs, lay the foundations for social needs which will be initially provided by the homemaking aspect. The surroundings contribute to the atmosphere of the family home and financial security is guaranteed by good management. By preserving and maintaining the building fabric, depreciation is slowed and the next generation can therefore benefit. This in turn will teach young people to create and care for homes of their own in the future.

The family meal not only fulfils a physical need but also provides a forum for social interaction and communication between the members.

*This year’s study demonstrates that the magic that happens at family dinners isn’t the food on the table, but the conversation around it...*²²

The key point of an activity undertaken by all can be an opportunity to develop relationships and widen personal views, opinions and modes of behaviour. Meeting the need for esteem within the family unit is evident in the individual in the tension between individuality and dependence. The person needs to be recognised in their own right as an individual but also seen as part of a group.

*The...fight for survival links the personal construction of identity with the more social project of construction of home: these two creative tasks focus on making us at home with ourselves and at home with others. This means that home is the site of a sometimes uneasy coalition between personal space and community life, between the normative restrictions of home and the individual’s desire for independence and creativity.*²³

²¹ Susan Smith, Editor, *Country Living Magazine*, quoted in introduction to Donaldson, op. cit.

²² J. A. Califano, ‘The Importance of Family Dinners VI’, CASA (the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University), September 2010, p. ii (available online at:

<http://casafamilyday.org/familyday/files/media/The%20Importance%20of%20Family%20Dinners%20VI%202010%20-%20FINAL.pdf> , accessed 22.1.2011)

²³ Wiley and Barnes, op. cit., p.4

Many studies have looked into the division of labour within the home, obviously a topic influenced by sociological, economic, geographical, educational and material factors. One such piece of research shows the scope and variety of variables which can present themselves in this topic.

Prior to unification, the differences between the two Germanys encompassed fundamental differences in the economic systems resulting in very different positions of women workers in both regions. However the regional differences and their consequences were not restricted to the economic realm. Out of the two systems arose ideologies that differed in particular with respect to the role ascribed to women in society. In the former West Germany, the proto type conservative welfare state, women were cast as primary caretakers of the household and there was strong support for the male breadwinner-female homemaker model. This was supported by the tax system, a scarcity of child care facilities and a strong reliance on half-day schooling. In the socialist economy of the GDR, there were no incentives for women to specialise in domestic production. There was a strong system of state run child care facilities, and women's labor market participation was expected, regardless of domestic responsibilities.²⁴

The type and structure of home life will also be affected by the climate, environment, size of the dwelling, materials and physical state of repair. The people in a higher earning bracket will have more resources to invest in labour saving equipment or outsource their tasks.

While acknowledging these other factors are important, this paper is looking at the influence of houseworking skills on the family unit as a whole. Having identified the skills required and the basic needs for the individual, these skills can now be applied to the small community which is the family. The aim is to demonstrate how housekeeping in the widest sense can provide these basic needs and thus contribute to the social, esteem and ultimately self-fulfilment needs of individuals alone and within their family and social structure.

The home too is a microcosm of outer social structures, being the smallest society that human beings have created. Because of this factor, what happens at home reflects in society at large and vice versa.²⁵

Implications for society

The social impact of housekeeping is an area which requires a great deal of 'homework' and has not to date been fully explored. Having looked into the aspects and skills of housework and its effects, it can be concluded that people will feel secure and happy in a well managed home and therefore be better equipped to contribute to the wider society. By running a home effectively people will have a sense of belonging and therefore will defend their home, they will have better mental and physical health so can contribute to society more effectively, can work better and society will be more united.

²⁴ Geist op. cit.

²⁵ Van Duin, op.cit. p.5

“It is your homemaking that keeps your house alive, that turns it into a small society in its own right, a vital place with its own ways and rhythms, the place where you can be more yourself than you can be anywhere else”²⁶

What is also significant is that the skills required to run the home can be transmitted to the future generation and therefore to the wider community, as people form homes of their own. In society at large, individuals are deemed more acceptable if they are clean, well mannered and socially aware. These are skills instilled mainly, although not exclusively, in the home environment as the ideal conditions in which they can develop are created mainly by the tasks involved in housework. Successful assimilation of these attributes can in turn facilitate social integration of each individual within the corresponding social sphere. Skills can also be transferred to other environments and situations, such as the workplace.

Having a healthy and happy workforce is an asset in any society and will impact on economic growth. A contented individual is more likely to transmit his or her skills and knowledge to others so that they also may benefit. A society in which people take care of their dwellings and are aware of collective responsibility within the neighbourhood will contribute positively to the overall standard of social awareness. This will be reflected in investment in specific areas, house prices and environmental benefits.

The sociological impact of the home environment has been widely researched but little study has been undertaken to correlate the role and actions of the homemaker in creating this required environment. In the modern world of diversity and change the place each person regards as their ‘home’ can have in most cases a positive impact for themselves and in their social and professional sphere.

Re-creating the home as a place where cultured minds can meet in a social setting can build bridges between many diverse patterns of thinking. Recognising the social art of homemaking is the new way to unite souls, so that society can be found on tolerant understanding of differences that are part of the vast spectrum that makes up the human race. Homemakers are in the forefront of the new discovery that humanity can live together creatively.²⁷

Housework and sustainability

In considering the skills necessary to carry out housework, environmental and ecological awareness is essential. The person working to maintain the dwelling needs to look at that material space in terms of its function and in the context of the external society in which it is placed. In the introduction to their book, Wiley and Barnes state: *the relationship between self and place is an interactive and changing one...*²⁸ The maintenance of the building and its surrounds plus related matters such as adequate waste disposal will all impact on the surrounding environment.

²⁶ Mendelson, op. cit. p. 8

²⁷ Van Duin, op. cit, p. 196,

²⁸ Wiley and Barnes, op. cit p 4

Legal systems in most countries uphold the respect for individual persons and their right to own property. This enables people to identify their 'space' within the community and gives them the right to defend it and the duty to look after it. The physical external state of a dwelling is the projection of the occupiers into the community, the interface with all aspects which are external to the family unit.

As has been seen, the transference of skills acquired within the home or carrying out housekeeping tasks can have an impact on future generations. These transferable skills can be applied to the workplace, social life, community involvement and ultimately in creating one's own home, thus generating values and standards (which could be positive or negative) in the future.

Education has a vital role in enabling people to acquire the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in this changing world. We need to acknowledge however that the sort of education required now may be very different from that required in the past. Old craft based skills are becoming obsolete and industrialisation and technology take over.²⁹

Some concern is being noted about the lack of homemaking skills in younger people, many of whose parents both work outside the home and so have not been able nor had the time to teach their own children these skills within the home. In terms of sustainability this can have a profound effect on both the material and social spheres, and merits further study.

Another new area for research is to initiate a study of career success for work settings other than those of upward mobility professional settings. In particular, trying to identify how success is defined in the occupation of homemaker...³⁰

Conclusions

In summary, individuals, the family and society can and should benefit from housework either by participating in it and developing the skills themselves or by benefiting from its effects. This will have an unquantifiable impact on the individual and society both in the present and in the future.

If, at the end of this paper, it is clear that housework needs some more 'homework' then the aim of the paper has been achieved. The topic has untold and uninvestigated depths and could be a rich source of study and research. Basically it is necessary to 're-cast' the term 'housework' and make it more meaningful and truly a reflection of the impact of this activity. As has been seen the areas of study can be wide and various involving specialists from different schools.

One further topic which has been highlighted is not only the need for skills to carry out this work but also, more importantly, the attitudes that need to be developed. The prevailing view that housework is a necessary evil is not a solid foundation upon which to change ideas and to build a new perception.

²⁹ Titus Alexander, 'The Global Learning Challenge', Adults Learning Vol. 14, no. 7, March 2003, pp. 28-29 p. 28. Expanded version available online at:

<http://www.kn-j.com/Global%20Learning%20Challenge%20Oct02.pdf> , accessed 22.1.2011

³⁰ Cherlyn S. Granrose, *Women's Employment and Homemaking Careers: a lifespan perspective*, New York, Edward Elgar Publications inc., 2010), p. 152

*Home is the world on one's doorstep, it is the university of life.*³¹

There are many facets of this fascinating topic and a rich source of opportunities as it is essentially an untapped resource which is has passed unseen and yet is very much part of daily life. Hopefully with this conference, interest will have been stimulated and academics and practitioners will have realised the potential of housework and start doing their homework.

Acknowledgements

Gratitude is due to the team of Home Renaissance Foundation who by stimulating research into *Sustainable Living: Professional Approaches to Housework*, Conference, London March 2011, have encouraged the production of this paper. Thanks are also due to the people who responded to the short questionnaire for the trouble taken to answer the questions so sincerely.

Finally, on a personal note, I would like to thank my parents for providing me with a warm and loving background and teaching me the meaning and value of a home as something deeper than a physical place, a shelter. With their example and encouragement hopefully I have been able to transmit these same values in both my personal and professional life and will continue to be able to pass these on to future generations.

³¹ Van Duin op. cit., p153.

Views – results of ‘mini survey’ (approx 30 people)

Annexe 1

Summary of responses

| Marital status | Decade (age) | Nationality | Comments |
|----------------|--------------|---------------------------------|--|
| s | 50 | British | works in home |
| s | 70 | British | retired |
| s | 30 | Spanish | full-time lecturer |
| m | 50 | British | works in home |
| m | 30 | Spanish | works in home with part-time work |
| m | 50 | British | works in home |
| s | 60 | Rhodesian | retired, full-time carer |
| m | 40 | British | Physically handicapped |
| s | 30-60 | various | Did as a group. All working in hospitality |
| m | 30-50 | various – mainly African, Asian | ladies who are refugees from various countries, none in employment |
| m | 30-69 | British | group of mothers with children |
| m | 80 | British | couple |
| s | 50 | British | works in home combining with other work |
| m | 50 | British | teacher – full-time |
| s | 50 | British | works in home |

1. How would you define 'housework'?

- A central/important aspect of the life of any human being.. It's the works that makes a home. To work in different departments in a house. It is something essential. Something that makes a place more than a simple building. Housework makes people feel loved, gives security and comfort and saves money.
- A set of tasks you have to do in order to keep your place nice and clean. You should make your private place enjoyable for living in.
- All necessary work that helps us to lead normal life at home. Therapeutic. Care of houseplants and tropic fish.
- All the tasks that you need to put into practice to create, maintain and foresee in running your home. To create: each household needs to create in relation to their needs, the priorities or just a list of jobs or tasks that have to be done. Once the basic structure is achieved, an order to advance is needed and a regular review in case the circumstances change. Home is a place in constant evolution. To maintain: always try to review the quality of your housework. To foresee: i.e. the circumstances are not always the same, e.g. seasons.....
- Any work that is carried out in the home to provide for the needs, both physical and spiritual, of those living in it.
- Cleaning, dusting, laundry, cooking, tidying home, organising, ironing, washing.
- Housework is any essential activity which provides the members of a household with a healthy, safe and hygienic environment in which they can live and grow as human beings.
- Housework is anything you do to keep your home functioning well and inviting.
- Housework: on-going maintenance and creative tasks needed to provide a suitable atmosphere for the life, development, and activity of those sharing the same house.
- Maintenance of order.
- Making sure everything is the right place. Get the clothes washed, dried and ironed and put away.
- Physical tasks to keep the food bought, cooked and served and to keep the domestic environment clean and tidy and welcoming. Includes ironing, sewing, knitting.
- Work dedicated to the home from the point of view of the family, providing the warmth, comfort and all those social characteristics that only humans can create. From the professional point of view; carrying it out with the knowledge which is as instrumental, innovative and competent as would be carried out in any other type of work.
- Work done to keep the interior of a house fresh and clean.

2. How would you describe your attitude to doing housework?

- As a necessity, something that has to be done, personal satisfaction.
- Enjoyable.
- I do it because if not, my other half complains and says I spend all day on the internet!
- I do it because it has to be done
- I don't want my 'other half' to come home to a dirty house.
- I find it a chore but sometimes I enjoy it, if I am not too tired
- I love it
- I struggle to do it as I combine with external work. Having no choice – it's got to be done.
- I use it as stress relief or exercise
- If I had money I would not do it at all, I would pay someone else to do it.
- It helps me to make good use of my time by sharing, serving the others, making them happy and being happy myself.

- It is an essential component to my job as mother and wife. I do not like cleaning as much as laundry. I have to plan time to get it done. Certain jobs like windows and cleaning the cooker have to be timetabled or I forget to do them.
- It is good for giving me time to think
- It is my duty but it does not make me happy
- Must be done but gives pleasure. Better if shared and do as a family. Cannot take over as there are other things to enjoy in life
- I hate it! I do what I can't employ others to do.
- My attitude is one of showing how much I care for my family and anyone else visiting or staying in the house. Ultimately, my housework is an expression of my love for my family. I love looking after people by cooking for them, looking after their clothes (a more hidden service than cooking since they don't see the effort to keep them looking nice) and keeping the home clean. I can see the effect my work has on the family, particularly if I am not there for any length of time (when things begin to fall apart a little and disorder rears its ugly head). I love gauging people's needs/moods and trying to provide what is necessary to help people rest, stay or get healthy. I also like providing for them without having to be asked; in that way I think people feel understood and loved.
- It is a necessary evil - although I want to do anything else but housework, I reach a point where I can't bear the disorder, dirt, dust anymore!
- To aim to be able to take pride in the finished result: providing pleasant surroundings, aiming for the best within the limits of possibility – i.e. the time available, physical capacity/energy and specific talents for the different elements involved.
- It's a challenge, lots of unknowns, and some monotony, but fulfilling and satisfying
- Realistic, with priorities, always in the search for the best standards, teaching that I employ telling them and showing them how much I value their help.
- Serving the others. It helps me to come out of myself instead of wasting time with technology.
- Tiring but necessary – like to see everywhere shining and family 'well turned out'. I recognise it as important as part of my main mission in life.
- Work that has to be done. It is not socially acceptable to have a house which is not clean. (This is my present attitude. In the past I enjoyed housework !)

3 How would you describe society's attitude to housework?

- Bad! Fridge magnet seen in shop ' Only boring women have tidy houses'
- Housework now is shared between husband and wife.
- I do think nobody likes it because it is the same thing again and again.
- I think the attitude of the majority of our society accepts that a certain amount of housework should be done but the standard need not be meticulous. A minority might be obsessive about the housework they do. Of those who are wealthy and have beautiful houses, most would expect a very high standard of housework but they would pay someone else to do it.
- In most cases no-one respects your effort at all.
- In some countries, it is recognized as fundamental in society, as they have realized the damage of having neglected it – causing loss of money and human values.
- It has to get done and so what is the most efficient way of getting it done in the shortest possible time. As people employ staff to clean more and buy on line we are in danger of losing and not passing on tips from our mothers as well as being unable to do the job itself. Children are not being taught or given chores as much as in the past so they do not have these skills into adult life.
- Not positive, undermining
- Nowadays husbands tend to help more. People like to have a nice home so appreciate housework more.

- One's choice, not bothered if you clean or not.
- People are beginning to realize the importance of this work.
- People are rediscovering the value of this work, it's becoming more professional.
- Society tends to see housework as something that has to be done and out of the way as quickly as possible so more 'important' things can be done! There is a movement among the '30 somethings' who have been working and are now having family, that expresses a sense of loss for not having understood previously that full job satisfaction can be obtained working at home for the family. People can see good housekeeping as being fussy or old-fashioned and some women are against women in the home more on principle than on experience. It is a false notion that the home is not important and trying to ignore the home takes constant effort precisely because it is a *false* notion.
- Society thinks it is easy work.
- Society's attitude - lots of adverts imply a clean home is a happy home. Programmes such as "How clean is your home" etc. imply there's something wrong with people whose houses aren't spotless. Certain elements of society however deem housework to be too menial for them.
- Society's attitude - menial task. Only do it when have nothing better to do
- Society's attitude: society expects it to be done, individuals not always happy to do it. On the whole, does not appreciate the impact it has, nor the fact that it develops skills and virtues in the one carrying it out
- Some people just do it to survive!
- Very poor,

4. In your opinion, what skills are acquired when doing housework?

- Ability to get the work done within a suitable time frame.
- Acquire perseverance,
- Attention to detail,
- Basic hygiene,
- Capacity to multi-task,
- Cleanliness.
- Common sense
- Desire to learn from others with more experience be it face-to-face or from a book
- Determination to do each job in its entirety otherwise sink gets cleaned but not under the bowl or pedestal.
- Discipline,
- DIY,
- Finishing off jobs,
- Food preparation,
- Fortitude (doing things over and over again without in most cases not being recognised),
- Good eyesight and ability to notice things.
- Housecleaning skills!
- Interior decoration
- Knowledge of appropriate cleaning products, vacuum cleaners etc. and how to use them.
- Knowledge of cooking, cleaning and laundry i.e. professional knowledge
- Logic.
- Management skills.
- Managing money,
- Need knowledge as to how to do so have to study, I don't think is getting passed on through generations so much now.
- Obtaining an acceptable end result
- Order

- Organisational skills,
- Organising family's activities.
- Patience
- Perseverance,
- Perspective and ability to prioritise in order to keep the aim in mind and not get lost in nor overwhelmed by the detail.
- Physical stamina if done with vigour, and the ability to delegate and train when necessary
- Planning,
- Powers of observation;
- Pride in the job,
- Prioritising.
- Sacrifice.
- Self discipline,
- Self giving
- Sense of aesthetics, beauty and elegance
- Simple chemistry
- Stain removal,
- Teamwork,
- Tenacity;
- The ability to push oneself: especially if spend long stretches of time by self
- The ability to see beyond the task in hand;
- The market is flooded with new products you can't always see the wood for the trees. Satisfaction in using a clean sparking bath etc and finding the sellotape when you need it!
- The outlook of 'this is for someone' rather than 'this HAS to be done'
- The skill of forgetting about yourself to make others happy which in turn makes you very happy.
- Time management, planning, budgeting, nutrition
- To spread it out over the week.
- To work hard,
- Tolerance,
- You must be fit, fast, determined.

5 What impact does housework have on you personally, on your family and to society as a whole?

a) Personally

- A feeling of happiness
- Cleaning and ironing depresses me. Enjoy cooking and being creative with food.
- Discipline, responsibility, personal satisfaction.
- I feel happy when I have done a good days work in the house, whether or not I am praised (although some praise is nice from time to time as in any job). The biggest impact on me is how I have learnt to put others first.
- I have to make an effort to do certain aspects of housework; I do have a tendency to delay doing certain jobs I don't like. I have to make myself do those jobs first.
- I like my flat to look clean and I expect a very high standard. If my flat looks dirty I get frustrated that I have to wait for someone to come and clean. Some cleaners are better than others. I think it's important to have a clean place to live in.
- I like to see everywhere clean and tidy.
- If it's not done, I find I'm stressed but I put it off until the stress of not doing it is too much. If I'm methodical and self disciplined I can get the housework done within a few hours, as I've said a necessary evil. I do feel quite a glow when the house is clean and tidy and the fridge is full.

- Impact on me personally: brings me closer to my family.
- It calls for discipline to undertake it with regularity and constancy, overcoming laziness and reluctance due to the physically tiring and repetitive nature of housework.
- It reduces the time I have for other things that I want to do but I recognise its value as an expression of appreciation, sign of respect for the intrinsic dignity of the person, beginning with oneself.
- Makes me more cheerful knowing things are under control.
- Mentally – I can switch off and be in my paradise,
- Physically – it is exercise, can be tiring.
- Positive.
- Satisfaction, sense of responsibility.
- The impact on me when my housework is done well is a feeling of satisfaction and tranquillity.
- Tiring, puts me under pressure, makes me feel good, once it is done.

b) Family

- Being looked after.
- Brings us together.
- Clean and pleasant surroundings express appreciation for the people we live with and also inspire them to reciprocate this both in their dealings with one another and in their care of material things.
- Education of children – to encourage children to think about the others and to be grateful for any service they receive. It helps to keep the family together as people as they learn to value each other.
- Housework has had little impact on my kids as they never do any - something I should have insisted on when they were little. My husband finds housework almost unnecessary but does some. (I do it again sometimes!).
- I think they feel loved, cared for, looked after and that there is someone who can and wants to sort out lots of little things for them like how to get the stain off the favourite jumper, how to get rid of their upset stomach or what to eat when they want to lose weight etc. My family find it hard to cope when I am not there because my role has to be split between them all and they find it difficult to do their own jobs AND a little more. They also tell me they feel more settled when I am at home because they know things will be ok.
- It is the unsung, often heroic backdrop that 'sets the stage' for life in general and for each particular day. Order facilitates living in harmony.
- Makes the home more peaceful and ordered.
- My family get involved as much as they can however in my situation it is not possible to always give lists of chores, I ask for help when I need it or they offer. The amount of school work is a factor. When we have an event coming up then we do share a list of chores for the family to do. When a spill occurs then I teach what to use and get them to clean it etc so I do educate.
- My husband does not do it but feels unhappy when the house is not clean and tidy. Doing things together.
- My family appreciate it – the kids have more space when the house is tidy. It gives good example and happiness.
- They don't seem to notice if cleaning's done or not but they certainly notice what food goes on the table.
- They know there is always food available, clothes are repaired and appointments are made and kept.
- Very positive they know with facts that my love is something that translates to FOOD (mainly) order attention dedication, cleanliness.

- Very satisfying
- When family have been on holiday and have returned to find their house spick and span with fresh flowers here and there, it gives them great pleasure.

c) Society

- Benefits are transferred from the people into their surroundings
- Children get a good grounding in how things should be which they can then transfer to their own homes hopefully.
- Cleanliness, germ-free society.
- Good family life will lead to a good society.
- Good.
- Helps produce balanced individuals.
- If everyone cleaned their own doorstep - The whole world would be clean.
- It promotes good use of resources. Healthier living. It prevents illnesses and gives peace.
- Order gives peace of mind so an organized clean individual produces more and is happier with less paranoia and traumas and dysfunctions. It is time to get real and value the family that creates this home as a factory to create a healthy society
- Order in the family will lead to order in society.
- Sad that people aren't eating more home made food. People's houses are quite untidy in this country so I'd assume they don't think it's that important either.
- Seen as a necessity and as a lot of work, can be expensive if you have to get someone else to do it.
- Society as a whole stands to benefit from good housekeeping – a kind of sociological ecology with abundant spin offs.
- Society has multi-million pound industries profiting from our obsession with cleanliness. I think we still feel cleanliness is next to Godliness and our capitalist society exploits this to the full!!!
- Society wants this work to take the least possible time with least amount of effort so we can have more fun! Housework is not deemed to be of worth. We are becoming a 'have to get something out of it or not worth doing it' society.
- The more chaotic your life is, the more your home looks messy unless you ear enough to pay someone to help you. Also some people get into a state of depression or lethargy so they don't feel like doing anything but at least they think of doing housework. But maybe this could actually help them
- We recycle – good for society, otherwise none.
- Well done housework forms a more human society. Badly done housework tells people they are not important and this has lots of negative social implications. Even in a poor home the house can be cared for and not left to degenerate and this helps the dignity of those forced to live in difficult conditions.