Food’s Gender Problem: 
an Ecofeminist History of Unremunerated Domestic 
Food Production in the United States 

by 

Alex D. Ketchum 
Class of 2012 

A thesis submitted to the 
faculty of Wesleyan University 
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the 
Degree of Bachelor of Arts 
with Departmental Honors in Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies 

Middletown, Connecticut April, 2012
To my mother, Norjon,

who first made me think critically about gender roles, cooking, and food
Acknowledgements

While there may be one official author, no one writes a thesis alone. This project would not have been possible without the support and aid of the many who have helped me along the way.

I must thank my two thesis advisors who guided me through this entire process. Thank you Professor Courtney Fullilove and Professor Lori Gruen for the many meetings, the wonderful advice, and all of the support and guidance you gave to my project. You have helped me grow not only as a student, but also as a human being.

I want to thank the entire faculty of the Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program for their wonderful teaching and their commitment to feminist studies. Without them, my Wesleyan experience would have been entirely different. Thank you to Professor Mary Jane Rubenstein, whose class “Christianity and Sexuality” made me want to become an FGSS major. I also must thank my peers Abby Baker, Abby Spector, Allegra Stout, Genevieve Hutchings, Casey Reed, Zak Kirwood, and Elizabeth Spergel for their help during our senior seminar, led by the wonderful Professor Christina Crosby.

This project would not have been possible without the financial support of the History Department. The generous Davenport Fellowship and White Fellowship allowed me to do archival research this past summer at the Sallie Bingham Center for Women’s History and Culture at Duke University and at the Schlesinger Archive at the Radcliffe Institute of Harvard University. With this funding I also attended the
2011 Berkshire Conference on the History of Women for the panel “What’s So Feminist About Food History?”

I would like to thank everyone who allowed me to interview them about their own experiences and beliefs. Special thanks to Selma Miriam and Noel Furie of Bloodroot Feminist Vegetarian Restaurant in Bridgeport. Thank you also Josh Viertel, the president of Slow Food U.S.A., for being so frank and genuine about discussing gender issues within the movement.

Thank you Keiji Shinohara for advising my work on the series of Japanese woodblock prints included in this thesis project. You are a brilliant and inspiring teacher.

On a more personal level, I need to thank my friends and family who endured my ramblings about this project over the last couple of years.

None of this would have been possible without my parents. Thank you Mom and Dad for always supporting my education and for instilling a love of learning within me. I want to particularly thank my mother who always makes me want to be the best person that I can be.

I need to thank my partner Max Meade, who listened to me agonize about this project for hours on end and never ceased to encourage my work.

Further thanks must go to my godparents Ann and Jim Dennison, who have always been there for me and have inculcated in me a love of this planet, and my grandparents Betty and Norge Kime, who have been incredibly supportive throughout this entire process.
Thanks also go to all of my Wesleyan friends and peers with whom I bounced off ideas, was inspired by, learned from, and grew.

Writing this acknowledgement makes me feel incredibly blessed to be surrounded by so many wonderful people in my life. As I close, I also need to thank the countless other people who made this possible: the tutors at the writing workshop who helped me eradicate the passive voice, the librarians who helped me locate sources, and the strangers that I chatted with on the bus.

This thesis project is the result of the time, energy, and dedication of so many people.

Thank you.
Table of Contents

p. 7 _______Preface

p. 12_______Chapter 1: Constructing the Household and the Role of the Housewife

p. 33_______Chapter 2: What’s So Wrong With Cooking?

p. 66_______Chapter 3: Producing Solutions

p. 104_______Chapter 4: Consuming Solutions

p. 131_______Chapter 5: Finding a Holistic Solution

p.177_______Photo Appendix

p.183_______Bibliography

NB: All of the images between the chapters are Japanese Woodblock prints that I created under the guidance of Keiji Shinohara.
Preface

“What am I going to do with my life?”

It was not the first time that I had asked myself that question and definitely not the last, but as I sat on a plane ride with little else to keep me occupied than my thoughts, I began the process of re-evaluating my life…again. I knew what I was passionate about, but that seemed to be the problem. How would I ever be able to combine my love of food and feminism?

Over the years I have worked on many organic farms in the U.S.A., Ireland, and France. I have been actively involved in the food politics community at Wesleyan University. In my first year at Wesleyan, I founded Farm House, a program house dedicated to food politics, and was the House Manager for two years. I have also been a leader at Wesleyan’s Long Lane Organic Farm since I arrived on campus in 2008. I have worked at a wedding cake bakery and as an intern at a sustainability consulting architectural firm. As a lifelong vegetarian, avid environmentalist, and an enthusiastic cook I have spent a lot of time thinking about the intersections of food and the environment… but it was not until that plane ride in 2010 when I started to figure out how feminism could be in the picture.

I knew it was not necessarily a life plan but I thought that if I could focus my academics on these passions I might have a better idea of what to do. I started to collect any and every article that somehow helped me make the connections between food, gender, and sexuality. I had assembled quite the treasure trove of materials, but was still unsure of what direction I wanted to take my research. That is until I found myself looking through the pile and one article stuck out.
My interest specifically in this project was sparked by Peggy Orenstein’s piece “The Femivore’s Dilemma.” This article, which appeared on March 14, 2010 in the *New York Times Magazine*, resonated particularly with me as it asked some of the same questions that I had been asking myself. In the piece, Orenstein describes a group of stay-at-home moms who raise chickens and grow organic produce. The women that she discusses are highly educated people who left the workforce to raise their children. Growing food allowed for them to feel like productive members of their families, contributing to their home economy, while forgoing paid employment. Orenstein ventures, “the omnivore’s dilemma has provided an unexpected out from the feminist predicament, a way for women to embrace homemaking without becoming Betty Draper.”¹ She cites author Shannon Hayes, a self proclaimed “tomato-canning feminist” who thought that prior to becoming a grass-fed-livestock farmer in upstate New York she felt like her “choices were either to break the glass ceiling or to accept the gilded cage.”² With domestic food production starting at the level of the seed and ending at mealtime, women could feel as if they were contributing to their family’s needs and living more environmentally conscious.

Although Orenstein later quotes Hayes about femivorism’s (what she calls the movement) potential to challenge America’s current consumer driven industrial capitalist society, the piece does little to answer why the work of these chicken raisers has to be “morally defensible.”³ For the women who had the economic privilege to decide whether or not they wanted to stay-at-home, it is wonderful that doing these

---

³ Ibid.
environmentally sustainable activities are emotionally gratifying and spiritually fulfilling. However, the article problematically ignores that all work within the home contributes to the overall economy, not to mention issues of race, class, and sexuality. The piece ends with Hayes warning that if, in heterosexual heteronormative marriages, husbands were not entering into this femivorism system in a “genuinely egalitarian relationship, you’re creating a dangerous situation. There can be loss of self-esteem, loss of soul and an inability to return to the world and get your bearings. You can start to wonder, ‘What’s this all for?’”  

While this article speaks specifically about women who were inspired by the current food movement, these questions are not new.  

This piece addresses many of the same issues about the validation of housework brought up by second wave women’s liberationists in the late 1960s through mid-1970s. Like the women in Orenstein’s article, many second wave feminists dealt with issues of personal and economic identity. They struggled with matters of economic validation within the American economic values system. Furthermore, many of these activists also worked to merge their environmental and feminist economic values. 

My interest in the article and the problems that I had with it led me to articulate some of my own concerns that I felt in the environmental movement, specifically within the food movement. Orenstein’s article was limited by space and did not give the issue the full time and detail that it deserved. This thesis seeks to do just that.

4 Ibid.  
5 The current food movement is a trend of people trying to eradicate many of the social and environmental injustices that come with the current food system. It is a social undertaking of people who are dissatisfied with their food. The movement has various factions and tactics which will be explored later in the thesis.
“Food’s Gender Problem” is an ecofeminist history of unremunerated domestic food production. In it, I have analyzed the writings about housework, specifically cooking, done by the American women liberationists of the late 1960s through mid 1970s and compared their work to their contemporary environmental movement. I am using this moment in time as a teaching point for the current food movement in order to discuss some of its gender and economic issues.

The first chapter discusses the social and economic history of household labor in the 19th and 20th centuries, focusing especially on the reconfiguration of the household as a productive unit in the wake of the industrial revolution and the concomitant ideological construction of the ideal housewife.

The second chapter focuses on the grievances expressed about cooking by the material feminists of the late 1960s through mid-1970s. These women’s liberationists wrote about the fear, guilt, stress, physical burdens, lack of respect, and lack of economic value associated with the labor of domestic food production.

Chapters three and four analyze the solutions proposed by the material feminists and contextualize them within a variety of economic and environmental theories. Chapter three most specifically looks at the changing modes of production and altering perceptions on both a personal and an institutional level. Chapter four looks at solutions that focus upon changing modes of consumption.

Chapter five brings the critiques of material feminists to bear on the politics of contemporary food movements.
The epilogue broadens the analysis of the thesis. In it, I explore how these issues work within an international context.

It is here that I turn to these questions.
Chapter 1

Constructing the Household and the Role of the Housewife

bell hooks openly critiqued Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*. She argued that Friedan’s work was too limited in its scope. Friedan’s often quoted phrase “the problem that has no name,” referred to the widespread unhappiness of women in the 1950s and early 1960s who were dissatisfied with a lifestyle of being confined to the home and occupied solely with homemaking and childrearing. hooks believed that although this phrase had been used to describe all of the women in American society, it was in fact exclusive to a specific group of white, college-educated, middle and upper class housewives. 7 She claimed that Friedan ignored the conditions of women with other class, race, and sexual identities. Part of her critique of Friedan’s work, was that by 1963, when Friedan was writing her book, “more than one third of women were in the work force” already. 8 Two very important themes that will be present throughout this entire thesis can be understood from this statement. The first is how the characterization of the housewife misrepresented her labor’s contribution to the household as an economic institution. bell hooks in this piece defined

---

6 Throughout this thesis, I am very intentional about when I choose to use the words “male/female,” “men/women,” and “masculine/feminine.” Although many of the sources, from which I directly quote, often deploy the words “male” and “female” in a fairly casual manner, those terms by definition refer mostly to biology and sex. While I do not want to take the time to define what is a male, female, or non-conforming person below (since it is a very complicated matter even in the scientific sense that is greater than the X and Y chromosomes), I do want to be deliberate when I use those terms. Since most of my thesis focuses upon gendered social conditioning, the terms “masculine” and “feminine” or “men” and “women” are more appropriate. One of my goals in being intentional about this is to not exclude transgender experiences.


housewives as women who were not part of the workforce. She drew upon a specific understanding of whom and what housewives were without ever declaring any dominant ideology to support this particular claim. The second theme is the how the division between work inside of the home and outside of the home is an ideological construction that is not trans-historical. When bell hooks said that a large percentage of women were in the workforce, how was she defining “work?” What kind of divisions between “work” and “home” was she making? Was there a historical basis to her claims? These threads are vital to my overall project and will be specifically explored below.

In order to understand the figure of the housewife and to comprehend how her work has been historically situated within the United States, housework itself must first be defined. On the surface, housework appears to be solely cooking and cleaning. While scrubbing a dish may be annoying or tiresome, what does it actually contribute to society as a whole? A Marxist analysis of household labor demonstrates the importance of cleaning that dish or baking a casserole to the economy and overall civilization.

In 1972, Selma James and Mariosa Dalla Costa published the pamphlet, “The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community,” in which they crafted a feminist reading of Marx to speak about women and labor struggles. In it they articulated how Marx’s work showed that in a class society the ruling class exploits the working class and appropriates their labor and how all other social relations in the
society, including the family, reflect that form.\(^9\) This productive labor is the wage labor, which produces the surplus labor for the capitalist.\(^10\) Exploitation was not reserved for the factory or office, but rested on the reproductive labor that occurred within the home. In order for workers to be available and able to do their jobs, they required necessities such as food and a place to rest. For workers to even exist, they had to be born and raised. These conditions were maintained through the reproductive labor that reproduces the working class from generation to generation and day to day, such as: nine months in the womb, beds being made, floors swept, lunchboxes packed, and dinners cooked. This labor, which was fundamental for all other productive work to occur, was most often described as “women’s work” and was also rendered invisible.\(^11\) The housewife was especially responsible for these kinds of tasks.

Marx had made clear in *Capital* that "it is the production and reproduction of that means of production [that is] so indispensable to the capitalist; the laborer himself.”\(^12\) Factory owners and shareholders were only able to profit from the surplus value, which was the difference between the value that the laborer adds to the product produced and his pay.\(^13\) Profits depended thus upon a worker being able to labor a certain number of hours a day. A greater profit could be extracted when factory workers, for example, were not responsible for the reproductive labor necessary to maintain them. Instead, these workers were dependent most often upon their wives to

---


\(^11\) Ibid.


do these kinds of tasks without pay. If this kind of labor was so vital for the system to function, why did writers such as bell hooks consider those, such as housewives, who did this labor, to be distinctly not part of the work force? In order to answer this question, the role of the housewife must be historically situated.

The figure of the housewife that Friedan had described in 1963 and that bell hooks would later challenge was not static throughout history. What it meant to be a housewife in the colonial period was very different than in the nineteenth century, which was different from the mid-twentieth century. The work that women were expected to do, although racially and class specific, changed over the years. More interestingly however, was how her work was viewed, changed.

**Reconfiguration of the Household and Household Labor**

Jeanne Boydston, author of *Home and Work*, argued that in the early colonial times women’s household work was respected but by the early nineteenth century it had lost its consideration as being real work. Boydston believed that although women in the early colonies were deemed to be social and political inferiors to men, this subordination did not undermine entirely their contribution to the economy.14 Importantly, although colonial women did not gain much political or social power, due to the formal acknowledgements and economic valorization of their work, it is clear that during the early colonial times women were recognized as workers. The colonial government actually gave formal recognition to the value of women’s domestic labor. One example was in the 1639 land division proposal of Sudburry,

---

Massachusetts that stated “the allotment to the wife expressed colonists’ belief that the addition of her labor more than doubled the viable economic size of the farm.” 15

Women also received economic protection in wills that recognized their contribution to the household. 16 Their communities and households valued their labor and understood women’s important macroeconomic role. How then did the consideration of the role of the housewife so drastically transform into being seen as an economic dependent and non-producer by the early nineteenth century if she had been respected during early colonial times?

Boydston believed that the changes within women’s unpaid work inside the home connected to the broader social processes of legitimating market-oriented wage labor. At the end of the eighteenth century, most households were still agricultural.

Families created a livelihood by combining internal systems of home production with outside systems of borrowing and barter. 17 Work was divided primarily according to gender. Men managed the pastures, tool making, and supervised older sons and masculine servants. Women were responsible for growing the fruits and vegetables in a kitchen garden, raising fowl, making dairy products, manufacturing goods needed by the family and distributing the household goods, and daily household care. 18

Furthermore, women were in charge of their own equipment, supervising infants, and training older daughters and feminine servants. Both partners were involved in commerce. Boydston gave the example that a woman might bake her own bread or trade cheese for it with a neighbor. Her husband might raise the family’s grain or

16 Ibid.
17 Ibid. 11.
18 Ibid.
barter for it. At this time, even among men who were not farmers, barter and not cash was a common form of payment. Payment in cash for an exchange did not solely define remuneration for labor. Although some work was paid whereas some work was not, all was considered work. Cash payment thus did not define work. Within the barter system, men and women’s work could be equally traded and all work was viewed as work.

Boydston believed that the declining value attached to housewifery was linked to the rise of a market society that defined wages as the measure of a man’s worth. She made clear that in the early nineteenth century, with the industrialization of certain goods and services, households did not only depend on the market for survival. The production of household goods had not ceased to exist. Instead she argued that there was a system of “mixed economics” since most families did not have enough cash flow to be fully free of the household economy. With men’s paid labor outside of the household, families were able to purchase some products. However, they still depended upon the unpaid labor in the household to process the commodities in consumable form and to produce other goods and services directly. The emphasis on cash labor above barter labor valorized men’s work above women’s. Although the household was still dependent on women’s contribution to it, by the early 19th century there was a “conviction that housework was not really work at all, but rather a new form of leisure reserved for married women as the last preserve of a way of

---

19 Ibid. 12.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.123.
22 Ibid. 123.
life…apart from industrialization”\textsuperscript{23} The housewife’s contribution was viewed as being more about emotional and psychological rather than economic support.

In \textit{The Bonds of Motherhood}, Nancy Cott further explains that housework had lost the status of work in the early nineteenth century due to a combination of changes in the economy and the structure of work and time. She argues that between 1780 to 1835, the shift away from family production for direct use with wage earning, the institution of time as discipline, and the heightened emphasis on machines, were all part of the same phenomenon that ideologically separated the workplace from the home and divided work from life.\textsuperscript{24} Although the move of some men’s work from the fields to the factories shifted understandings of work and home, Cott has argued that the replacement of home spinning by industrial manufacturing in the 1830s “changed women’s work more than any other single factor, and likely had more emphatic impact on unmarried women than on mothers of families.”\textsuperscript{25} Since daughters had often been responsible for the production of textiles, but now these fabrics needed to be purchased, daughters would go to textile mills to supplement their family’s income for the work that they were no longer doing within the home. While economic modernization changed young unmarried women’s work more conspicuously than their mother’s at first, this transformation disrupted the relations of the household to the commerce of society. This shift consequently also redefined the occupations of the women who stayed in the house. When even the work of some women was moved outside of the home, the divide between work/home and work/leisure magnified. For

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid. 141.
\textsuperscript{25} Cott, Nancy F. \textit{The Bonds of Womanhood.” 36.}
women who had to remain at home to perform the still necessary tasks of childcare, housekeeping, cooking, and sewing, their occupations were confused with leisure due to the contrast to the work/home, work/leisure divide that was present for those, primarily men, who worked outside of the home.26 Women’s work within the home eluded the rationalization of the cash nexus and it also integrated labor with life.27 Thus housework, the work of women, was viewed to be a representation of leisure and not real work.

Although the status of household work had diminished, Ruth Schwartz Cowan in More Work for Mother argues that throughout the nineteenth century the responsibilities included in women’s household work actually increased. Thus women were responsible for doing more work at the same time that they were receiving less respect for this labor. Her argument rests on her conviction that the home itself was also industrialized. Cowan, echoing Boydston, believes that the home has always been part of the marketplace. Households have always had to buy and barter for certain tools and products that could not be produced at home. Thus the divides between the home and marketplace that were discussed as occurring during the 1830s, were actually part of an ideological construct. However this ideological construction was still important due to its impact on social consciousness. Technology came into the home as it did into the factory. Rather than relieving housewives of work, it actually just reduced certain drudgery.28 Household work did not disappear, rather the type of work changed. Tasks such as doing the laundry would no longer take the same

26 Ibid. 48.
27 Ibid. 62.
amount of time, nor be as physically grueling, with the invention of the washing
machine. However, at the same time since it was easier to do this kind of cleaning,
the standards of cleanliness increased. Thus even if the machine meant that laundry
did not take as many hours, the task needed to be repeated more often to meet the
newer cleanliness standards. Furthermore, the industrialization of America did not
just take men out of the households for the factories, but it erased many of men’s
earlier household responsibilities. Prior to the industrialization of the household,
housewives were in charge of cooking and baking. However, their husbands were
responsible for much of the preparation- such as chopping wood, shelling corn, and
pounding the grain into meal. Children also would have helped with the seasonal
tasks of making sausages. 29 With the industrialization of the household, beginning at
the turn of the nineteenth century, the cast-iron cooking stove, the automatic flourmill,
and factory-produced food and clothing meant that the housewife bore the whole
burden of the housework. 30 Cowan succinctly states “the kitchen became a place in
which men had no useful role to play and the shop became a place in which men were
more comfortable behind, rather than in front, of the counter.” 31 With the
industrialization of the home, women’s household responsibilities increased at the
same time that their work was being devalued and ceased to be thought of even as
work. Technology also played a role in producing the image of a leisurely housewife.

29 Cowan, Ruth S. More Work for Mother. 47.
30 Ibid. For further reading about how men and women’s work was intricately divided but both
contributed to food preparation, see: McGaw, Judith A. Early American Technology. Chapel Hill, NC:
Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the
31 Ibid.
As Boydston, Cott, and Cowan have shown, the process of how women’s household work changed from being thought of as work and economically productive to a thing of leisure occurred due to a variety of factors. Boydston argued that the changes were connected to the broader social processes of legitimating market-oriented wage labor. Cott argued that this shift occurred due to a combination of changes in the economy and the structure of work and time. She especially emphasized the role that textile mills had on creating the ideological divide between home/work and home/leisure. Cowan had argued that the industrialization of the household and the adoption of household technology made it seem as if the household no longer produced anything particularly important and that made it seem as if housewives had nothing to do. However the time saved by not making strawberry jam was cancelled out by the invention of the horse and buggy and later the automobile as women would now spend time commuting to the market to buy the product. Women’s work within the home increased, while men’s responsibilities to the home decreased. Although all of these factors occurred at different times, by the 1830s women’s household contributions had already been economically devalued. The process continued throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as the industrialized work schedule and way of life became ever-present in American life.

**Ideological Construction of the Ideal Housewife**

The reconfiguration of the household affected the ideological construction of the ideal housewife. The housewife role is one laden with the history of change.

---

32 Cowan, Ruth S. *More Work for Mother.* 47.
33 Ibid. 100.
spanning from the colonial times. In The Great American Housewife: From Helpmate to Wage Earner, 1776-1986, Annegret S. Ogden shows the major changing roles that housewives were supposed to play throughout the history of the United States. She divides American history into a series of periods in which the housewife’s role differed. She argues that all of these roles bound up together influenced the subsequent generations of housewives and of women as a whole.\textsuperscript{34} She describes housewives after 1776, as managers, in a similar manner to Boydston, Cott, and Cowan. In the period from 1800-1860 while the industrialization of the home and factory was occurring, Ogden argues that housewives occupied the ideological role of “the lady,” but not in the European tradition.\textsuperscript{35} The lady-housewife was a multipurpose role in which the woman had to function as a laborer and manager, cook and companion, mother and governess, hostess and housekeeper—“the model for generations of American housewives to come.”\textsuperscript{36} She argues that even rich women of the south who had slaves were not in a position of leisure, as they had to coordinate all of the food on the plantation and run the household.\textsuperscript{37}

By 1860, Ogden identified a shift in the role of the housewife. She has named this group of housewives the “saints and sufferers.” The saints were the group represented by Catherine Beecher’s work that believed that women’s spiritual superiority and wholeheartedly supported the belief in a natural division of labor

\textsuperscript{35} Ogden, Annegret S. The Great American Housewife. 34.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid. This is similar to “Catherine Beechers ‘A Treatise on Domestic Economy’ from 1842 that advocated that women turn away from aristocratic standards and rely on their own values of creating a democratic American home… She argued that housework was only seen as vulgar drudgery because those vulgar people were doing it and not fine ladies.” 58.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid. 37
between the sexes. With respect to their housewifely duties and attitudes, they acted like domestic saints, always trying to be the perfect wives and mothers. They were solely responsible for the quality of their family’s life and health. These women recommended an education to strengthen their ability to perform these duties more perfectly. The sufferers conversely were represented by the ideology of Elizabeth Cady Stanton who fought for the equal distribution of rights and responsibilities and the deliverance of women from masculine oppression. The sufferers thus were opposed to the saints’ romanticization of the isolation of the home. However seemingly different these two groups were from each other, they both sought to affirm women’s education and active participation in creating their society. These roles did not remain unchanged for long.

The shift in the housewife’s role continued from the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth century. From around 1870 to 1915, housewives acted as pioneers in the sense that they were the settlers who ventured west and the Euro-American immigrants who lived in the cities. Similarly, tenement apartments filled with immigrants mirrored the sanitary conditions of the colonial era. The wives of Euro-American frontiersmen and farmers were forced to revert to colonial conditions and provide much for their household. While housewives in both of these circumstances were responsible for many of the duties similar to their colonial counterparts, the ideological shift that had devalued women’s household work as economically

38 Ibid. 70. “The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors, and her society could be divided into four cardinal virtues - piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity... Without them.... all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power.” Welter, Barbara. The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860. 1966. Http://www.pinzler.com/ushistory/cultwo.html. Web.

39 Ibid. 76.
important and as actual labor had already occurred. Of course there were other communities, such as different immigrant groups, people living in slave economies, indigenous Americans who were forcibly removed, and others, all of which had unique patterns of production and labor, but the Euro-American ideology became predominant and effaced the others. These housewives were burdened with lots of work and met little respect for their economic contribution.

Ogden argued that by the beginning of the twentieth century, two images of women existed during the last decades of American society. The first was the ladylike homemaker who was skilled in the domestic arts, was middle or upper class and was thus able to inhabit an insular world through her husband’s earning. Separate from the employment market, she continued in the tradition of the saintly wife. The second figure was that of the poverty stricken woman who was an immigrant or immigrant’s daughter and who was forced to take a paying job.\(^{40}\) Thus the ideal, coming into the twentieth century, was for women to find a man to be her supporter and to not work outside of the home.\(^ {41}\) Certain women, of course, transgressed these norms and sought careers, but the ideal of the time was that even if women sought the vote and wore sports clothes and business attire, they were supposed to want and have stable homes and families.\(^ {42}\)

The paradoxical industrialization and pastoralization of household labor in the early 19\(^{th}\) century set the stage for the continued devaluation of domestic work over the course of the next century. World War II and its wake redefined the expectations and the conditions of housewives. During World War II, women had to take the place

\(^{40}\) Ibid. 135.
\(^{41}\) Ibid.
\(^{42}\) Ibid.
of factory workers while the men were away at war. While this newfound economic independence would have lasting effects, when men returned from home, the ideal of women and thus the housewife shifted to pre-war times. In the affluence brought to America at the end of the Second World War, housewives were defined by their consumption and were tied to their housework. Mrs. Consumer became Mrs. America, as the housewives’ purchases ideologically shored up the family against socialism and communism. These expectations led to the kind of housewife, which Betty Friedan would come to write about in *The Feminine Mystique*, as well as the Supermom character. As bell hooks had made clear, this experience did not speak for all women. That is exactly the point. These roles that Ogden traced were not lived realities for many women, but ideals and ideologies that influenced their lives.

In spite of the pervasive devaluation of domestic labor, the home retained powerful symbolic value. Household work was diminished economically. Conversely, the role of the housewife and her work held a complicated position in society. Granted, cultural ideologies have ascribed many different meanings as to who and what the housewife was throughout American history, as can be seen above. However, that ideologically housewives were seen as important, yet their work was devalued, is a fascinating tension. Cott has argued that this tension first became most apparent in the 1830s. Although housewives’ work was devalued as work in the 1830s, men and society simultaneously glorified it. The home and the occupations that occurred within the home were seen as alternatives to the changes in pace and the division of

---

43 Ibid. 171.
44 These idealized figures will be discussed further in later chapters.
labor that were happening within the factory.\textsuperscript{45} As the symbol and remnant of pre-industrial work, the home commanded men’s deepest loyalties but also reproduced ideologies of masculinist protection.\textsuperscript{46} The home and the housewife were reminders of the halcyon pre-industrial days and they garnered an emotional response. However, the loyalties men had to the home contrasted too greatly with “modern” forms of employment that were defined by wage-labor.\textsuperscript{47} The home as referred to in literature of the time thus “was idealized and yet rejected by [the] men” that labored outside of the household.\textsuperscript{48} It was the object of yearning and of scorn and thus “women’s work (indeed women’s very character, viewed as essentially conditioned by the home) share in that simultaneous glorification and devaluation.”\textsuperscript{49} This tension between respect and a lack of respect demonstrated how the role of the housewife was about more than work. As Ogden has already argued, the different roles of the housewife have influenced subsequent generations of housewives.

**Idealizations and Politics**

A housewife was defined by more than just her labor. She was an idealization of social expectations. Each generation of housewives dealt with different expectations for her role. However it is important to remember that these expectations were ideological constructions, ideals impossible to fully embody. Take for example, Donna Reed of *The Donna Reed Show*. She represented the perfect 1950s to 1960s housewife. During the run of the series from 1958 to 1963, Reed played Donna Stone,

\textsuperscript{45} Cott, Nancy F. *The Bonds of Womanhood.* 62.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
a white, upper-middle class American mother whose main role was to cook, clean, and raise her two children. She was always perfectly dressed and groomed and was never without her pearl necklace. Furthermore, she always had dinner on the table exactly when her husband Alex came home from work and kept the house perfectly neat. Occasionally she worked as a nurse on the show, but her primary function was to care and support her family. What is fascinating to remember, is that even Donna Reed did not fit the idealization of her character Donna. Most obviously Donna Reed was not strictly a housewife. She was an actress and an un-credited producer and director of her own television show. She was in fact also a wife and mother, but unlike her character she had divorced and married two more times. Although the real Donna Reed met many of the expectations of the role of the white 1950s-1960s housewife, even she could not fulfill all of them. No one could ever satisfy all of these expectations, because they were in fact ideals that by definition could not be realized. However this ever-present set of ideals impacted the lives of all women despite their different identities.

While *The Donna Reed Show* ceased production in 1963, its influence continued in the form of re-runs throughout the 1960s and later. Furthermore, related shows such as *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, which portrayed a similar ideal, aired from 1952 through 1966. This thesis focuses largely on the work of a group of women from the late 1960s through the mid-1970s. These women were raised in a culture where the Donna Reed ideal impacted the social expectations of what it meant for them to be women. The late 1960s to mid 1970s woman, even if she worked outside the house was still expected to maintain the household. She may not have
been married, she may not have been heterosexual, she may not have been white, she may not have been middle class, she may not have been able-bodied, but she did have to navigate a world in which this ideal was based on strong cultural ideologies that created norms that greatly shaped her life. Every woman was thus a housewife. Even if a wealthy woman hired others to perform these household tasks, it was her job to oversee their work. Furthermore, even if poor women worked in other women’s houses tending children, cleaning, cooking, washing, and ironing, she was responsible for doing the housework when she returned home.

For these reasons, examining both the household and the role of the housewife became central to political work. The analysis of this figure and of the tasks that she had been expected to perform occupied many feminists in the late 1960s to mid-1970s America.

These writers and activists that were specifically concerned with this subject were material feminists. Dolores Hayden has characterized material feminists as those who attempted to define a “grand domestic revolution” in women’s material conditions, concentrating on economic and spatial issues as the basis of material life. Women’s work and the household were important sites of analysis for them. These writers saw the economic exploitation of women’s domestic labor by men as a basic cause of women’s inequality. However, while this group drew on Marxist theories that emphasized a “perspective on social life that refuses to separate the materiality of meaning, identity, the body, state, or nation from the requisite division

---

50 These material feminists are not to be confused with the new material feminists discussed in Chapter 5.
of labor that undergrids the scramble for profits in capitalism’s global system,”52
Hayden argues that not all of the writers were strictly Marxist in that they were not
avowed Marxists. They offered a similar analysis but did not always claim Marx as
an influence. Some of course, as will be evident later in this thesis, did promote
Marxist ideas. Others, however, relied upon Marxist frameworks and language
without necessarily promoting Marxist rhetoric. Actually some of the material
feminists quoted in this work were post-Marxist in that they “reject[ed] historical
materialism’s systemic view of social life… the premise that human survival is based
on the existence of real living individuals who must produce the means to survive and
do so under historically variant conditions. Instead they focus[ed] almost exclusively
on ideological, state, or cultural practices, anchor meaning in the body and its
pleasures, or understand social change primarily in terms of the struggle over
representation.”53 In fact, “more than socialist feminism, materialist feminism was
the conjuncture of several discourses- historical materialism, Marxist and radical
feminism, as well as postmodern and psychoanalytic theories of meaning and
subjectivity.”54 Material feminism did not solely subscribe to any of these theories but
relied on their critical frameworks, simultaneously claiming and rejecting these
traditions as their own. In fact, material feminism during the period of the late 1960s
through mid-1970s was an ideological grouping constructed to deal with specific
issues. Hayden describes material feminism at that time as re-conceptualizing the
relationship between the private household space and public space by presenting

52 Hennessy, Rosemary, and Chrys Ingraham. Materialist Feminism: a Reader in Class, Difference,
53 Hennessy, Rosemary, and Chrys Ingraham. Materialist Feminism. 5.
54 Ibid. 7.
collective options to take the "burden" off women in regard to housework and cooking. This label adequately defines the group’s general ideology, while highlighting the potential for a diversity of opinions.

The material feminists whose works are examined in this thesis came from a variety of backgrounds. Some were academics, others were small business owners, some were strictly housewives, some were farmers, and others were employed as writers. They all had the basic skills of being able to write, but they came from many different educational backgrounds. Many of these material feminists were middle class, but also some were lower and others were upper class. They lived in a variety of different geographic regions within the United States. Some were married; others were divorced, while others were single. They were not all heterosexual. The majority of these writers were white, but not exclusively so. All of them identified, at least at the time of writing their works, as women. All of their works were written from the late 1960s through the mid-1970s. Despite their diversity of backgrounds, all of their works can be categorized as material feminism.

This group tended to write about women, despite the diversity of identities that the writers had and that the population of the United States was composed of, as solely “women.” They most often wrote about women seemingly as an almost monolithic group, with a few exceptions. However, despite ignorance on the part of some of the material feminists about race and class differences, many of these writers were aware of the different experiences that women faced due to their intersecting identities. This is not to say that certain groups’ experiences were not privileged

---

within the feminist movement, namely those of white, middle and upper class feminists. However, as can be seen by the diversity of experiences had by the material feminists themselves, many were aware that when they wrote “women,” they were making a generalization like with any category. Using this title of “woman” or “women” was useful for their analysis of the impact of certain ideologies on the experiences of individuals. Of course, people experienced the iniquities caused by patriarchy differently. However the focus of their analysis in regards to the issues of domestic food production and other housework was to draw attention to a prescriptive ideal that became dominant and that carried with it expectations for all women, despite the diversity of identities within that category.

In the same way that women seemingly were portrayed as a fairly homogenous collective, it may appear that the material feminists wrote about most men too as if all were the same. As a result, sometimes when they wrote about “men” as a group, especially when they were referring to the patriarchy, all men appeared to be rude blockheads. They did not believe that all men were rude, but instead they were commenting on the privileging of masculinity within the patriarchy that allowed for rudeness.

I intend to read their writings sensitively as political arguments that were both passionate and flawed in certain respects. In the following chapter, now that the figure of the housewife has been historically situated, their grievances about cooking will be further explored.
Chapter 2:
What’s so Wrong with Cooking?

People often ask me why the Schlesinger Library, devoted to women’s history, has always collected cookbooks. Behind the question there is usually the assumption that a library that chronicles the progress of women’s rights ought not also to be collecting books that are a testament to women’s traditional role in the kitchen, thought by many feminists to be the epitome of patriarchal oppression.  

-Barbara Haber, former head archivist of the Schlesinger Library of the Radcliffe Institute of Harvard University

Barbara Haber argues that although women’s relationship to food and the kitchen has been fraught with tension, it is still an important part of American women’s history. If the kitchen is a site of oppression, it needs to be further investigated, both for its faults and for its virtues. However, many contemporary feminist writers have shied away from the topic of kitchens. When the matter of food appears in their texts, it is usually about anorexia or body image rather than the act of cooking. While some feminist academics may try to distance themselves from this connection to the kitchen already put on them by larger society because they themselves might be women, there is such important work still to be done on this topic.

Although there is little current feminist work being done on kitchens as a site of oppression, at the start of the women’s liberation movement, there was a large emphasis made not only about the role of the housewife, but household work in general. Discussions of women’s oppression being created through cooking began to be discussed in the late 1960s and mostly petered off by the mid-1970s, as the movement began to redirect its focus. This concentrated focus was clear both in the topics being discussed in pamphlets, newsletters, journal articles, books, zines, etc., but also in the types of sessions and workshops happening at large conventions. While of course the National Organization of Women (N.O.W.), begun by Betty Friedan, did not represent all women involved in the women’s liberation movement, it did have a large following. Evidenced in their convention pamphlets on both the national and state level, by the mid-1970s workshops and lectures about household labor had virtually been erased from the agenda and been replaced with other discussions.\textsuperscript{57} By 1973 the kitchen was discussed far less and by 1975 its mention, along with that of other forms of housework, became quite rare. Other problems may have seemed more important and there was some growing awareness in the movement that the past positioning of this problem had been done in a way that could exclude women who were not white, middle class housewives, especially in the way the mainstream media had portrayed those second wave feminists demands.

Despite some of the problematic aspects of the movement’s past, these women liberationists had some very important things to say about housework, cooking, and

domestic food production. Furthermore, the second wave feminists who wrote about these problems were not just white, upper class women, although that is the image that is most often presented. Groups of women from a variety of class, race, religious, and ethnic groups were writing and organizing around this problem. Although their different identities and affinities influenced their experiences and their relationship with this “burden to cook,” they still nonetheless faced it. Whether they worked outside of the home or not, women were expected to perform this task.

Of course, some women loved to cook. Being responsible for domestic food production can also have some benefits, as will be later discussed. However, whether or not a woman liked to cook, this social and cultural burden placed upon them is what will be central to this investigation. This idea of the kitchen as the source of oppression was a real, lived thing. The material feminists critiqued the expectation that they be responsible for domestic food production. Below the main sources of their problems about this form of labor are divided into the following categories: fear, guilt, stress, burden, lack of respect, economic, value, and the questioning of what work really is.

**The Grievances**

The material feminists of the late 1960s to mid 1970s identified a variety of grievances associated with cooking. The act itself was not seen as a repressive force. Some material feminists actually enjoyed cooking. Rather the issue was the

---

58 I have defined “material feminists” in Chapter 1. Dolores Hayden has defined material feminists as those who attempted to define a “grand domestic revolution” in women’s material conditions. Material feminism concentrated on economic and spatial issues as the basis of material life.
expectation that women be the ones to cook in their families whether or not they enjoyed it, whether or not they worked another job outside the home, and whether or not they were any good at it. Although material feminists scrutinized other domestic tasks such as cleaning, they particularly focused upon cooking due to its cultural and social significance.

Before I delve into discussing some of the problems that they identified, I must make one caveat. While the authors below often speak of women as a monolithic group, not all of these grievances would apply to every woman or at least would not apply in the same way due to identity categories such as class, race, ethnicity, geographic region within the US, or even individual experiences. This is especially true in that many of the writers claimed these grievances within a heteronormative framework. This does not mean that they are not worth looking at, because they make some very useful claims of inequality. However, by looking at these claims, I am not saying that lesbian or queer housework problems are unimportant. In fact, those issues are addressed in later chapters.

**Fear and Anxiety**

One prominent grievance discussed by material feminists was that they felt that women were locked into the burden of being expected to cook by fear. Fears about social acceptance, maintaining family stability, and personal identity kept women in the kitchen. In a culture that expected women to cook for their families, it did not matter whether or not they liked to do it. Although the idealized image of the American housewife was unattainable to all women, the level to which some women
even had the possibility of embodying it varied due to factors such as class, race, age, etc. However unattainable this ideal was, it still had a real effect on the cultural expectations of what women should have done. That expectation, compounded with the post-industrial revolution historical precedent of women being in charge of homework, meant that there was a social pressure to cook. Household guides such as Heloise’s Hints for Working Women, published first in 1966, are proof of these expectations. This book, targeted towards busy women who may or may not have been working outside of the home, assures women that “it is entirely possible to run a satisfactory house, keep that hubby and the kiddies happy, and still have time for whatever outside interest you choose.”  

There was no questioning in that statement of a woman’s role in the house. Material feminists wanted to draw attention to the kinds of pressure being put on women and how publishers were producing books that played into that fear.

Due to this intense pressure on women, some had anxieties about their inability to cook. This is readily apparent in the I Hate to Cook Cookbook of 1960. As the title suggests, this book was for those who hated to cook. The idea of not being the one who does the cooking is not expressed in this book, since that was not seen as an option. Instead even admitting not liking to cook was something to be hidden. As the inside cover proudly proclaims, “It is such a clever book that no one need ever know how much you do hate to cook. The more than 180 recipes are quick, easy, and

60 “To come right to the point- if you have a kitchen (Pullman or otherwise) in your home and are expected to cook in it, but HATE TO COOK- this book is for you.” Bracken, Peg. *The I Hate to Cook Book*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1960. Print.
tested by other housewives who used to feel hostile to the kitchen.”61 This anxiety about cooking was felt so deeply that women felt that they would lose their respect and their family if they did not cook.

In books such as the I Hate to Cook Cookbook women who did embody this perfect identity were respected but also feared as a threat. Great cooks were seen as the unattainable ideal, which others had felt they must strive to become. However those who failed were to fake it, or else they would be punished. Although it was written in a joking way, there was a real fear that the women would lose their husbands if they did not continue to do the cooking. After complimenting the women who could cook well, the author stated, “we’ve little to say to them, really, except, ‘Invite us over often, please.’ And stay away from our husbands.”62 This fear again arose when she said, “some women can keep a leftover going like an eight day clock. Their Sunday’s roast becomes Monday’s hash, which becomes Tuesday’s stuffed peppers, which eventually turn up as Tamale Pie, and so on, until it disappears or Daddy does.”63 Not only were women failing at meeting social expectations, but also by not cooking well enough or even by daring not to cook, they would lose their husbands, their security, and their respect.

Material feminists made efforts to challenge these expectations. The amount of fear was enormous. Sheldon Harnick, in a spring 1972 Ms. Magazine article, put it simply. She discussed how in TV ads all the women doing housework looked happy. This media imaging created an illusion that could allow for the internalization of this

---
61 Bracken, Peg. The I Hate to Cook Book. Cover flap.
62 Ibid. xi.
63 Ibid. 26.
expectation and build fears of incompetence. Harnick boldly challenged this when she declared, “so the next time you happen to be just sitting there quietly watching TV remember: Nobody smiles doing housework but those ladies you see on TV. Your mommy hates housework. Your daddy hates housework. I hate housework too. And when you grow up, so will you.” Her speaking about housework as such a distasteful task had the potential to denigrate the labor and thus the laborers involved with that work. While the potential belittling of the value of housework and cooking could cause other social problems, as will be later discussed, her claim did important work by disarticulating this lie that led many women to feel fear and shame.

In Harnick’s quote, presumably the father did not enjoy doing housework, such as cooking on a daily basis, and since he was not culturally expected to do it, he left the burden for his wife. Men did have socially appointed tasks related to the home, such as yard work, which they may have viewed as a burden of their masculinity. However, women were responsible for the majority of housework. They continued to perform these duties partly due to fear.

Women however were driven by more than fear. These complex feelings from not satisfying a cultural expectation led to feelings of immense guilt.

**Guilt**

Material feminists of the time identified that one of the greatest burdens that came from cooking, which differentiated it specifically from other domestic work was

---

that it had been given special standing within the home. Cooking carries with it
cultural, familial, and historical traditions that are associated with food. Thus
women’s relation to her personal, familial, national, cultural, and ethnic identities
were at stake. To not live up to these expectations could be the source of immense
guilt.

If a woman adhered to expectations, to cook was therefore to be. Eleanor
Dienstag, in a 1974 article entitled “The Dinner Hour,” put best:

It has been said that you are what you eat. Perhaps it should also be
said of women, you are what you serve. The feminine mystique about
food lingers on. Whether the fare is bean sprouts and brown rice or
naarin printanier, for a woman the table is laid with expectations far
beyond taste and nutrition. A meal, especially dinner, is supposed to
be a creative act, as expression of love, intelligence, and imagination.
The reward? Female fulfillment and our household’s adoration.65

Cooking concerned more than an individual’s womanhood. It had to be a creative act.
The food a woman prepared was to be the art of American culture. Each dish
prepared was socially and historically situated in relation to the heritage of the United
States. The metaphorical melting pot of the country was to be literally produced three
times a day, every day, and the result was expected to be pleasurable and aesthetically
pleasing. Cooking was considered not only to relate to a woman’s individual identity,
but to her national identity as well. Women who could not or did not want to perform
her American duty had failed both at a personal and state level.

Despite its many problems, the I Hate to Cook Cookbook did address this
issue of guilt head on. While of course it still held the assumption that women had to

Radeliffe Institute of Harvard University.15.
be the ones to cook, its author, Peg Bracken, wanted women to address “the really basic trouble here[.] It is your guilt complex. This is the thing that you have to lick. And it ain’t easy. We live in a cooking-happy age. You watch your friends redoing their kitchens and hoarding their pennies for glamorous cooking equipment and new cookbooks called *Eggplant Comes to the Party* or *Let’s Waltz into the Kitchen*, and presently you begin to feel un-American.” That quote, like much of the cookbook, empowered women to put less time into their cooking to get it over with if they hated the task, but still that need to stop cooking was not talked about. This situation remained as such until the material feminists began their work.

Material feminists in the late 1960s through mid-1970s, in order to challenge these expectations, had to dispute the basic assumptions upon which they were built and attack cultural rhetoric. These challenges were made through various media including magazine articles, pamphlets, and flyers. The following reproach was a comic book, with simple hand drawn images and a powerful message written in verse. The comic tells the story of a young woman who swallows all of the lies of society. She tried to follow the cultural expectations made upon her, but she cannot stomach it. She eventually rejects the lies, such as a “woman’s place is in the home,” “learn to serve others,” and “serve, cook, clean, raise sons.” Rather than attempting the suicide she first contemplates, “she ran to her sisters, [because] it wasn’t too late/ to be liberated.” She eventually finds peace with other women

---

66 Bracken, Peg. *The I Hate to Cook Book*. 27.
69 Ibid. 9.
standing under a banner that reads, “Sisterhood is powerful.”70 This comic spoke to the institutionalization of these expectations, for in the comic she first learned these lies in the school setting. These lies however were then repeated to her throughout her life until she was able to break free. This comic was only one of the many productions made by material feminists to challenge what American society required of women.

Once the roots of some of these expectations were challenged, the next step was to help other women to not feel guilty for not fulfilling them. This overwhelming feeling of guilt was readily apparent. In the article, “Click! The Housewife’s Moment of Truth,” feminist Jane O’Reilly told women not to feel guilty. She claimed that she had “never met a woman who did not feel guilty. We can post signs in our hearts and on our walls saying: ‘It’s not wrong to inconvenience my family- it is making us responsible, ego-strong adults.’ But when a man we are attached to goes out with a button off his coat, we- not he- feel feckless.”71 These claims were revolutionary for the time. Telling women that they shouldn’t feel guilty for not fulfilling their expected social role was a radical idea. While O’Reilly here was writing about women not satisfying general domestic tasks, her work applied specifically to cooking as well.

70 Ibid.
Guilt was a real issue associated with cooking that these feminists were writing against. While these roles were being challenged, many women still felt an immense burden imposed upon them.

**Stress and Burdens**

In addition to some of the emotional and psychological burdens that the expectation to cook placed upon women, the literal labor of domestic food production was also strenuous. Whether or not a woman worked outside of the home, cooking took a lot of effort when done on a consistent basis. Domestic food production, which includes cooking, preparation, shopping for materials, and cleanup, requires numerous hours of effort on a daily basis.

Even when women enjoyed cooking, they still felt its burden. These hours of reproductive labor required enormous input by women. Eleanor Dienstag again eloquently articulated this issue. Even though she preferred cooking to all other domestic occupations, and even though cooking is fun in a way that making beds is not, mealtimes are still part of a daily routine, largely taken for granted. Shopping for, planning, and preparing food can take hours of work, but unlike a piece of machinery or a project report, the end product is consumed in moments. There is a built in evanescence to triumph. Mrs. Ramsey’s thought – ‘but what have I done with my life?‘ – does not, I think occur to men at mealtime.72

Her mention of Mrs. Ramsey is a reference to a moment in Virginia Woolf’s *Lighthouse*, when the character looks at all the white plates scattered across the dining room table and wonders where the years have gone. Domestic food production

is labor intensive and it requires hours of time, day in and day out. While the amount of work is apparent, it is important to remember that at the same time, the expectation still stood for women to be the ones doing this work. This was many hours of labor a day that went unremunerated. As Dienstag remarked, cooking could have had its rewards if one enjoyed it. It could have been fun. The issue was that it was expected and that it was a burden on primarily women.

Even material feminists’ contemporaries acknowledged the great amount of work involved in cooking, but they sought to allay the problem rather than challenge the system itself. One solution proposed as a quick fix, not by the material feminists but by some of their contemporaries, was to just occasionally “spoil yourselves a little,”\(^{73}\) but not to question their realities. This comment was made immediately after a discussion about how women have to do all of this cooking and cleaning in addition to their jobs outside of the home. Another solution suggested in the *I Hate to Cook Cookbook* and also in the *Career Woman’s Cookbook* was to make quicker meals. The book’s description acknowledges that cooking takes a lot of time for the “woman who runs both her home and a job outside the home” and thus her meals “must be attainable without encroaching too far on such precious free time as she may have. It is clear that time and energy available for the preparation of complicated dishes can occur only occasionally, even if her tastes run that way.”\(^{74}\) *Betty Crocker’s Working Woman’s Cookbook* proposed similar tactics. The amount of these books that were released shows the publishers’ awareness to this need. However, since those solutions

---


evaded the actual problems and instead reiterated the cultural expectations that told women that they must be the ones to cook, it is necessary to return to what the material feminists actually said about how cooking caused such a burden in their lives.

In feminist consciousness raising groups that tried to focus on all of the ways in which women are burdened, a large emphasis specifically was placed on the way that women were burdened by cooking. Women thus were not allowed to cook for CR groups. Rule number 14 clearly stated, “CR meetings should not provide refreshments. No matter how simple at the beginning, refreshments have a way of becoming more and more important and elaborate, creating stress, work, and expense for some or all of the members of the group. Women are so conditioned to offering food in their homes that it is almost automatic to expect such service from them, and CR must be able to break away from this form of forced role-playing.” This rule reflected the ideology behind many of the topics the women involved in these groups discussed. They did not want their workshops, while challenging cultural norms, to simultaneously replicate them by expecting that women cook for the group.

A quintessential text of the period, Judy Syfer’s, “I Want a Wife,” did immense work in spelling out the burden placed on women. This piece was read and distributed widely, especially among active feminist groups and was on the list for mandatory readings for the CR groups. She first told readers “I belong to that classification of people known as wives. I am A Wife. And, not altogether

---

76 This piece appeared in multiple folders in both the Sallie Bingham and Schlessinger archives.
incidentally, I am a mother.”77 Once she made her social role clear, she recounted the tale of how a newly divorced male friend of hers was in search of a new wife. Then she proclaimed “As I thought about him while I was ironing one evening, it suddenly occurred to me that I too, would like to have a wife.”78 She then listed all the reasons for why she wanted a wife. Some of her most notable answers were when she said,

I want a wife who cooks the meals, a wife who is a good cook. I want a wife who will plan the menus, do the necessary grocery shopping, prepare the meals, serve them pleasantly, and then do the cleaning up while I do my studying. I want a wife who will care for me when I am sick and sympathize with my pain and loss of time from school. I want a wife to go along when our family takes a vacation so that someone can continue care for me and my when I need a rest and change of scene.79

She finishes the piece by asking: “My God, who wouldn't want a wife?” After the numerous listings, she has made very clear what the burden on women was. This amount of work was expected of them without pay and whether or not they worked outside of the home.

Thus the issue was that women were expected to be “Supermoms.” The 1973 article “Supermom” by Madelon Bedell explained this phenomenon. Bedell began the article talking about making a Julia Child recipe that took half the day, making the dessert that was her son’s favorite. Her brother said that she was a super woman. Her son said no, she was a Supermom. She beamed. She then cleaned dishes until 3 am, knowing her husband had had a tough day and she did this after making the dinner for

ALFA Box 12 of 20, Folder 12.5
78 Syfers, Judy. "I Want a Wife."
79 Ibid.
ten. She was already thinking about breakfast the next day. She talked of her two jobs by saying that

The world is full of women like me. All of us who are married and have children and also have full-time jobs are, or are expected to be, Supermoms. We’re quite different from our male counterparts, fathers who also have jobs. The difference is that they just have one job, the one that pays. We have two, and the one that doesn’t pay is the more important. At various times in my working life, I have been a researcher, a reporter, a writer, and a publicist, but in my mind, I was first and foremost a Mom. A Mom with a job. A do-it-all woman. That’s me. Super. How did I get that way? 80

She then listed the seven big factors that identify a “Supermom.” She began by talking about her occupation and that she would fix things so that way they could work and said she was sick when her children were. She claimed, “no one can be a Supermom unless she feels guilty.” 81 Again there was a discussion of feelings of guilt in this article, which compounded the physical burden. She went on to list other identifiers but ended with how: Supermom was a nervous wreck and Supermom was an obnoxious person. This Supermom character was obviously very dissatisfied. She was overburdened by trying to be the perfect wife, mother, and laborer. While she worked outside of the home, she did not challenge the status quo of gender hierarchy in a threatening manner. As Bedell states, “all male chauvinists approve of Supermoms. With shrewd practicality they recognize that a Supermom gives a man his money’s worth and asks no sacrifice of male privilege. You mean you take care of the kids and manage the house and bring home an income too? Groovy!” 82 As she was drowning in a system in which she felt overburdened by expectations, she simultaneously could make other women feel inadequate by comparison. Bedell

81 Bedell, Madelon. “Supermom.” 86.
82 Ibid.
called the Supermom the enemy of other women, including perhaps herself. Supermom was first hated for not being a “real woman” since she worked outside of the home, but she simultaneously caused the other women to feel guilty that they were not earning their own wage. Bedell declared, “This character must be disassembled.” These expectations created a character that was overworked, overtired, and overburdened. Women’s labor hours needed to be interrogated.

Feminists were not only aware of the amount of work that women were doing, but knew that many wanted a change. In a 1970 piece “Up From the Kitchen Floor,” Betty Friedan described how she had began “to get letters from other women who now saw through the feminine mystique, who wanted to stop doing their children’s homework and start doing their own; they were also being told they really were not capable of doing anything else now but making homemade strawberry jam or helping their children do fourth-grade arithmetic. It was not enough just to take yourself seriously as a person. Society had to change, somehow, for women to make it as people. It really wasn’t possible to live any longer as ‘just a housewife.’ But what other way was there to live?” The women who were questioning their roles, pointed to the burdens imposed upon them and the lack of freedom that they really had in their own lives.

While of course women, depending on class, race, geography, age, etc., faced these emotional and physical burdens differently, the burden was immense. From the

---

83 Ibid.
late 1960s through mid-1970s, the average woman, whether or not she worked outside of the home did between 30-48 hours of housework a week.\textsuperscript{85} This burden was enormous and equated to a full time job, often with overtime, and without pay. After all of this work that women were doing, they were then faced with a lack of respect from all levels.

\textbf{Lack of Respect}

The lack of respect for women’s domestic food production and housework in general was evident in many facets of American society. It was not counted in the GDP and thus was not seen to have any market value as a service in the US economy. In cultural rhetoric, women, especially housewives who did not hold another job outside of the home, were mocked as doing little or nothing during the day. This kind of language was most apparent at the level of the family. While of course there was a vast economic disrespect paid by society as a whole, women experienced this especially on the personal level. Two wonderful texts, Pat Mainardi’s “The Politics of Housework” and Jane O’Reilly’s “The Housewife’s Moment of Truth” did a wonderful job in demonstrating the frustration of how housework was not taken seriously by others living in the house.

The first article, “The Politics of Housework,” deals with a woman trying to convince her husband to help with housework. She claimed that women’s true liberation was tied to housework. However, trying to convince her husband to help

\textsuperscript{85} The large range in this statistic is due to the great variance in the number of hours cited by numerous sources.
with it was difficult. She began with the most basic premise “Women's Liberation-
and housework. What? You say this is all trivial? Wonderful! That's what I thought. It
seemed perfectly reasonable. We both had careers; both had to work a couple of days
a week to earn enough to live on, so why shouldn't we share the housework? So I
suggested it to my mate and he agreed—most men are too hip to turn you down flat.
You're right, he said. It's only fair. Then an interesting thing happened.‖

She first had to deal with the fact that her husband did not at first view housewo-
rk as the route through which women’s liberation could be achieved and thought that it was no big
deal to agree to share the work. Although he agreed at first to sharing the work, the
transition did not happen very smoothly. She started by making her

list of dirty chores: buying groceries, carting them home and
putting them away; cooking meals and washing dishes and pots;
doing the laundry, digging out the place when things get out of
control; washing floors. The list could go on but the sheer
necessities are bad enough. All of us have to do these things, or get
someone else to do them for us. The longer my husband
contemplated these chores, the more repulsed he became, and so
proceeded the change from the normally sweet, considerate Dr.
Jekyll into the crafty Mr. Hyde who would stop at nothing to avoid
the horrors of housework. As he felt himself backed into a comer
laden with dirty dishes, brooms, mops and reeking garbage, his
front teeth grew longer and pointier, his fingernails haggled and his
eyes grew wild. Housework trivial? Not on your life! Just try to
share the burden."  

When he saw how much actually had to be done, he began to fight her on it. In his
excuses for not doing the work, his own sexism was rather apparent. The disrespect
for housework in general could easily be seen.

His rationale for not doing the work showed how he and others in society actually viewed housework, including domestic food production. Mainardi described some of the high points of the dialogue that ensued, such as when he said,

"I don't mind sharing the housework, but I don't do it very well. We should each do the things we're best at." MEANING: Unfortunately I'm no good at things like washing dishes or cooking. What I do best is a little light carpentry, changing light bulbs, moving furniture (how often do you move furniture?). ALSO MEANING: Historically the lower classes (black men and us) have had hundreds of years experience doing menial jobs. It would be a waste of manpower to train someone else to do them now. ALSO MEANING: I don't like the dull, stupid, boring jobs, so you should do them.88

But the list of his excuses got worse and continued to show his disrespect for the housework she had been doing all along. He claimed that

"I hate it more than you. You don't mind it so much." MEANING: Housework is garbage work. It's the worst crap I've ever done. It's degrading and humiliating for someone of my intelligence to do it. But for someone of your intelligence... "Housework is too trivial to even talk about."
MEANING: It's even more trivial to do. Housework is beneath my status. My purpose in life is to deal with matters of significance. Yours is to deal with matters of insignificance. You should do the housework... "This problem of housework is not a man-woman problem. In any relationship between two people one is going to have a stronger personality and dominate," MEANING: That stronger personality had better be me... "In animal societies, wolves, for example, the top animal is usually a male even where he is not chosen for brute strength but on the basis of cunning and intelligence. Isn't that interesting? MEANING: I have historical, psychological, anthropological and biological justification for keeping you down. How can you ask the top wolf to be equal? "Women's liberation isn't really a political movement." MEANING: The revolution is coming too close to home. ALSO MEANING: I am only interested in how I am oppressed, not how I oppress others. Therefore the war, the draft and the university are political. Women's liberation is not. "Man's accomplishments have always depended on getting help from other people, mostly women. What great man would have accomplished what he did if he had to do his own housework?"
MEANING: Oppression is built into the system and I, as the white American male, receive the benefits of this system. I don't want to give them up.‖89

One of the most pivotal lines that he said was ‘‘We used to be so happy!’ (Said whenever it was his turn to do something.) MEANING: I used to be so happy.

88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
MEANING: Life without housework is bliss. No quarrel here. Perfect Agreement.⁹⁰

Here, like some of the writers previously discussed, she denigrated housework. This can later be problematic for the movement. Housework was something that had to be done by the individual or by someone else on behalf of the individual and someone had to do it. Putting down this necessary labor would have other implications. Mainardi’s essay indicated the structural quality of oppression and how directly material feminists confronted it. However, Pat Mainardi was not the only one to point this out.

Jane O’Reilly’s “Housewife’s Moment of Truth” further emphasized the material feminists’ awareness of this labor oppression. She provided many examples of men not helping clean or cook. She began by reiterating that women’s oppression really relies upon housework and her examples focus primarily on cleaning. She too remarked on how she had encountered people calling her petty for stating that the future improvement of their civilization depended upon questions such as who washed the dishes.⁹¹ She wanted new answers to be created for the problems such as when “Denise works as a waitress from 6 am to 3 pm. Her husband is a cabdriver, who moonlights on weekends as a doorman. They have four children. When her husband comes home at night, he asks: What’s for dinner?”⁹² However she found that many people were not willing to consider this a problem since the work of women had been viewed as something not even worth analyzing. O’Reilly found that she and other women were asked, “What else have you got to do but sit around the house all

⁹⁰ Ibid.
⁹² Ibid. 57.
Angered, she wonders, “How dare he ask such a question! What sort of bizarre social arrangement is post-industrial revolution marriage? What kind of relationship involves two people sharing their lives without knowing, or apparently caring, what the other does all day?” In this post-industrial revolution world, the masculine partners are not required to care what is being performed in the feminine partner’s imagined separate sphere. Housework remained in her sphere whether or not she worked outside of the home in the imagined separate masculine sphere also. O’Reilly’s discussions emphasized the little respect paid to women by men.

However, O’Reilly believed that it was not just husbands who were responsible this injustice. It was a larger social matter. She put into economic perspective how much housework was actually viewed as being worth within the corporate world. She gave the example of Alice who “according to insurance companies it would cost Fred 8,000 to 9,000 dollars a year to replace Alice’s services if she died. Alice, being an average ideal suburban housewife, works 99.6 hours a week- always feeling there is too much to be done and always guilty because it is never quite finished. Besides, her work doesn’t seem important. After all, Fred is paid for doing whatever it is he does. Abstract statistics make no impact on Alice.”

O’Reilly in these few lines said some very important things. First of all, insurance companies valued Alice’s more than twice full-time forty hour work week as totaling only around 8,000 dollars which even in the 1970s was barely making minimum

---

93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
wage without overtime pay at 1.60 an hour. However, Alice did not actually receive any of that money for her work, which was quantified by the insurance company as unskilled labor even though the coordination of the entire household was a complex matter. If Alice was not Fred’s wife and he made her work this much and did not pay her, she would be considered enslaved. However, since they were married, the benefits of her work could be received for free. Her work was also made to seem unimportant because unlike Fred, she was not paid. Her work has been devalued within greater society, both in terms of economic value and also emotional value.

The conditions of the home were only a reflection of the greater society at large. The lack of respect that women faced was in large part due to the little value ascribed to cooking and other household tasks. Material feminists also critiqued how their work was so devalued, especially when they were such an important part of the economy, whether or not they worked outside of the home.

**Economic/Value**

Part of the devaluing of their cooking and other housework related to the economic and political system at large. It was not Fred from the above example who independently decided to not pay Alice for the work that she did. This occurred because of widespread cultural views that privileged certain kinds of work above others. However, this issue of value brought up by material feminists was not just a question about remuneration. It was actually more complex, because in some ways society did value housewives and household work.

---

96 Ibid.
The work done by women was acknowledged in cultural rhetoric as being important for maintaining society. Cooking was especially seen as important because food is richly embedded with cultural traditions. However, the reward for this work was that women were supposed to be emotionally satisfied by doing this task. Politicians and other public figures might have spoken of the importance of wives and mothers to the American nation in maintaining society, but their work was still being devalued even while these claims were made. If real work was paid work, what then was household work?

The material feminists divided into three different camps in regards to this point in question. The first group took issue with how the work was valued. They of course also challenged the expectation that women take part in this work, but they saw the work as having inherent value and wanted it to be socially acknowledged. The other group generally had a similar position, except that they drew attention to the less pleasant aspects of domestic food production. Their dislike for the type of work complicated their position when it came to allotting certain types of value for cooking. The third group took issue with capitalist ideology as a whole and thought that remuneration for labor did not actually make it more important.

Group 1: Issue with Value

Women’s household work was for the consumption of others. This was most obvious in the case of cooking when the product was so readily consumed. As Meredith Tax in her pamphlet “Woman and Her Mind: The Story of Daily Life: A Bread and Roses Publication” from 1970, eloquently reiterated, “In our stage of
society, where most necessary production work has been taken out of the home (like baking bread, raising chickens, weaving cloth), the job of the housewife is to produce the labor power of others. The housewife feeds, clothes, cares for, and does psychological repair work on her husband and children, so that they can be resold in the capitalist marketplace each morning. She is not paid in any way that is defined as remuneration for this work, because it is not defined as a job. Her husband supports her as an appendage of himself, but no employer pays her for her labor.” 97 She was involved thus in what Tax called “immaterial production.” 98 This kind of labor thus cannot have great value in a capitalist economy that awards value by allocating different amounts of money to bestow and recognize merit.

The problem was not the job but the value given to it, argued Ann Crittendon Scott in 1972 in an article called “The Value of Housework.” She first discussed all the skills required to run a house and managerial skills and teacher to children and nurse to children and so on. Then she talked about how men would not actually mind the job based on the many intriguing aspects of the job. In this she differs with other women who hate housework like Mainardi. She claimed, “If the job weren’t considered “women’s work,” there is little doubt that its challenges, its variety, and its flexibility would appeal to many men. For many individuals, these rewards more than outweigh the long hours, sometimes 13 to 14 per day- and the hard, often routine work.” 99 However, men would not want to deal with the downsides to the job that

women have accepted for many years. She asked, “What man would want a position that guarantees no independent income, no Social Security, not even a living wage? And worse, which has, in this male dominated culture, in spite of all propaganda to the contrary, has almost no status at all?”

Here she drew attention to the lack of economic value and security that was given to this work. Furthermore, she challenged the rhetoric of the politicians and public figures that, as discussed earlier, acted like the country truly valued women’s work. Of course there had to be an awareness that the economy would crumble without someone doing the reproductive labor of society, but this does not mean that it had strong cultural value. In fact Scott talked about how she was ridiculed. She was met with “endless jokes and social put-downs, she [was] patronized, condescended to, and considered unemployed.” She challenged anyone who doubted that cooking and other housework was seen as valueless needed only to “look at the current edition of Funk and Wagnalls. A ‘housewife,’ the dictionary proclaims, is one ‘who does not work for a living.’” The value of the cooking was obviously problematic.

Group 2: Issue with the Work Itself

This discussion of the amount of economic value and social value placed upon their labor was definitely discussed in CR groups. These groups forced women to

---

Ms. Magazine 9822.00 MS V.1, 1-12. Schlesinger Library of the Radcliffe Institute of Harvard University. 56.


101 Ibid.

102 Ibid.
question how they had viewed cooking and other household work themselves first in order to come to a more just and equal society. According to a CR pamphlet, these sessions had “one basic purpose: it raises the woman’s consciousness, increases her complete awareness, of her oppression in a sexist society. To do so, it helps her break through the conditioning all women have received, so that she can see and fully comprehend how society has deliberately trained and prepared her to play certain roles, accept certain situations, feel certain emotions, within the fabric of the culture; above all, how she is trained not to question, not to challenge, not to upset the way things are.”\textsuperscript{103} An entire section of the curriculum was what they called “shitwork.” As they defined it, shitwork “must be done to maintain every individual in our society: grocery shopping, food preparation, home cleaning, clothes cleaning, etc., are chores integral to the continued comfort and efficiency of all persons, irrespective of sex, status, or occupation.”\textsuperscript{104} The writers of this pamphlet obviously did not enjoy doing this kind of labor. In their writings, they helped raise awareness of the necessity of this kind of work and in that way they showed how it was very valuable to society.

Calling this labor “shitwork” drew attention to the fact that even though politicians and other public figures may have said that women’s work was important to society, it was something that they actually viewed as “shit” and wanted to avoid at all times. Not only was the “the overwhelming proportion of this work is considered women’s work, but when women begin to question their responsibilities for shitwork, men object in many ways, all aimed at masculine/feminine stereotypes and true actualization as autonomous persons depends upon the sexless fair sharing of

\textsuperscript{103} Abarbanell, Gay, and Harriet Perl. \textit{Guidelines to Feminist Consciousness Raising}. 3.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid. 46.
shitwork. The measure of the woman’s personal oppression is the man’s resistance to sharing shitwork. Freedom from the need to do shitwork directly affects a person’s potential for earning money; famous and/or highly productive people throughout history are those whose shitwork has been done for them. (The leader must read the articles by Mainardi, O’Reilly, and Syfer, given on the reading list).”\textsuperscript{105} The authors of the CR pamphlet, who like Mainardi, O’Reilly, and Syfer that we have already looked at, and who the CR authors cite, truly believed that the kitchen and housework in general were important grounds of women’s oppression. While calling it “shitwork” showed how this type of labor was viewed by society, by calling it “shitwork,” they extended the associations of this kind of work as something that is to be avoided. Thus they simultaneously devalued it while talking about its importance.

The main argument of the CR section about “shitwork” was that it was necessary for society to function, yet it was expected to be performed by those who society did not view as important or valuable, in this case women. Women were expected to do the undesirable tasks despite the fact that “science has not found a "toilet cleaning gene: in female babies which guarantees they will grow up to be knowledgeable house workers. [They asked] What are the implications of this fact? Who decided that women were to do the shitwork and how has this affected your life?”\textsuperscript{106} Having women discuss this issue addressed an overarching theme within feminist publications of the time that showed how some women were upset by the fact that women were being expected to do this supposedly unimportant work that in fact allowed the rest of society to flourish. The CR groups were supposed to “discuss

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.

59
the phrase “I’m a self made man/woman.” (Behind every “self-made” person, look for a loyal shitworker.) If you are a woman living alone, apply this question to yourself.”¹⁰⁷ Each discussion question thus drew attention to the value that this work actually had, yet how society was not acknowledging its value in the way that it acknowledged other work deemed valuable, with money. They furthermore showed that this work kept women from being able to participate as freely in paying labor outside of the home. General society saw women as less “‘ambitious’ than men, yet the CR groups showed how this burden of ‘shitwork’ that was seen to have little value, was “why they [allegedly] can’t make it’ to higher levels of business and professions.”¹⁰⁸ Ultimately they thus made the point that “shitwork” was economically confining and also devalued.

Since women were conceived of as weak and unable to handle the unpleasant, although this was proved otherwise based on what previously mentioned authors had said about their husbands avoiding work like cleaning toilets because they actually viewed these tasks as extremely unpleasant, the only things women must have been able to do would have had to be easy and pleasant and thus emotionally fulfilling and not requiring remuneration. These justifications were tied up in strong cultural sexist ideologies that continuously disadvantaged women and their labor. Jo Freeman’s 1971 article, “The Women’s Liberation Movement: It’s Origins, Structures, and Ideas” suggested that sexism was the reason that cooking ultimately held such little economic value. She believed that first core concept of sexist thought was “that men

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.
do the important work in the world and the work done by men is what is important.”¹⁰⁹ Thus work such as cooking, which fell under the realm of women, was viewed as unimportant, insignificant, and valueless. Ultimately the work that women did was undervalued, except in how it could elevate men. She described this when she said “the second core concept is that women are here for the pleasure and assistance of men... It defines the few roles for which women are socially rewarded—wife, mother, and mistress—all of which are pleasing or beneficial to men and leads directly to the “pedestal” theory which extols women who stay in their place as good help-mates to men.”¹¹⁰ Thus Freeman argued that the little value awarded to women’s work was part of an economic structure ruled by sexism.

Material feminists further critiqued how women were forced into this system. Whether or not women liked this kind of work, social institutions, such as schools, forced them into doing it. In Mary Ellen Verheyden-Hillard’s 1975 article, “Cinderella Doesn’t Live Here Anymore,” it was obvious that these material feminists were abhorred by the lack of respect and economic value placed on their work. The piece talked about the disillusionment with the fairytale picture. Cinderella, after getting married, was confined to the castle and was responsible for overseeing the production or actually cooking all of the food for her, the Prince, and their numerous offspring. Verheyden-Hilliard assumes that “she did not take up an outside career of castle building or working in the sword repair shop in town. Rather,

¹⁰⁹ The value placed upon women’s work is a direct result of sexism. Freeman, Jo. "The Women's Liberation Movement: It's Origins, Structures, and Ideas."

¹¹⁰ Ibid 9.
she remained in the Cinderella intensive sphere of non-gainful castle economics where she was kept very busy.”

Despite the physical and emotional drain from the labor burden, she continued to do it for the rest of her life. She and the Prince usually however “lived happily ever after- which wasn’t really so hard to do because most people of the time tended to be dead by the time they were 35.”

It is actually quite a funny piece, which is important to note. Although many material feminists were making similar claims to each other, they approached the issue in different ways. Some used comics, some used economic theory, others used memoirs, some created pamphlets for meeting groups, and others used humor. The point is that regardless of the media through which they chose to express themselves through, there were many problems with cooking, domestic food production, and general housework as unremunerated and expected labor. Verheyden-Hillard further claimed that how at the time of this article 53.9 percent of women over the age of 18 were in the labor force and 1 of every 8 families was headed by women, “in many ways, the country’s federally supported vocational education programs are preparing female enrollees for Cinderella’s lifestyle.”

She was upset that this kind of labor was all girls were being trained to do. They were being raised into this system that did not value but expected this household labor. Their oppression around cooking had been institutionalized.

---

ALFA Box 12 of 20, File 12.6, Sallie Bingham Center for Women’s History and Culture of Duke University. 34.
113 Ibid.
Group 3: Capitalism is the Issue

The 1975 edition of *Country Women*, which had the theme “women working,” again questioned what work is. The authors tried to redefine “work” to create a definition in which the labor that she and other women do was valued. They reminded her readers “We often apply to our lives the capitalist assumption that work that’s not remunerative is valueless. And what of the largest category of unremunerated work, women’s traditional work, housework and childcare?" They recognized though, that the way the system was, it was seen as not having any value. In that same publication, in an article entitled “The Riverboat Cook,” when looking about issues of remuneration, the author learned “a lot about the cultural value placed on the work women have traditionally done, as well as our own internalization of that value.” The capitalist system of America, especially post industrial revolution in the ideological separation and in part realized separation of remunerated and unremunerated working spheres, creates problems for women cooking. Cooking in this system was part of women’s oppression. Even if it can give women emotional, spiritual, psychological, or other forms of fulfillment, unremunerated labor was given different standing in the capitalist society of America. Thus these feminists were not just upset about the value bestowed upon domestic work, but also about the entire economic system.

Conclusion

Contemporary writer Leslie Bennetts’s *Feminine Mistake: Are We Giving Up Too Much?* provides a way to briefly summarize all of these ideas. We live in a capitalist society. We measure value based on what it is “worth”- i.e. how much it costs or how much it makes. Although value can be articulated in other ways, such as emotional reparation, these alternatives are marginalized since the capitalist society prioritizes money. We do not pay for housework, domestic food production, and home cooking. Housework is thus not valued in a monetary manner. The emotional value of the work is marginalized and rendered to be less important than the monetary value bestowed to labor that is remunerated. This is problematic since it is oftentimes the labor done by women. Of course the above authors go into many different facets of how this actually played out in late 1960s to mid-1970s society, but this is the ideology that lies at the heart of their arguments.

This same ideology drove many of the solutions, which they proposed to reconcile the problems associated with domestic food production.
For women to have full human identity and freedom, they must have economic independence. Breaking through the barriers that had kept them from jobs and professions rewarded by society was the first step, but it wasn’t sufficient. It would be necessary to change the rules of the game to restructure professions, marriage, the family, and the home. Equality and human dignity are not possible for women if they are not able to earn money. But the importance of work for women goes beyond economics. \[115\]

- Betty Friedan

After identifying their grievances about the expectation that women be responsible for domestic food production, the material feminists crafted a variety of solutions. Some of their ideas were bounded by the political, economic, and social systems of America. Others directly challenged these systems. For some material feminists, the goal was to change the modes of production and alter the way that society viewed and talked about domestic food production. Others had wanted to change the modes of consumption. A variety of political ideologies and practical work influenced these solutions.

Some of their solutions to ameliorate the grievances associated with cooking were far more radical than others. Changes would need to be made on multiple levels, varying from home relations to the state level. This chapter is arranged by the increasing degree to which their proposals differed from the status quo.

---

\[115\] Friedan, Betty. "Up from the Kitchen Floor." 114.
Changing Modes of Production and Altering Perceptions

Changes on the Personal Level

Language

Part of altering perceptions of domestic food production relied upon redefining household work. This reframing of domestic work itself had as much to do with altering the tasks, as it did with changing how that work was discussed. The words that were being used to define household labor were highly gendered and restrictive. Social understandings of the reproductive labor performed in the house, such as cooking and cleaning the dishes, were greatly influenced by the words being used to describe this process.

Wilma Scott Heide, a dynamic social activist who served as the third president of NOW, beginning in 1971, believed that language was a powerful tool that the material feminists need to harness. She drew attention to the problematic nature of words that carried with them cultural understandings that greatly limited gender mobility in regards to work within the home. In a 1976 article entitled “Why Don’t We?” Heide proposed a new process of understanding the words people constantly used, such as “housewife.” She suggested to “drop it from the language [because] no one marries a house.” 116 Heide proclaimed, “Homemaking and housework are for people- men, women, and children. Why don’t we substitute ‘houseworker’ or

‘homemaker [than for housewife]?’" She believed that if the title of the work were made more gender neutral, the work itself would become more accessible for men and children.

Although this solution would not remedy many of the downsides of domestic food production, changing the language could have some effect. For instance, words could persuade or dissuade people from entering into certain economic and work arrangements. She made her point clear when she challenged, “Why don’t we eliminate the phrase ‘head of household?’ It assumes that being an economic supporter (and/or male) entitles one to authority and prerogatives, implicitly devalues shared authority and perpetuates unequal living arrangements. Why don’t we just use the term ‘economic provider (s)?’" She believed that a simple change of vocabulary had the potential to alter society, especially in regards to the respect given to those who did household work such as domestic food production.

Heide obviously knew that changing the language would not fix all of the issues with household labor and specifically with domestic food production. However, language has the power to influence people’s thinking. Using more gender neutral terms such as “economic provider” and “homemaker” would allow for men and women to be able to imagine themselves occupying roles that had been far less possible before the linguistic expressions of such roles existed. These changes to language did not mean that there would not be any political, social, or economic

---

117 Heide, Wilma Scott. " Why Don’t We?"
118 Interestingly, this solution related to some of her other activist work. Heide was involved in the 1973 Supreme Court Case of Pittsburgh Press Co. v. Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations that ended the practice of listing separate help wanted ads for men and women. She was actively involved in making spoken and print language about work more accessible for women.
119 Ibid.
barriers that would prevent this expanded flexibility, but shifts in vocabulary could allow for some change. Furthermore, even if these new words were used, there would not be a guarantee that they too would not eventually become gendered terms as well. However, a change in terms did have some potential, even if only for the more immediate future. Ultimately the gendering of certain titles and household tasks was indicative of some of the larger societal issues about the respect given to this kind of work.

**Respect**

One of the biggest grievances that the material feminists had experienced was the lack of respect given to housework and specifically domestic food production. This reproductive labor had to continue in order to maintain society. Somehow food had to be procured, produced (cooked), and the mess cleaned. Someone would have to be responsible for these tasks and those persons deserved respect for their necessary labor.

The lack of respect given to household labor was a socially constructed problem; nothing about household work was inherently shameful. In fact this kind of reproductive labor was vital to the continuation of human life. In her 1972 article “The Value of Housework,” Ann Crittendon Scott argued that “‘Occupation: Houseworker’ is a viable and respectable choice for anyone, male or female, provided that it is treated as such, socially and economically.”[120] Providing care work for one’s

---

family was not in any way intrinsically bad. The long process of devaluing this kind of labor, as was traced in Chapter 1, contributed to the lack of respect given to this work, which some women actually found pleasurable.

Some women in fact loved to cook because they found the act empowering. For certain women this was the only thing in their lives that they actually had control over. While many women, depending of course upon their cultural and economic backgrounds, had less economic and political power than their masculine counterparts, food was a realm in which they had power. Although there were many issues with women’s power being confined to the kitchen or in the imaged domestic sphere, there were some advantages. Women got to decide what the family ate. Food carries with it social, cultural, and historical significance. By determining what their families ate, they were in fact guardians of their families’ cultural heritage. It is understandable why some women thus did not want to give up this role.

Discussions about cooking as a symbol of women’s oppression could unintentionally make some women feel bad about their desire to cook. In the same way that some women who did not enjoy this activity felt pressured into cooking, the shame that would prevent women from doing something they enjoyed could also have potentially had deleterious effects. While the goal of the movement was not to take away an activity that some women enjoyed doing, it is easy to see how some women might have felt uncomfortable about this position.

Even Betty Friedan wrote about her discomfort with this tension. In 1977, she wrote an article called “Cooking with Betty Friedan, yes Betty Friedan.” Even major
critics of cooking and household labor, such as Friedan, could also feel isolated by some of the ramifications of this critique.

Friedan began her piece by stating that she was “considering making soup from scratch next summer…” and immediately followed it with the reassurance that “No, I am not announcing public defection from the women's movement. I think in fact I'm just coming out on the other end of women's liberation.” In this piece Friedan tries to reconcile her feminist work with her passion for cooking. She wanted to make clear in writing this piece that she was not leaving the feminist movement. She continues to believe in its cause and continues to find issues with the expectation that women be responsible for domestic food production. However, she realized that denying her own passions in order to appear to be feminist would also be problematic. When she claims that she is “coming out on the other end,” she means that she is trying to find a balance in her life. She tried to reconcile how to live as a feminist while also preserving some of the benefits of the housewife role that she had enjoyed.

She wondered why she should have deprived herself of the joy that she found in cooking and questioned what can also be lost by not cooking. Families and cultures preserve a large part of their histories within food traditions. When her son tried to get in touch with his Jewish roots through being involved with the procurement of certain types of foods, she questioned, “Why did I lose touch with those particular female

---

roots of my own, those generations of women who expressed their love with chicken soup? Was it really all-bad?“\textsuperscript{122} She went on to recount how

Particular circumstances aside, I think that certain conflicts and rebellions over ‘the women's role’ as it used to be defined made some of us, for a while at least, lose our zest for creative cooking. The stress of finding our own identity in society, the energy it took to achieve independence, status and our own support in society, and our rage against the barriers in our way somehow turned off or sapped our willingness or even our ability to cook creatively, for those we loved.\textsuperscript{123}

After many years of cooking out of a feeling of obligation, she had felt freer by letting go of the responsibility go. However even though cooking had once been a burden, she wondered if she could not enjoy it again. To feel such a tension is completely understandable. Spending so much time fighting against social conditions that mandate that women are responsible for domestic food production would create conditions that rendered the only possible form of activism a sort of rebellion. However, cooking was never the issue; it was the expectation that was the issue.

For the women who loved to cook, it was wrong that the main source of power in their lives was in the kitchen with a task that was still widely disrespected. The women’s liberation movement was not about taking away something that provided women joy but about interrogating and bringing attention to a burden and expectation that caused many problems for women. Thus, giving respect to this kind of work was very important. Some material feminists postulated, like Crittendon, that cooking did not have to be oppressive, but a joy if it were given the proper social and economic standing. Respect could influence cooking’s social regard.

\textsuperscript{122} Friedan, Betty. "Cooking With Betty Friedan ... Yes, Betty Friedan."
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.
By identifying the fear, guilt, burden, and lack of respect associated with cooking, material feminists, however did not treat food as if it did not matter. On the contrary, they were acutely aware of its cultural significance and its potential power as a focus of reform.  

This work needed not be shameful. If someone considered this kind of labor to be “shitwork” as the consciousness raising pamphlet had suggested, she should not be expected to do this task solely due to her gender. Since the work had to be done, it should be respected in society. The goal of the material feminists was not to shame those who did this kind of labor, but rather to problematize the expectation that women do it. For those families that did not have someone who enjoyed inherently doing this kind of labor, other solutions needed to be formulated beyond generating respect for this kind of work.

---

124 Abarbanell, Gay, and Harriet Perl. Guidelines to Feminist Consciousness Raising. 15. Even in the consciousness raising groups, where it seemed like the other rules were strictly against food involved in group interactions, there was an exception. The pamphlet writers recognized that food is an important part of human exchange. They acknowledged that as a CR series progressed, many of the participants would want to get to know each other better in a more social context. In order to allow for time to chat with one another and become friends, they suggested the scheduling of a potluck meal to precede the fourth or fifth CR session. However there was still the addendum that if “the members should plan and provide the food so that there is no additional burden on the woman in whose home the group is meeting, and the meal should be planned so that it does not interfere with the normal amount of time for the CR itself.” The eleventh session for coordinating an action was also allowed to be a party with refreshments. The writers of the pamphlet knew that food can allow for a bonding experience but they also did not want the women to feel burdened by the expectation to cook that they were feeling already in their lives. Although there was a wonderful amount of sensitivity to these needs of the group, the passion some women also felt for cooking tended to be disregarded.

Split the work

Apart from altering the language, and giving the work more respect, another way to reconcile the problems faced by women who were burdened by cooking was the seemingly simple idea that men and women equally share household work. As Mainardi had said “One hour a day is a low estimate of the amount of time one has to spend ‘keeping’ oneself. By foisting this off on others, man has seven hours a week-one working day more to play with his mind and not his human needs. Over the course of generations it is easy to see whence evolved the horrifying abstractions of modern life.”\(^{126}\) Rather than allowing one partner seven hours more free time than the other, they could divide the work so that each would have an equal amount of free time and work time. Mainardi was just one among the many material feminists that advocated splitting the work. Most of the authors focused specifically on how this work could be split in a marriage.

An important concept expressed by Claude Servan-Schreiber’s “Marriage of Equals” was that people in marriages should share the responsibility for maintaining their families. Servan-Schreiber told the story of a couple that embodies this philosophy. She claimed that “since their wedding day seven years ago, Sandra Lipsitx and Daryl Bem have been happily sharing what they call an “egalitarian” marriage. They both work, they both cook; they both plan to take care of their children when the time comes.”\(^{127}\) This idea of egalitarian marriage was important. It

\(^{126}\)Mainardi, Pat. "The Politics of Housework."

would theoretically allow for individuals to be freed from the confinement of their
gendered roles.

Splitting work would relieve half of the burden from women. It would also
allow for a more realistic representation of humans. Men and women would not be as
radically divided along a gender binary in accordance to their labor. As some material
feminists wanted to emphasize, men were fully capable of doing this kind of
household work. The well-known journalist and feminist activist Gloria Steinem said,
“We want to liberate men from those inhuman roles as well. We want to share the
work and responsibility, and to have men share equal responsibility for the
children.”128 Part of relieving the physical and emotional burden that many women
felt from the expectation that they cook would be to create a solution that would be
more inclusive to sharing the workload with men. In order for such a solution to even
be possible, cultural norms would need to be challenged.

Certain divisions of household labor had been reinforced by ideologies that
had to be challenged. The 1976 Washington state women’s political caucus
demonstrated this sentiment by stating

Regardless of the advertisements averring that only ‘mother knows best’
about everything from cereals to coffee (providing that the manufacturer
has told her which is best), we think fathers either can, or do already,
know as much. It is belittling to men to convince them they cannot
operate a can opener or an oven but can fix a car. The reverse is insulting
to women. As for single persons who are able to learn anything they put
their minds to, there is the reminder that knowledge of housekeeping is
not an automatic by-product of procreation. One does not need to be a
parent to know it. Nor is either sex entitled by birth to be the recipient of
the joy of coping with a sink full of used crockery.129

ALFA Box 12, File 5. Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture of Duke University.
129 Kaplan, Shirlie. Pots and Politics: An Historical Cookbook : From the Suffragists to the Equal
This argument gave attention to the strong societal messages that reinforced the gender division of certain labor. The Washington state women’s political caucus intended to make the standing divisions of labor appear trivial. Although the idea that a person is not born with a gene that makes hir fit to cook or do the dishes seems obvious, these arguments needed to be made. Advertising and other forms of media consistently reinforced these ideas. Print ads would show women solely with vacuums whereas men would be bombarded with images of yard tools. In a feminist newsletter produced by feminist newsletter, *KNOW Inc.*, the authors encouraged readers to write to the creator of *The Family Circus* comic, Bill Keane, and inform him of how his work is sexist. In one of his comics, his character states “Dolly can cook better than the boys ‘cause she’s a natural-born girl.”¹³⁰ This comic (see Photo Appendix, image 1) displays how the expectation that women be responsible for domestic food production was biologically justified in many forms of popular media. Entire theses or books can and have been devoted to media and advertising in relation to their perpetuation and concomitant generation of gender norms in regards to household labor. These few examples have been raised, however briefly, in order to show how important it was for the material feminists to draw attention to this kind of messaging in order to even advocate for a divide of the work.

The material feminists who made such arguments saw not only the potential of splitting work as positive for themselves, but for future generations to come.

Splitting housework was not just about the plight of the women who were writing these articles. In fact, such a division had the potential to make an impact on future generations. Some material feminists believed that children who saw both parents doing housework would not think of it as a gendered thing. In the 1972 article, “Down with Sexist Upbringing,” this point was clearly articulated. Letty Cottin Pogrebin believed “home environments tend to set the stage for sex role stereotypes. Children oftentimes model themselves after their parents. If children were raised in a heterosexual two-parent home where household labor, and especially the task of domestic food production was divided between the mother and the father, the children would just conceive of the work as work that everybody did, not just men and not just women. Such a belief rested on the hope of an egalitarian future/egalitarian tomorrow. The material feminists envisioned themselves as doing work that would hopefully improve their lives, but also improve the conditions for future generations. Some had believed that the seemingly simple task of dividing the

131 Pogrebin, Letty Cottin." Down With Sexist Upbringing." Ms. Magazine, Spring 1972. Microform. Ms. Magazine 9822.00 MS V.1, 1-12, Schlesinger Library of the Radcliffe Institute of Harvard University. 18. “But living with Abigail and Robin, age six, is an ongoing consciousness raising session for my husband and me. In them, and in their three-year-old brother David, we see ourselves. They mirror our attitudes and mimic our relationship. They are constant reminders that lifestyles and sex roles are passed from parents to children as inexorably as blue eyes and small feet. From empirical evidence our children have concluded that women’s work is writing books and articles, having meetings, making dinner, doing puzzles with the kids, and fixing the electrical wiring. Man’s work on the other hand, is writing legal briefs, arguing cases, having meetings, making breakfast, reading stories with the kids and fixing the plumbing. In our household, whoever can, does. Call it convenience plus ability. I make dinner because I like to and because I cook better. My husband makes breakfast because I simply cannot get up that early in the morning and the children love his pancakes. In homes where male and female roles are rigidly defined, children would tune in a wholly different picture. If the father restricts himself to the television room, the evening paper and the “masculine” chores in the backyard, his son is not likely to feel that folding laundry is man’s lot in life. If the mother is exclusively engaged in domestic activities her daughter may question whether women were meant to have other interests.”

labor could bring about this change. However while this project of splitting labor sounds easy to do; large-scale social change is never easy.

This work would need to be constantly reevaluated to make sure that it was actually being shared. Pat Mainardi emphasized that women needed to “keep checking up. Periodically consider who's actually doing the jobs. These things have a way of backsliding so that a year later once again the woman is doing everything.” The couples involved in these households had been raised in a culture that had strongly emphasized that it was women’s responsibility to cook and take care of household work. Old habits do not quickly disappear. Even if both partners wanted to make a concerted and genuine effort to divide household labor, over time their workloads might again settle into familiar patterns. The division of the labor needed to consistently be interrogated.

In couples with partners that were less avid about committing to a more equitable division, splitting household chores was a more difficult task. Husbands might at first appear open to the change but could eventually grow less responsive or unresponsive.

For work to be genuinely divided, it must be seen as the responsibility of both partners. She advised that women “don't have the responsibility for the housework with occasional help from him. ‘I'll cook dinner for you tonight’ implies it's really your job and isn't he a nice guy to do some of it for you.” This idea of “help” vs. “responsibility” was also discussed in the CR pamphlet. If one partner was seen only as “helping,” the other then had the expectation to do the work and thus the work

---

134 Ibid.
was not actually being split. In order for the split to actually be effective, both partners needed to feel that it was both of their obligations. A solution to the household burdens that rested on the hope or expectation that one partner that had previously been unburdened by this work would suddenly want to do new work could be tricky.

In some cases men were very unresponsive to this idea of splitting the household work. They simply did not see it as their responsibility. O’Reilly in “Housewife’s Moment of Truth” presented a strategy. A preliminary step was to “Decide what you will and will not do.”\(^\text{136}\) She suggested that women “Make a plan and present it as final. There will of course be democratic argument, but it is only fair to state your purpose. Not that anyone will pay attention. They will laugh nervously and expect life to go on as usual.”\(^\text{137}\) She understood that getting one’s family to agree might be hard. However, despite this difficulty, if women really wanted their conditions to change, they needed to assert their desires in their own homes. Again, she recognized that this task would be complicated. As she claimed, “almost equally difficult is deciding who does what. Men will always opt for things that get finished and stay that way putting up screens, but not planning menus. Some find washing dishes a peaceful, meditative experience. It has to be worked out.”\(^\text{138}\) However, “the important thing is to get the argument away from philosophy and onto assigned chores.”\(^\text{139}\) O’Reilly believed that real liberation happened in the concrete changes within the household, rather than in discussions of theory and philosophy. The first

\(^{137}\) Ibid.
\(^{138}\) Ibid.
\(^{139}\) Ibid.
step then would be to actually split the labor. Nevertheless some couples realized that if they were to share the work, they needed a contract.

Bedell, in her “Supermom” article, mentioned the idea of the contract. The couple would in theory outline how they intended to divide their household labor.\footnote{140} However, this technique was poorly received in her personal experience. Her husband laughed at the idea, just as O’Reilly’s husband had laughed at her when she had suggested that they split the chores. Bedell stated, “Eventually they agreed without a formal contract to each do what they could and not try to be perfect.”\footnote{141} While such a technique was lacking for Bedell, some material feminists had found the idea of the contract useful to reference during domestic disputes.

As these writers have shown, couples would have to develop individualized strategies that would work for them during this transition stage away from the expectation that only women cooked and did these domestic tasks. This solution of splitting the work did not address all of their grievances. In some cases, it actually created new problems.

\footnote{140} The idea of creating a contract in order to gain liberation from burdens imposed upon people due to their identities was not a new idea. Amy Dru Stanley has brought attention to the power of the contract in order to gain freedom in an earlier period in American history. She claims that in the era of slave emancipation, “signifying self-ownership, volition, and reciprocal exchange among formally equal individuals, contract became the dominant metaphor for social relations and the very symbol of freedom.” Her book, \textit{From Bondage to Contract}, explores how a generation of American thinkers and reformers - abolitionists, former slaves, feminists, labor advocates, jurists, moralists, and social scientists - drew on contract to condemn the evils of chattel slavery as well as to measure the virtues of free society. Writers like Bedell did not explicitly state whether or not they were drawing specifically upon this framework. However, it is interesting that they, like earlier feminists, believed that their liberation would come from a contract. In fact, Carol Pateman, in her book, \textit{Sexual Contract}, has argued that part of this mentality in American feminist liberation work stems from the fact that our rights and freedoms derive from the social contract explicated by Locke, Hobbes, and Rousseau and were interpreted in the United States by the Founding Fathers. Stanley, Amy Dru. \textit{From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation}. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998. Print. And Pateman, Carole. \textit{The Sexual Contract}. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1988. Print.

\footnote{141} Bedell, Madelon. "Supermom." 100.
An issue with the idea of sharing household work was that even if husbands agreed to divide it, there usually was a dispute between the partners about the level to which the tasks were performed. Some of the women, for example, had held themselves to rigorous cleaning and cooking standards and when their husbands did the work, they felt that the men did not execute the chores at the same level of quality. Some men, as O’Reilly and Bedell pointed out, would purposefully try to do a poor job in order to get out of having to do certain tasks. However, this problem could have been rectified by another proposition posited by some material feminists.

**Relax Standards and Do Not Feel Guilty**

Some women suggested that an important aspect of getting over this burden was to not feel guilty if the standards were not being met. A husband might not make the bed exactly how the wife would, but at least he was making it. It had to be determined what was more valuable: a well-made bed or the equitable division of household labor.

O’Reilly suggested that the first step was to cut the work in half. Social expectations about the standards of certain types of cleanliness and certain chore rituals were relative. To some material feminists, instead it was more important to change the standards. She suggested to decide what housework needs to be done. Then cut the list in half. It is no longer necessary to prove ourselves by being in motion all day and all night. Beds must be made and food cooked, but it is unfair to demand that the family share the work if your standards
include cooking like Julia Child and bouncing dimes on the bedspread. Beware of useless and self-defeating standards. Other authors also talked about the change required on women’s part during this transition. In the 1973 article “If Your Husband Makes the Bed, Must You Lie in it,” Jane M. McDivitt told the story of a couple trying to balance their expectations when the man becomes a househusband but he is not meeting the woman’s standards of cleanliness. Apparently “Ms. Gould assume[d] that her time-honored values will prevail, and that her husband will, under subtle pressures knuckle under and make the bed properly in return for his supper.” McDivitt suggested that the woman “and her husband have a conference and, with both having equal voting rights, hammer out an agreement on their housework values. This is really the only way that two people can run a true partnership.” If household work was to be shared, compromise needed to happen. Part of this process thus was undoing the oppressive standards of perfection to which women were being held. Women should not have had to act like Bedell’s cast of Supermoms. Such expectations were unrealistic if women wanted to change the conditions of their lives. As McDivitt reminded readers, “Liberating oneself always involves give and take. It’s not just roles that have to become more flexible, but values as well.” A big part of this had to do with not feeling guilty about the change.

142 Ibid.
144 Ibid.
145 Ibid.
Countering that guilt to which many of the material feminists had spoken also relied on the relaxing of standards. Yes, the women would likely have needed not to expect perfection in household duties from their husbands, but they also needed to not expect so much from themselves. When O’Reilly suggested that women look at the list of household work and to “cut the list in half,”\textsuperscript{146} she did not just mean so that men would not be burdened with as much work and thus less likely to actually do it. However, she meant that women also needed to ease up on themselves and interrogate all of the tasks that they had been performing day in and day out. Women needed to face their guilt head on: first by cutting down their list of tasks that they would even have the potential to feel guilty about and next by splitting the responsibility of the actual tasks that still needed to be done with their partners. Of course this solution of splitting the labor relied on a heterosexual two-person household and many women lived lives that did not exactly fit this mold. However, for the majority of the women who had this kind of lifestyle, these solutions could be helpful. Nevertheless, as will be discussed below, some material feminists pointed out that this kind of change relied upon altruism of men and that these changes had to happen on the individual level. Some of the material feminists feared that liberation at this level would take too long.

These suggestions of altering the language, respecting the work that was being done, dividing and re-evaluating the standards of household work (specifically cooking), relied upon changing how people interacted with the labor itself. All of these discursive claims rested on the belief that the burden women were facing, via

\textsuperscript{146} O’Reilly, Jane. "Housewife's Moment of Truth." 58.
the expectation that they be responsible for domestic food production, came from all sectors of society. Their burden was imposed on them linguistically, through media materials, and through their interactions with other members of society. The above-discussed solutions were formulated in order to deal with individual issues within the modes of production. The pro of these kinds of solutions were that they offered the material feminists some seemingly practical and tangible solutions within which they could create change in their own lives. However, these solutions dealt more with symptomatic issues rather than some of the underlying social issues.

Other material feminists showed that changes to production did not have to be conceived as only occurring on the individual level. In fact, some material feminists advocated for systematic changes involving institutional reform on the educational, economic, and governmental levels.

**Changes on the Institutional Level**

Systematic changes had the potential to reach a large number of people. Individual change was conditional on the hard work of people within their own relationships. Some of the proposals made by the material feminists required changes on the institutional level in the educational, the governmental, and economic systems. These proposals were not exclusive and many material feminists actually advocated for the deployment of combinations of individual and systematic tactics for liberation. Change on the individual level, however, would be difficult if the structures of
society reinforced an entirely different model that reiterated the norms that the material feminists sought to challenge and unhinge. Thus, many of these proposals targeted large structures that impacted daily life.

**Education**

If women were to be relieved from the expectation to cook, changes had to occur in the educational system to prepare women and men for this new type of gender division of labor. Mary Ellen Verheyden Hilliard’s “Cinderella Doesn’t Live Here Anymore” piece had critiqued how the educational system only prepared women to be cooks and cleaners in heterosexual households. Their training in the federally supported vocational schools did not prepare women for the kinds of lives that many were in fact living, in which they worked outside of the home. Hilliard claimed that 53.9 percent of women over the age of 18 by 1975 were in the labor force and a woman headed 1 out of every 8 families.\(^{147}\) Thus the material feminist wanted to alter the training women received in schools to prepare women for the lives that they would actually be leading.

While Hilliard’s piece was focused mostly upon the theoretical issues, specific changes to the system were possible to imagine. Apart from the education that children received from their parents and guardians about domestic work, the school system had a large ability to influence them. Women were receiving inadequate training to prepare them for their lives. Men, too, were not receiving the kind of training that they needed to do household labor. The material feminists sought

---

\(^{147}\) Verheyden- Hilliard, Ellen. "Cinderella Doesn't Live Here Anymore."
to make changes to the educational system to train all people, regardless of gender, for the important life skills that would allow the household to function without expecting women to bear the burden of all of the cooking and cleaning. These changes would include having courses in which students regardless of their gender would learn tasks such as cooking, cleaning, child rearing, etc. In addition, vocational activities such as plumbing and carpentry skills would be taught to everyone as well. Furthermore, students, regardless of gender, would have the option to take classes that would prepare them for a variety of different professions and the opportunity to continue their studies in higher education. These changes however depended on governmental support.

**Government**

Although propositions for potential governmental change were not limited to economic policy, the majority of their proposals focused on economics. Since many material feminists conceived the burdens of domestic food production with other household work to be a labor issue, restructuring economic policy seemed like a reasonable tactic.

The material feminists who advocated for changes on the institutional level in order to change the domestic and economic conditions of women were divided. They varied on the degree from which they wanted to depart from the framework of the capitalist system. Some were more Marxist or socialist in their thinking and this group proposed more radical changes. Although some of them specifically self-
identified in these terms in their writing, oftentimes they relied upon certain frameworks without explicitly mentioning them.

The material feminists that advocated for less radical changes would still challenge the contemporary system of capitalism that allowed for the burden of unremunerated domestic food production to be possible. These material feminists however, did not need to fully dismantle the capitalist system for their ideas to be implemented. For example, those that believed that changes needed only be made to the education systems did not seek the end to capitalism. Nevertheless, even this change would have disrupted the structure of family and work life ever-present for many, but not all, Americans since the 1830s. Such a disruption was not a call for the end of capitalism exactly, but it would have the potential to unsettle the capital accruement of the capitalists because it would limit the surplus value that could be extracted from individual workers. If families did not rely upon the unremunerated reproductive work of a single person within the household, but if instead this work was shared throughout, there would be potential economic effects.

Even writers like Claude Servan-Schreiber who wrote about Sweden’s economic policy were not necessarily arguing that America should no longer be capitalist. Rather she looked to Sweden as a model for allowing both men and women “the same practical opportunities of participating in both active parenthood and gainful employment.”148 She then detailed how Sweden in 1973 was making it easier for equitable partnerships and the splitting of benefits and care work. However, she was not interested in making the United States become Sweden, but rather allowing

women access to the capitalist market in a way that did not oppress them and that actually valued women’s labor in the household. Her solution was thus not socialist, but relied upon principles of social democracy in order to provide a solution to the issues of unremunerated domestic food production.

Other material feminists produced an important body of work that centered on this goal of making women’s role in the marketplace matter. This was the work of the advocates for the wages for housework campaigns. This solution would seek to give value to household work and increase the accessibility of women to be participants in the market outside of the role of the consumer and unremunerated reproductive laborer.

**Wages for Household Work**

The wages for housework movement pointed out the contradictions of capitalism and re-appropriated them in the favor of the exploited. This movement made a revolutionary challenge by demanding economic sovereignty for women engaged in reproductive labor. The Italian-American feminist, Silvia Federici, a major proponent of the movement, wrote in her “Wages Against Housework,” that “to view wages for housework as a thing rather than a perspective is to detach the end result of our struggle from the struggle itself and to miss its significance in demystifying and subverting the role to which women have been confined in
capitalist society.” She sought to bring attention to how capitalism had rendered women’s work invisible and had disguised it in terms of a labor of love.

Unable to fully upturn the capitalist system, paying for household work seemed like a logical solution. Giving money for labor in a capitalist society would in fact give cooking the respect that many of the material feminists sought. Furthermore, it would make housework become a viable economic option so that those who did work outside of the home would be compensated for their additional work within the home, while those who worked inside the home would have economic power in their households.

The idea of wages for housework had the potential to alleviate many of the grievances voiced by the material feminists, such as the lack of respect and economic value that was given to domestic food production and other household work. Ann Crittendon Scott, who had suggested that occupation: houseworker was a viable option, believed that as long as a “houseworker could at least be recognized as a professional member of the American labor force, paid for her or his labor, time, and skills,” the job would gain its needed respect and be a viable option for those who partook in domestic food production.

This solution would counter social practices that undermined the labor that had typically been performed by women in the household. It challenged the idea of what real work was. One of the slogans of the time that embodied this ideology was that “every mother is a working mother.” Even though this call was made in a

---

151 "Every Mother Is a Working Mother." Safire Magazine Fall 1977. Print.
capitalist system, it expanded the notions of capitalism by challenging assumptions about labor.

The article “The Hand that Rocks the Cradle Should Be Paid,” by Roberta made this point explicitly clear. Her essay relied on the basic premise of two points: “First, alternatives to domesticity in contemporary society are for women few and unattractive. Second, patterns of socialization conspire to prevent serious consideration of the full range of human possibilities which do exist.”

Roberta believed that current social structures forced women to work in the home. For those who worked outside of the home, they were still burdened with the expectation to cook and clean. Roberta believed that challenging the expectation would have been a fruitless tactic since there were strong social structures in place that would make such change difficult. Instead she conceived of a remedy that would be to give prestige and value to cooking in a manner that was legible in a capitalist economy. She suggested that women receive pay for the work that they did. She responded to the question of how salary would change the situation by positing, “Pride is a function of prestige. Prestige and income may not be synonymous or even necessarily directly related; but there is a tendency for prestige to rise when income rises, assuming that the income has been acquired in an acceptable manner.”

However, Roberta actually believed that giving salaries for household work would have the ability to attract men to the job as well. Such a shift would break “the

---


exclusive association of women with domestic labor and child care.”¹⁵⁴ As she claimed, “Sheer altruism won’t motivate many men. Who wants to work for low pay or no pay and little prestige? A salary changes the situation and acts as a definite drawing card.”¹⁵⁵ If the work were remunerated, women like Mainardi and O’Reilly might have found their husbands more willing to split the household labor. Asking someone to give up their privilege without compensation is far more difficult than if you can offer them a type of incentive beyond altruism.

Furthermore, Roberta thought that this change would also make people—especially men who after being exposed to this type of labor then chose not to participate in household work - more likely to respect cooking and other domestic work. She claimed that “men exposed to the rigors of domesticity on an ongoing basis will emerge as a little more appreciative of what it really does take and a little more sympathetic to the plight of the “pampered” housewife. Bingo, prestige rises.”¹⁵⁶ Even if men did not necessarily participate regularly, they would hopefully have gained a better understanding of the kind of work that their wives, mothers, and partners did and thus be more likely to respect it. A salary for household labor did have a lot of potential in solving many of the concerns and grievances raised by material feminists about unremunerated domestic food production.

Nonetheless, Roberta was a realist. She readily admitted,

> A salary is not a panacea. A salary for domestic service is not without problems. A salary for domestic service is not the whole answer, but it is a way of dealing with contemporary reality. A salary isn’t an ideal solution, but we don’t live in an ideal world. A salary is merely a viable alternative in a world in transition.¹⁵⁷

---

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 2.
¹⁵⁵ Ibid.
¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 2.
¹⁵⁷ Ibid. 3.
She knew that a salary could not undo all of the issues of women’s oppression. She believed that women were bound by more than economic constraints. However, in a capitalist society, having money would give women more leverage within the home and more social mobility in general.

Despite the attractiveness of the wages for housework ideology, there were downsides. Roberta claimed, “They tell us woman’s place is in the home. They tell us the work we do in their home is vitally and equally important. The time has come for them to put their money where their mouths are.” However, who was the “they?” Who in fact would be paying for these wages? Would the remuneration come from the government or be a percentage of the family income? Although material feminists did craft propositions, ultimately this solution remained mostly ideological.

Beyond hiring other workers, such as maids, to come into the household and perform the labor for monetary compensation, current models did not exist for what wages for housework would necessarily look like. These “servant models” too were problematic in regards to class and race. To hire domestic workers would push the issues of domestic labor unto another group of oppressed people, mostly likely poor women of color. True liberation for women could not be found in a solution that would only benefit those who were white, heterosexual, middle and upper class, and able bodied. While wages for housework was mostly an ideological movement, it sought to allow for the appreciation of care work within a flawed capitalist society.

158 Ibid.
159 Ruth Schwartz Cowan in More Work for Mother showed that in the 19th century there were models for communal housework and paid cooperative work. The paid laundry cooperatives, where some women in the community would be paid to do the laundry of their entire community, including their own families, was not exactly a “wages for housework” model, but it did proffer an alternative to unremunerated domestic labor in an earlier time period. However, these experiments failed and information about them was not highly popularized. Cowan, Ruth Schwartz. More Work for Mother.
Such proposed plans relied heavily upon government and public support that would be difficult to garner. Therefore, some material feminists took matters into their own hands. They wanted a way to gain retribution for the work that they were doing, so they brought household work into the market. Some material feminists even opened feminist restaurants.

**Feminist Restaurants**

Feminist restaurants were a way for women that enjoyed cooking to use their skills to their advantage in a capitalist system, while simultaneously subverting it. The proprietors of these restaurants did not see themselves as occupying a servile position. Rather, these ventures were empowering for the women involved. They allowed women remuneration for their labor that did not exist within the household. However, while these restaurants were businesses in a capitalist economy, many of the owners were acutely aware of how they inhabited a space within a system that had oppressed many women. Some of the restaurants had made moves to challenge systems of hierarchy even when participating in capitalist enterprise.

The structure of these businesses sought to challenge the oppressive, systematic forces that had disempowered women. They accomplished this in the following ways: they changed the way that the restaurant was run and managed and they changed the setting of the restaurant to provide different economic opportunities for different women and to change workplace dynamics. These restaurants did this by integrating women workers within various aspects of the process. Although they were operating in a capitalist economy, their economic goals were different. They also
made their spaces accessible to a different kind of clientele that traditional restaurants often did not. In doing this work, they were able to alter understandings of work and of family. The combination of these steps had the possibility to alleviate some of the grievances associated with cooking at least for some women.

Although each feminist restaurant was unique, they shared certain aspects in common. A 1975 *People Magazine* article had answered the question “Is the kitchen any place for a feminist these days?” The writer proclaimed, “The answer is yes, provided the kitchen is in a restaurant owned and managed by other feminists.” Restaurants such as Bread and Roses of Boston, Mother Courage of New York, Susan B’s of Chicago, and Bloodroot Feminist Vegetarian Restaurant of Bridgeport, Connecticut, were similar in regards to some of their business practices. Unlike most restaurants of the time whether they were fast food or high end, these businesses were women run and were often managed by a collective or by multiple members. Usually there was a core group of managing members who received support from other women who were not able to commit full time to the business but still wanted to be highly involved. Patricia Hynes and Gillian Gane mostly managed Bread and Roses in the beginning, but the group expanded to include Pat O’Brien, Anne Feely, Barbara Fried, and Linda Franklin. Dolores Alexander and Jill Ward founded Mother Courage. The Bloodroot Collective ran Bloodroot and two of the members; Selma

161 Jerome, Jim. "Feminists Hail a Restaurant Where the Piece De Resistance Is An Attitude, Not a Dish.
Miriam and Noel Furie continue to operate the restaurant/bookstore currently. The involvement of women in the business was far greater than the management.

Whereas many restaurants in the American capitalist marketplace were run according to hierarchy, feminist restaurants sought to disrupt such divisions. Both Bread and Roses and Bloodroot had no “waitresses.” The work was shared by the members of the managing collective rather than divided according to position, so that “each woman working at the restaurant share[d] the responsibility of setting the tables, planning the meals and doing the cooking, washing the dishes, as well as general cleanup and maintenance.”162 These restaurants even disrupted the divide between customer and server. Clients were to clear their own plates and to pick up their own food from the counter. Each patron could “help herself to freshly baked bread at the counter.”163 Even though the restaurant was still part of the so-called service industry and even though the labor of those running the restaurant was remunerated, the divisions between patrons and servers did not exist.

In addition to providing economic opportunities for the women who managed the restaurants, these spaces worked to expand the business opportunities for other women as well. Bread and Roses for example hired only women architects, women lawyers, and women carpenters when they began their business.164 They believed that it was important to “invest in Women.”165 Many of these restaurateurs used the power

---

163 Ibid.
they held in being business owners to support other women-friendly and women-led businesses. Bread and Roses was part of a nexus of nearby feminist institutions, including the Feminist Health Center, New Words Bookstore, and the Women’s Credit Union. The restaurant worked in conjunction with these institutions to sponsor women-focused events. Bloodroot, which also functions as a bookstore, has consistently supported women business ventures. For example they sell the chocolate of feminist vegan chocolate maker, Lagusta, in their store. This principle of supporting other feminist businesses and feminine focused small businesses has continued from the 1970s.

The women involved with these ventures also encouraged other women to create their own businesses. Jill Ward of Mother Courage gave an interview for the Ms. Magazine Handbook of “How to Start Your Own Business: A Restaurant.” In the interview she encouraged women to follow their dreams and gave tips for running a restaurant. However, she was also realistic about the difficulties of such work. Feminist restaurants not only gave women opportunities in them, but also provided inspiration and a structure for other women to be involved in the paid marketplace. Selma Miriam remarked in a recent interview that the women at Mother Courage were very helpful to them in the beginning. They accommodatingly shared

---


information about how to run a feminist restaurant. Furthermore, the spaces that they provided allowed for other economic opportunities for women.

These spaces harbored a feminist-focused intellectual environment. At Mother Courage, authors such as Susan Brownmiller (Men, Women, and Rape) Lucy Komisar, Kate Millett (Flying), Alix Kates Shulman, Phyllis Chester (Women and Madness), and Gloria Steinem socialized and networked. The Bloodroot Collective published a series of cookbooks and calendars and continues to do so even in 2011. Selma Miriam also teaches weaving classes and sells her creations in the store, while Noel Furie sells her photos. Patricia Hynes of Bread and Roses taught a course for a fee at the restaurant called “Food, Feminism, and Feeding the World.” These restaurants provided women with the means to make connections and have opportunities to make money for their work that they were passionate about.

The restaurants also provided important spaces for women. Some of the restaurants, like Bread and Roses, were more exclusive to women, especially initially. Some like Bloodroot allowed men as clientele, while others like Mother Courage seemed to encourage it. However, these restaurants provided important “woman spaces.” Material feminists of the time often talked about how women needed a “space and place: of their own.” During the discussion on this topic at

169 Jerome, Jim. “Feminists Hail a Restaurant Where the Piece De Resistance Is An Attitude, Not a Dish.
170 Goldberg, Gale. "Feminism and Food: An Alternative to Restaurating." 12.
171 Ibid. “Men aren’t encouraged to patronize Bread and Roses. Primarily it’s a place for women, and, to the women working there."
172 "’Men feel comfortable here too,’ adds manager Joyce Vinson.” Jerome, Jim. "Feminists Hail a Restaurant Where the Piece De Resistance Is An Attitude, Not a Dish.
Dolores Hayden’s course, Sexual Politics and Design during the spring of 1976, women had openly expressed their anger in how difficult it was to walk into a restaurant not escorted by a male and avoid undue harassment by men.\textsuperscript{174} Marilyn Schugar, in her article “Eating Out… Alone and Liking It,” had also commented on this problem. She recommended Bread and Roses as a space where women could actually feel comfortable to just enjoy a meal by themselves. Here too, women could also make new friends. Bread and Roses served as a venue for weekly speakers, performers, and art exhibits. In addition, it provided a meeting space for many women's groups, and offered a forum for discussion of political issues that sometimes divided feminists during that period. It also sponsored women's softball teams, contributed meals to a local women's shelter, and regularly contributed small grants to other groups. Bloodroot also hosted events. In their first cookbook, the Political Palate, they discussed the G. Knapp Historical Society, which met weekly at the restaurant in order to commemorate Elizabeth Knapp and all of the other nine million women who had been killed between the 14\textsuperscript{th} and 17\textsuperscript{th} centuries because they had been accused of witchcraft.\textsuperscript{175} These restaurants were important social spaces for women. As Selma Miriam stated, “We hoped for community.”\textsuperscript{176} They were also important places for political and economic activism.

Feminist restaurant managers sometimes found themselves in a strange place since some were opposed to capitalism but they were running a business embedded in that system. The managers of Bread and Roses dealt with this tension in some of

\textsuperscript{174} Goldberg, Gale. "Feminism and Food: An Alternative to Restauranting." 10.
\textsuperscript{176} Miriam, Selma, and Noel Furie. "Why Bloodroot Is Vegetarian." Letter to Sinister Wisdom (copy given to Alex Ketchum). Dec. 2011. MS. Personal Folder of Alex Ketchum, Middletown, CT.
their first official documents. In their prospectus Patsy Hynes and Gill Gane discussed how they were going to commit the next few years of their lives to this venture and that they were hoping “to earn [their] living from it.” However, they wrote of how

As feminists, we are naturally opposed to capitalism. Though we cannot work outside the realities of American economic life, we hope as far as possible to operate as an alternative to business institutions as we have known them. Our main goal is not commercial; structurally we see the enterprise as a co-operative venture and one responsive to the needs of our community.

They were acutely aware of this unavoidable contradiction. However, they navigated this issue by utilizing a new model of business. They knew that business in American society was defined in terms of capital and profit. They wanted instead to be part of the women’s movement and not take advantage of it. As such, after the initial earnings went to cover the operating costs of the restaurant and giving 10 percent back to the shareholders, they put the rest of the profits in a trust for feminist causes. Furthermore, rather than having a tip jar, they had a donation can for different feminist organizations. They had wanted to redefine the labor of work. This task of redefining what a restaurant and thus a business could be even when limited to the structure of a capitalist economy had revolutionary potential. The work they did to change the economic structure also influenced how these businesses had the potential to alter family structures.

Cooking within the home did not provide remuneration, yet it was seen to provide a family environment. The feminist restaurants, however, did provide money

---

for the labor that was being done and also apparently provided a family environment. Multiple articles talked about how there was “a family feeling about the place”\textsuperscript{181} and how “everyone feels at home here.”\textsuperscript{182} These restaurants thus altered an understanding not only about work but also about family, a process that was believed by many feminists to be necessary for alleviating their grievances.

Furthermore these businesses actually challenged what it meant to be a business. When asked recently about Bloodroot’s relationship to capitalism, Selma Miriam responded, “This is not capitalism…Capitalism is exploitation.”\textsuperscript{183} Selma Miriam instead sees Bloodroot as an alternative institution. Yes, money is exchanged for the food they provide, but the point of the institution is not to extract a large profit from the laborers. Instead Bloodroot is a space where Selma Miriam and Noel Furie are able to do the labor that they enjoy and receive respect for their work.


\textsuperscript{183} Selma Miriam elaborated, “The notion of capitalism is very oversimplified in terms of lefty circles and always was. My father had a fabric store. He was a business owner. He was also a socialist. There was no [conflict]. Yea, that’s no conflict. All you have to do is think about the 99% right now. It’s the people, and I’m not blaming them, but whenever you hear talk about capitalism and they are talking about workers, they are talking about the people who are in the thousands working for GE or Google. They aren’t talking about a Mom and Pop store where the people are selling burritos. So you want to call that capitalism? I don’t think so. That’s ridiculous… In the 70s this was not capitalism. Of course people had businesses. You had to have some way to make a living. So either you worked for the man in a very stultifying, miserable way or you’re some kind of secretary or you work for the school system or you work for the government. But all of those things are great big miserable sorts of jobs. You might get off on working with kids but in terms of the people that we have things in common with are like I said, the guy who sells the burritos or the Vietnamese restaurant or you know what I mean. People who are selling food to their friends and they are people from their countries and make them feel at home and nourished. That’s not capitalism. Never mind we’re not making money and we’re really in trouble with this economy. This is not capitalism. Capitalism is exploitation.” Miriam, Selma, and Noel Furie. "Interview with Selma Miriam and Noel Furie of Bloodroot."
For institutions like Bloodroot, apart from supporting their feminist work, they were also able to support their environmental values as well. Bloodroot is a feminist vegetarian restaurant. Selma Miriam says that in 1977 she and several friends started Bloodroot because her “change from housewife and mother to lesbian feminist meant that [she] needed to lead a life outside patriarchal morality away from husband and societal expectations. She wanted a community with shared values (not all, but most), and [she] wanted to think and put into practice what was feminism for [her.]”\textsuperscript{184} Part of this work also meant taking into account how running a socially just business was about more than economic practices. Selma says that through this business she was “trying to lead a life that was better. Better for people and creatures and the earth itself as well as for [herself.]”\textsuperscript{185} They always cooked seasonal foods because these ingredients were the most fresh and tasty. The seasonal menu allowed for them to please their customers’ palates and also buy local products that supported the local economy and were more environmentally sustainable to procure. In addition, their menu throughout the years has become more and more vegan.

Feminist restaurants were spaces that altered changes of production in a more institutionalized way. They altered the institution of oppressive business practices to create a space for women to be empowered in their labor. They also allowed feminists to do labor that reflected their values. These women were able to support themselves in a woman-centered space that perpetuated their feminist values.

\textsuperscript{184} Miriam, Selma, and Noel Furie. "Why Bloodroot Is Vegetarian." Letter to Sinister Wisdom. \\
\textsuperscript{185} Ibid.
Looking Ahead

Many material feminists had advocated for alleviating their grievances by changing the modes of production, whether that be on an individual or institutional level. However, some of them advocated changing the modes of consumption in order to gain liberation.
Chapter 4

Consuming Solutions

As you know from your own experience...the daughters...have always done their thinking from hand to mouth; not under green lamps at study tables in the cloisters of secluded colleges, They have thought while they stirred the pot, while they rocked the cradle...Let us never cease from thinking- what is this 'civilization' in which we find ourselves? What are these ceremonies and why should we take part in them? What are these professions and why should we make money out of them? Where in short is it leading us, the profession of the sons of educated men?186

- Virginia Woolf

The material feminists struggled to develop plans for their own liberation while having to negotiate economic and social systems with which they had a complicated relationship. In a similar fashion to “daughters” above described by Virginia Woolf, the material feminists interrogated their own civilization and ceremonies, while simultaneously trying to alter their current roles within them. Changing the modes of production was not the only strategy proposed by feminists that tried to ameliorate the burdens that cooking and the other steps of domestic food production imposed upon women. Some material feminists believed that the only way to improve their conditions was to change the manner in which food was consumed. Proposed tactics included: not cooking, buying pre-cooked food, growing their own food, or forming communes. These many solutions originated from radically different theoretical frameworks. Most notably, these propositions were quite dependent on the writers’ engagement with and consideration towards ecology and their contemporary environmental movement. Some of these material feminists were in fact completely

opposed to one another’s strategies, but all were working towards the goal of liberating women from the social expectations of domestic food production. In the following chapter, I will explore and critique each of these proposed changes to the modes of consumption made by the material feminists.

**Don’t Cook… Buy**

For some of the material feminists who did not want to cook, the solution seemed quite simple—just stop cooking. As noted in Chapter 3, Supermom Madelon Bedell had proposed a relaxation of standards. In a related ideology, some women thought that they did not need nor want to concern themselves with cooking for their families anymore. However, if their masculine partners in the heterosexual family relationships did not take up the task, how would the family eat? In reality, deciding not to cook, or at least deciding not to be primarily responsible for the family’s eating, was far from simple. One of the most common techniques to substitute their cooking was to buy already made food.

When Bedell tried to dismantle her family’s oppressive structure, she took what she saw as a radical step and gave her child a dollar to buy cake. Her son needed to bring something for a school bake-sale, and rather than taking the time to make sweets from scratch, she gave him cash and told him to run out to the store to buy one instead.\(^{187}\) She declared that no longer feeling obligated to satisfy the needs of her family by cooking, was a “shattering” revelation.\(^ {188}\) For Bedell, the ability to purchase pre-made food was a breakthrough. However, this kind of solution ignored a


\(^{188}\) Ibid.
consciousness about where the pre-made food was coming from. It ignored who was making the food, the agricultural and industrial systems that produced the food, and who was or was not liberated from the suggestion that purchase replace home production.

Although buying food was offered as a solution, it often was utilized after other options had been exhausted. For example, in the December 1972 issue of Ms. Magazine’s “Mary Self Worth” comic strip a group of women were baking cookies for an upcoming dance. Their friend Mark entered the house and invited his date to go to a “great lecture on Marxism over at the community college on Friday night. If we leave the dance at 9, we could make it!” His date replied that she did not have the time to discuss plans at that moment because she was preoccupied with baking. He replied, “Jeez, are you women doing that kitchen number again? If they want Christmas cookies, why don’t they all chip in and buy’em or bake’em in the co-ed cooking class!” Although the comic artist was a woman and thus she was proposing that women buy food rather than use their time to cook it, it is interesting that this message was delivered through the voice of a male character. While he does have the consciousness to not believe that women should be responsible for doing the cooking, he does not offer to do it himself. The idea of him doing the work was not proffered as a solution. Instead, he tells the women to buy the cookies or to give the project to a cooking class. Granted the cooking class was co-ed, but the fact that he did not offer to participate in the cooking project demonstrated how the solution of dividing housekeeping responsibilities likely was not going to work in all families’

190 “Mary Self Worth.” 68.
situations. When the proposition of splitting the work, discussed by material feminists who wanted to change the modes of production in Chapter 3, would fail when their masculine partners were not interested in sacrificing their own privilege, another solution would be necessary. This issue led some material feminists to suggest that if the men were not going to cook, the women would have to just to buy pre-made food. This solution thus was often employed when other options had failed.

**Food and Technology**

Whether or not buying food was the first, second, or third attempt at relieving women of their domestic food production burden, many material feminists, like Bedell, saw the opportunity to buy one’s way out of the problem of cooking as a natural and progressive step when technology had made such options feasible and seemingly economically viable. These women sought empowerment through the power to purchase. American society from the 1920s onward had emphasized the American woman’s role as a consumer.\(^{191}\) Buying pre-made food was an extension of this role.

The ability to buy one’s food pre-cooked was not something that every generation of American women could have done. By the late 1960s and through the mid-1970s an entire system of machines, factories, and other equipment enabled pre-made food to be produced on an industrial scale and be purchased in supermarkets and restaurants around the country. To be clear, some of these technologies had

existed far prior to the late 1960s and Americans had been previously buying pre-made foods. Yet, as will later be discussed, a specific technological, political, and economic climate existed during this time period that put pre-made food products into the marketplace in a new way. Certain material feminists were trying to utilize this option of consumption specifically during the late 1960s through the mid-1970s. Some material feminists who advocated buying food were aware of how such a decision relied upon technology. Nevertheless, rather than questioning these technological systems, technology was praised and positioned as a savior.

In a 1976 publication, a group of material feminists in Washington State reprinted an essay by first wave feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who had died in 1935, because they believed that her words represented their own sentiment. Gilman’s quoted essay, “The Progress of Women in the Last Fifty Years II. Domestically,” demonstrated how the issues relating to domestic food production had plagued feminists for multiple generations. Similarly throughout the generations, feminism had multiple proponents who believed that technology could be their deliverer. She began the essay by discussing how although women are confined to the home, “the domestic progress of women is one of the mechanical improvement at least.”¹⁹² She attributed this to the increase of material comfort within the home: such as stoves, furnaces, better water supply, plumbing, and utensils.¹⁹³ She, like historian Ruth Schwartz Cowan, positioned the history of women’s work, within a history of

technology. However, unlike Cowan, she believed that this technology has done
more than to just relieve women of drudgery, but to actually improve the overall
quality of their work and life. She thus extended the idea of household
technological changes to the ability to buy food.

Gilman had thought that the technological changes that allowed for prepared
foods hinted at better living conditions for women. She believed that “just so far as
the trained specialist takes the place of the housemother or the house servant, just so
far as the professionally prepared food takes the place of the amateurishly prepared
food, so far we may mark domestic progress.” For her, these pre-prepared foods
could replace the role of the servant for those who could afford one and for those
women who were the only ones responsible for producing the family’s food,
purchasing seemed like a more luxurious option. However during her lifetime she
noted that “unfortunately, at present the vices of our economic condition do much to
reduce the superiority of this professional service, just as the virtues of the housewife
do much to add value to her unprofessional service, so that the change noted is
considered by many to be a change for the worse.” Gilman wanted to be able to
buy food, but the technology was not yet developed enough. She truly believed that
purchasing pre-made food could help women be relieved of some of their oppressed
gender roles. She saw nothing wrong with giving the responsibility of preparing food

---

194 See Chapter 1 to learn more about the work of: Cowan, Ruth Schwartz. More Work for Mother: The
Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave. New York: Basic, 1983.
Print.
195 “The improvements are there, non the less; and where the grandmother brought water from the well,
made sap and candles, laboriously filled her pork and pickle barrel, the granddaughter has a neat sink,
water piped in and a pantry largely filled with prepared food. Business methods have begun to reach
her.” Kaplan, Shirlie. Pots and Politics. 81.
196 Ibid. 82.
197 Ibid.
to an outside party such as industry. She in fact likened this process to taking one’s child to the doctor when the child was sick. Buying food would be seeking professionalism rather than a lack of care.\textsuperscript{198}

Food for Gilman was not special in that she believed it could be traded in the marketplace without consequence. Gilman stated that buying cooked food instead of raw should not bother anyone “so long as it is excellent and inexpensive.”\textsuperscript{199} She wondered, “why should a man mind so seriously as to who cooked the food and where”\textsuperscript{200} since she believed that this system would lead to “happier women, happier homes, better service, better food, better health, incomes nearly doubled and expenses reduced by two thirds.”\textsuperscript{201} The women who published this book obviously were in agreement with Gilman about these views. For them, buying pre-made food was a possibility and for many it became a reality.\textsuperscript{202} When the second wave group of feminists published her essay in their own 1976 text, Gilman’s hopes for industrial food production substituting domestic food production were more feasible.

**Problems with Buying**

As is evident from Gilman’s and Bedell’s works, some of the material feminists were actively advocating for buying instead of making, especially when their masculine partners would not share the work. However, these solutions, which

\textsuperscript{198} Ibid. 83.
\textsuperscript{199} Ibid. 84.
\textsuperscript{200} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{201} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{202} Goldberg, Gale. "Feminism and Food: An Alternative to Restauranting." Thesis. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1976. Print. Papers of Patricia Hynes. Box 1. Folder 3. Schlesinger Archive at the Radcliffe Institute of Harvard University. As will be explained further below, when Gilman was writing at the turn of the twentieth century, agricultural and industrial food systems were quite different than how they were by the late 1960s and mid-1970s.
Gilman had described as part of “social progress,” did not consider the many other factors at hand. To begin, this solution was classist, since women needed money with which to buy food. Prepared foods often were more expensive than raw food, due to the embedded production cost. Families with less money may have been unable to spend more of their budget on prepared foods. Someone also had to make these foods.

Ostensibly those who made the food for purchase would have been paid for their labor, unlike women who cooked at home for their families. Many feminists would have seen this as a success in a capitalist system, since if remuneration is what validates labor, cooking for money would garner respect and a certain sense of economic mobility from the wages received for hir work. However, to keep costs of food low, they likely were poorly paid. Still, for some material feminists making sure that cooking was remunerated would actually be a very positive factor. Unfair wages would be another issue with which they could later deal.

For the families that could afford to buy pre-made food, the writers most often still assumed that the women would be the one’s purchasing it. Bedell still oversaw the process of her son procuring a cake. Rather than cooking it, she instructed him to buy it. Also important is that he came to her and not to her husband about matters relating to food. In the “Mary Self Worth” comic, Mark tells the women to buy the cookies instead of baking them. Even with the solution of buying pre-made food, women are often still confined to the role, even in the feminist texts, as overseeing the process of feeding their families. Although this shift to buying pre-made food would be moving cooking to the industrial realm, this proposition still kept women in the

---

203 Kaplan, Shirlie. Pots and Politics. 83.
role of being responsible for domestic food production, since part of that original responsibility included the purchasing of the food to cook.

Buying food also had the potential to wipe out or diminish different ethnic foods in peoples’ diets. Manufacturers would not necessarily create the traditional dishes of every ethnic group. For people unwilling to forgo these certain cuisines, purchasing food as a form of liberation was not an option.

Additionally, this solution of purchasing pre-made food did not take health issues into consideration. With the purchase of pre-made food, consumers were less likely to be able to control what ingredients were in their food. Feminist articles that spoke of the benefits to buying pre-made food did not mention the quality of the food that consumers would be getting. Furthermore, they did not discuss how their plans would impact the health of the planet and rural communities. The industrial food system’s ostensibly cheap food offerings came at a high cost to ecosystems and the general American public.204

Some of the material feminists engaged in activism against this industrialized food system. Although these sentiments were expressed in multiple forms of media and literary sources, one publication in particular emphasized this connection.

204 For more information on the history of the industrialization of American Food, see Michael Pollen’s Omnipres Dilemma and Barbara Kingsolver’s Animal, Vegetable, Miracle. These texts go into much more detail about the process of how the American food system was industrialized from an agricultural standpoint. Building a Housewife’s Paradise: Gender, Politics, and American Food Stores in the Twentieth Century by Tracey Deutsch gives a concise history of how food distribution was industrialized. These texts outline the rise of the Green Revolution, political maneuvers that radically changed the Farm Bill under President Nixon’s Chief of Agriculture Earl Butz, oil, fertilizer, pesticide, and herbicide subsidies, the hidden costs of food, the story behind corn and high fructose corn syrup, food transportation networks, genetically modified organisms, food corporation conglomeration, and more. While these books do an amazing job in describing the rise and failures of the current American food system and the significance of the late 1960s and mid 1970s within that process, this thesis is not that history. What is important is what the material feminists themselves were saying about these issues. In their own words, they tell most of the story. For more general information about American food, see Chapter 5.
between women and the land. Country Women was a magazine run by a women’s agricultural collective in Mendocino, California from 1973 through 1980. The publishers saw “Country Women as a feminist country survival manual and a creative journal. It [was] for women living with women, with men, and alone, for women who live[d] in the country already and for women who want[ed] to move out of the cities.” Contributors from across the United States sent in the articles, which ranged from how-to pieces to polemical editorials. The goal of the magazine was to “become a national exchange for women learning and growing in rural communities” and help women break out of the oppressive structures of industrial society. The articles in this magazine poignantly made the connection between environmental justice and feminism, particularly in matters relating to food.

In 1976, Harriet Bye’s piece for Country Women, “The MacDonalidization of America,” described the horrors of the industrial food system. She spoke of the “major food crisis” that the world was facing. Bye argued that since the 1950s corporate control of food had created widespread problems. She described how, in the last twenty years, the food industry has been taken over by giant U.S. monopolies- agribusiness- which control every stage of the food process, from manufacturing farm machinery, fertilizers and seed, to cultivating, processing, storing, trucking, retailing, and exporting. Often many different levels of food production are combined under one corporate roof. This push for “seedling to supermarket” control, called vertical integration, has eliminated the

---

205 For example, Patricia Hynes, the cofounder of Bread and Roses lead a five week course on Feminism, Food, and Feeding the World. Hynes, Patricia. 5 Week Course on Feminism- Food-Feeding the World. Print. Papers of Patricia Hynes. Box 1. Folder 4. Schlesinger Archive at the Radcliffe Institute of Harvard University.
independent middle man and allowed the company to make a profit each step of the way. 209

This system hurt workers in the food industry, keeping them impoverished by only offering them only small wages as the greedy corporations’ revenue continued to grow. Bye emphasized in this article how this system, which was part of the “Green Revolution,” and had been “touted as America’s answer to hunger,” was greatly detrimental to the ecosystem. 210 She wrote about how this system depended upon the massive use of petrochemical fertilizers, intensive irrigation and large landholdings that demanded a huge amount of capital to begin with. It put forth a technical solution to the food crisis and ignored social factors and the domination of a country’s resources. Such a system was dependent on US machinery, fertilizers, and technology. 211 For Bye, “the super large technology of mass production is inherently violent, ecologically damaging, self defeating in terms of non renewable natural resources and stultifying to the human person.” 212 This system produced environmental devastation, hurt small farmers, and produced bad quality and overly processed foods. Bye was not the only material feminist who addressed this issue.

Alice Malloy, in 1978, wrote a piece for Country Women that positioned food choices as central to the work of feminists. In “Feminist Future,” she emphasized that “each person, each being, each animal and planet and rock” deserves respect. 213 She too saw the corporations “who need nuclear energy, chemical fertilizer, pesticides, and microwave pollution” to continue their work as extremely unjust and morally

---

210 Ibid. 12.
211 Ibid.
212 Ibid.
wrong. She believed that the only hope of changing these wrongdoings would be a “massive forging together of the ecology movement with the women’s movement and the third-world movement.” Although social justice was the link between the two movements, food was the bridge between the ideologies for some feminists.

**Co-Ops and Grow Your Own Food**

Due to these environmental considerations, many feminists did not want to participate at all in the system of the industrialized food supply. Some women who were aware of these ecological issues and were oftentimes involved in the environmental movement argued for joining cooperatives, referred to as co-ops, to buy their food. The 1974 Collectives Newsletter, a feminist publication of the Northeastern United States, reported on an October conference with different collectives and co-ops meeting to stay in touch. In order to “deal with [their] present economic system…[they] talked at length about how food co-ops [had] been combining their buying co-operation to increase savings, quality, and variety. This [led them] to consider areas in which collectives might work together to fulfill mutual needs.” Independent cooperatives allowed feminist ecologists and environmentalists to opt out of the harmful industrial food system. For some material feminists, environmentalism was a very important issue of social justice and the co-ops...

---

215 Ibid. 38.
op option seemed like a more moral and, for some, a feminist way in which to procure their food. However the emphasis of this move towards co-ops in some environmentalist writings about food showed some of the divides between the environmental and the feminist movements. These pieces focused on where the food came from and not at all about who would prepare the food once it was purchased. However, other material feminists proposed different solutions to be more environmentally friendly and to free themselves from oppression.

Some feminists did not believe that joining cooperatives was a radical enough step. The industrial agricultural food chains were so corrupt since they had been driven by a profit motive encouraged by the capitalist economic system. Thus, some feminists advocated that for food to be more feminist, they needed to grow it themselves.

Environmental and economic social justice to these material feminists was a feminist issue. To live by their values, they wanted to opt out of what they viewed was an unjust system and for some that meant growing their own food. In 1976, group called “Women in the Land” produced a flyer in which they declared, “we must grow food to feed ourselves and others because we cannot continue to eat foods which are poisoned, and we should not support the system that is controlling our food.”217 They too described the role of the chemical and agricultural corporations that had an oligopoly over America’s food. This group believed that “the earth is

---

…in enemy hands.” For them, acquiring land and growing food was the most vital step to protect the planet.

Growing and raising food is a very involved process. Whether these feminists were cultivating vegetables and fruits, harvesting grains, or caring for livestock, they were committing a significant amount of time to this process. Whereas many feminists were trying to escape what they saw to be the burdens of housework, raising one’s own food actually increased household labor. There were, of course, benefits to this work. These feminists had the opportunity to grow organic food and be freed from the industrial system of agriculture. For others this work was freeing, as it separated them from some of the bonds of capitalism. For those women who had felt that capitalist mentalities had contributed largely to their systematic oppression, especially in regards to how their work had gone unpaid, they found it empowering to be able to separate themselves from the capital system. For some, their work contributed to their family life in a way that seemed more tangible than producing food before by cooking with products bought from the supermarket. Now the family fully depended on the gardener/farmer for their food. As Jeanne Tetrault argued in the 1973 article, “The Making of a Feminist Farm,” women were able to find empowerment through their labor with raising their own food. She believed that their

\[\text{\textsuperscript{218}}\text{“We Must Feed Ourselves.” Women on Land. This group used the phrase “the earth is your sister and she is in enemy hands.” They, like some of the other feminist environmentalist writers of the period, referred to the earth as a fellow sister that needed to be protected. Such a comment is part of a tradition that links women with nature and men with culture. The earth is viewed as female and protecting the “mother earth” is seen as a feminist task. This technique of linking environmental sustainability to feminism through arguments that women are closer to nature has been critiqued as essentializing by many writers. For some examples or work that discusses the problematic nature of this kind of claim and also uses other methodology to connect environmentalism and feminism, see: Adams, Carol J. The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-vegetarian Critical Theory. New York: Continuum, 1990. Print., Gaard, Greta Claire. Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1993. Print., and Mies, Maria, and Vandana Shiva. Ecofeminism. Halifax, N.S.: Fernwood Publications, 1993. Print.}\]
crops and farms were “growing as [they were] growing, one and the same.”

Raising food did provide the potential opportunity for women to shift their relationship with food. They could live by their environmental values and also develop a new identity through it. However, for some women, this transformation did not fulfill their desires.

Diana Howden wrote into Country Women that despite her efforts to earn respect from her family by personally growing their food, her labor was fruitless. Over the years she had raised goats, birds, and veggies and gave her family the potential to become more self-sufficient. She kept track of all of her money records like a business to show her family the contribution that she was making. Ultimately though, she said she felt like a failure because her family never took her seriously.

The idea of growing one’s own food as a feminist project was ultimately complex. It provided a way for certain women to partially opt out of an economic system that they believed was corrupt. Of these women, some were able to alter their social role by changing their home tasks, whereas others were not. Furthermore it could reflect a feminist environmentalist stance and allow women to live by their values. However, this act was not a radical enough step for some. Bye believed that “dropping out and growing your own food is good, but it’s not good enough. Who do you have to buy your goat chow from?” The seemingly subversive tactics of growing one’s own food could still unfortunately have been supporting the systems that they were trying to dismantle.

---

Although some material feminists saw the goals of sustainability within the ecology as a feminist issue, there were barriers to their ambitions. Even as Malloy advocated for a merge between feminism and ecology, she spoke of some of the downsides. Malloy said, “The ecology movement is blissfully sexist and racist, not committed to ERA, childcare, abortion rights, affirmative sex and race hiring, abused wife shelters, or protection of the handicapped and elderly. We must fight to make them accept these among their major issues.”

She said that although many women activists that took part in the ecology movement also took part in the feminist movement, their masculine counterparts did not recognize their work equally. Malloy believed that “undoubtedly, as with every other movement, the ecology movement would fall apart without woman energy.” Ultimately though, many feminists felt disrespected by the ecology movement for not recognizing their needs.

Although there had been overlap between the two movements, solutions proposed did not always take into consideration peoples’ intersecting identities. Material feminists that were committed to the environment did not want to have to sacrifice their ecological beliefs, nor did they want to remain tethered to the social expectation that they be responsible for cooking. In order to merge these two ideologies, some writers proposed the idea of communes.

**Communes as Alternative Living Communities**

Ideologically, communes meant a communal life. Work was to be shared by all within the community and their labor was to reflect their ideological values.

---

223 Ibid.
Communes came in many forms. Roseabeth Moss Kanter in 1974 studied many commune communities. She stressed that whether these communities were in an urban setting, like the family style commune, Greenbrooke in Boston, or whether they were in isolated agricultural areas, communes provided living alternatives. Although each community divided their work differently, most relied on the ideology that all work should be shared.\textsuperscript{224} In practice of course, each commune developed a different system.

Communes gave feminist environmentalists the potential to live by all of their moral principles. They could live in a more environmentally sustainable community and eat healthy, homemade and home-raised food while being able to avoid the pitfalls of being expected to cook every meal. Catherine Vronwode in 1973 wrote about what women’s life at her commune, the Garden of Joy Blues, was like. She described how

\begin{quote}
women’s role is, we hope, equalized by weekly rotation of all chores. Each time each person gets one household task (such as sweeping floors or dishwashing) and one farm chore (such as milking, care of rabbits, etc.). Cooking is a spontaneous free-will offering, in practice, almost daily rotation. So the obvious sex discrimination is eliminated.\textsuperscript{225}
\end{quote}

The women participating in this type of communal life were making very intentional choices to participate in both the women’s and the ecological movements. However, Vronwode admitted that even though this commune had the best intentions, they still had their struggles and still had “a lot to learn. The men need to learn to treat the women as self-determinant beings whose ideas are of value, especially in carpentry.

The women need to learn to take the initiative in such activities as getting fire wood and building instead of waiting for a man to come boss them or guide them.”226 The people who were living in these communes had grown up in an environment that had socialized them to partake in certain gender roles. Regardless, some residents of communes were making a concerted effort to create the most equal and just society that they could imagine. Despite all efforts though, certain tasks would likely remain divided by gender, such as breastfeeding.227 No commune was perfect, but those with members who were willing to make huge efforts at reforming their ways and challenging their socialization did have potential. Some communes did manage to make a way for themselves that did create a more just society.

Other communes, nonetheless, had problems. Probably the best illustration of this issue is an actual illustration by Jo Nesbitt. The comic, “Alice’s Alternative Adventures with ATman” (alternative man) describe how for many, communal life was not what they had initially imaged. In the comic (see Image Appendix, image 5 and 6), Alice is fed up with her current heteronormative family. She is tired of her thankless household tasks and is easily persuaded to run away to a commune with the superhero Atman. When she gets to the commune she is excited to find health foods such as “100 percent compost grown flour” and “sprout wine.”228 She thinks that here she will finally live in a world of gender equality. However, she is soon dismayed when she finds out that the men on the commune are not participating equally in the household tasks. When she speaks with a mother about how much she must enjoy

227 Ibid.
having her “bloke share the childcare with her,” the woman replies that he is actually unable to help because he is too preoccupied working on his book about “Alternative Parenthood- the Male Role in Childcare.”

The irony of the communal life here is made obvious. Men on some of the communes spoke boldly about gender equality, but were unwilling to forfeit any of their actual privilege. In fact when Alice confronts them about it by calling a house meeting to discuss work sharing and house roles, the men reply with excuses such as “ideally, I’d love to help, sisters, but I can’t do a thing for the next two weeks. I’ve got to finish me handbook on ‘Building your own Barricades’ and prepare six lectures on ‘Exploitation in the Home-a Dialectic Approach’ and “‘course it’ll all be different after the Revolution…no point in getting impatient though” and “this housework thing just isn’t my trip- it’s all a bourgeois fetish, anyway.”

Alice feels truly deceived. She came to the commune searching for gender equality and healthful living. Now she is not only responsible for the three biological children of her own, but for the childcare of the whole commune. She says, “Huh! Call this living? Slaving away day in, day out for five blooming men and fourteen blooming kids…what we need is some alternative Alternatives… O, where do we go from here?”

Alice feels frustrated. Her utopia did not exist and now she does not know what else she can do in order to live without the social burden of being expected to complete domestic food production and other household work according to her gender while still living in a more environmentally sustainable manner.

The Jo Nesbitt comic is very significant. Communes were wonderful alternatives for some people. They allowed for certain individuals to explore different

---

230 Ibid.
231 Ibid.
family and living structures and could provide a different economic system.

Furthermore, when labor divisions were less dependent on gender divides, these spaces allowed for revolutionary work to be accomplished. However, oftentimes, as Rosabeth Moss Kanter admitted that

The charge of sexism in rural communes had some validity. Barefoot and pregnant women in the kitchen with macho men marching in from a day of physical labor in the fields was a popular image. Those who left the cities in search of the Garden of Eden—a spontaneous paradise in which no plan, order, or organization was necessary—often wound up dividing the labor along traditional lines. Childbearing women contributed to the group’s economy by collecting welfare payments. Frowning on marriage and favoring doing-your-own thing often led to problems: when a man’s “thing” was to split, his “old lady” was left behind with an infant or two to care for. Women, trained to be responsible, ended up doing most of the work and bringing in most of the income.  

Communal life did not always turn out the way that its participants had expected. Many times dominate gender roles and stereotypes were replicated within them and the communes reflected the large systematic issues of the larger society.

Women did not always tolerate the inequalities that were perpetuated within the commune. Although her attempts were fruitless, the character Alice in the comic, tried to speak with the men about some of the issues. Kanter similarly told of real women who confronted the men about their hypocrisy. Some of the women, like in a commune in New Mexico, told the men not to return until asked. This was not an isolated situation. Women who were unsatisfied with men not fulfilling their duties to the commune would sometimes leave and form their own communes or make their current communes solely for women and children. As one of her interviewees said,

233 Ibid. 66.
“The women’s movement means a lot to me. I can accept myself. I don’t need a man to lead a satisfying life.” 234 Thus some thought that the best way for them to live in a community that reflected their ideas was by isolating themselves and living independently of men.

Although some communes eventually became women only spaces, some were founded with those principles in mind. The Ozark Commune was a self-declared “dyke separatist” space founded in 1977. 235 They advertised that they had “secured’ 80 acres of land in northwest Arkansas that is the beginning of a woman’s land trust. We are open to sisters who want to live/work collectively to create women’s spaces in the country and to grow women’s food.” The idea of security here is an interesting one. The space was specifically for “women identified women. No men will be on this land.” 236 Security of an ideology might have been imagined if men were excluded.

Women only communes represented an interesting challenge. The women who lived in them often hoped for a community that reflected their values and would be freed from the patriarchal oppression that men might have introduced within their dwellings. However, the women in these communes had been raised in the larger society and had already been extremely shaped by the socialization of their former communities. Excluding men would not free them from this reality. Some of the women however felt that when they worked on household tasks for other women, they were not doing it solely because they were women but because the tasks had to be accomplished in order to maintain the community. The issue was that these

234 Ibid.
communities would make unfair assumptions about all men just because they were men. Granted, as some of the mixed gendered communes’ failures demonstrated, sometimes men were reluctant to forfeit their privilege. However those who were willing to do the necessary work could be wonderful contributing members to a community. Furthermore, excluding men and thinking that they were creating a community where everyone was on equal terms could have allowed the women in these communes to ignore some of their own privileges that they had in terms of race, class, ability, etc. When men had been so strongly positioned as “other” and “oppressor,” the women in these communities may have been less able to see their own role in perpetuating social inequalities. These communities, by being exclusive, actually strengthened a man-woman gender binary which not everyone identified with and perpetuated the isolation of gender non-conforming people. Though the single sex communes could have some benefits, they were not without problems.

Ultimately, this communal life did not work for many. Even Harriet Bye, who had earlier argued fiercely against industrial agriculture and wanted a revamp of all of society, was disillusioned with communes. In her piece, “Memoirs of an Ex-homestead Wife,” she talked about how miserable her experience ended up being. She claimed

we were over-amped with responsibilities that we did not want. For me the bread was baking, the sprouts were sprouting, the yogurt was coagulating and my life often felt like a tv version of Jackie Kennedy touring the White House—“and here is our compost heap,” followed by a two minute speech on how it worked. After 2 and ½ years my mind was growing as soggy as corn meal mush and wheat germ-untosted. We had not made our dream match who we really were or to reflect what we wanted. I became so tied into food production and childcare that I forgot what I wanted even when I tried to remember (maybe I never knew). We both enjoyed looking at the goats but nobody wanted to be responsible for milling every
Eventually her husband left her and her daughter. She remained on the land planting her perennials. She had begun with so much enthusiasm and was ultimately left disappointed.

Bye wanted to continue living on the land, but the communal and heteronormative system did not work for her. Most communes did eventually dissipate. However, they were part of a utopian idea— a thought experiment for social justice. Groups continued to try and make different models work. When the communes failed, activists had to ask themselves the question that Jo Nesbitt posed in her comic “what we need is some alternative Alternatives… O, where do we go from here?”

O, where do we actually go from here

The question of “what to do next” plagued material feminists. In the last two chapters it has been demonstrated that the material feminists had been vigilantly trying to craft solutions to relieve themselves of the socially imposed burden of domestic food production. These feminists also were often trying to create solutions that reflected their values about more than just feminism, or an expanded view of feminism that included environmentalism. Some proposed changes in how food was

---

238 Miller, Timothy. The 60s Communes: Hippies and beyond. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1999. Print. Xvi- xviii. It is difficult to say how many communes there ever actually were to begin with. Timonthy Miller discusses that most commonly the number was stated as 2,000 based off of a New York Times article. However, he has found that estimates that combine both urban and rural communes are well into the 10,000 mark at the height of the movement. Some, like The Farm, in Tenesse, continue today. Nonetheless, many of these communes did eventually dissipate.
produced and others wanted to change how food was consumed. In reality, many of the feminists had to craft individualized solutions that utilized multiple combinations of the proposed techniques. For example, some would decide to stop cooking entirely but buy food only from a neighbor that would grow their own food. Others would have a husband who was willing to share household work if each partner worked outside of the home part time. A series of other solutions were crafted on the individual level. However, that solutions had to be so individualized reflected how deeply ingrained this gender divide regarding labor was in society that there was not a fix that would work for all.

Crafting these solutions also crafted the women’s own feminism. One group maintained that their liberation from the kitchen could be found through buying corporately produced food, while the other side contended that those practices themselves were unfeminist because they rely on patriarchal and anthropocentric systems. Other material feminists were in favor of buying food, but still mostly in raw ingredient format from cooperatives. These material feminists were focused more on their connection to the earth rather than their liberation in this solution.²⁴⁰ There were the groups that wanted all of the women to work outside the home, while others said such a solution belittled the important contribution of reproductive labor and devalued care work. Some also argued that this elevated a corrupt capitalist system. Meanwhile, others argued that such a system was an inescapable reality and it made the most sense to learn how to play the game. Basically none of these solutions would

²⁴⁰ These material feminists, pre-dated the term ecofeminism, although they advocated for what would later be described as ecofeminist ideas. For more information on ecofeminism, see Chapter 5.
fit everyone. The material feminists of the later 1960s though mid-1970s continued to
toil with this issue.

**The Issue gets dropped, not solved**

Although no single solution was ultimately formulated by the material
feminists of this era, the topic was eventually abandoned. Even by the mid-1970s the
topic had already started to loose footing within the feminist literature being
circulated at the time. Although this was certainly a hot topic in 1972, by even 1975 its prevalence was mentioned less and less.

Feminism had moved on. Critics of the movement had challenged that the
plight of the housewife and housework was not the most important issue facing
women. Critics such as, bell hooks, said that such a conversation often alienated
women of color in the movement. Educated upper middle class housewives did not
represent all American women and their tribulations were no longer the center of
discussion. While the phrasing of some of these issues had been done in an
exclusionary fashion and published often for white feminist audiences, the issue of
housework continued to plague many individuals. Granted, the language of the
husband and wife dynamic was isolating for queer or single women. Discussions of
women who did not work outside of the home may have appeared useless for the
many women who did in fact work outside of the home already. These had been very
raced, classed, heteronormative and ablelist discussions, but as I have mentioned
before, housework still had to be done and someone had to do it.
Some families, groups, and individuals had worked out solutions of what to do for them to relieve this burden, but the social expectation still existed that women in general, whether they were white, black, rich, poor, gay straight, in American society were responsible for housework. Whether or not the women conformed to this expectation was a different story.

An important thing to note is that while this period of the women’s movement in the mid 1960s through mid 1970s problematized and raised awareness about this issue of housework, particularly in regards to food, they did not resolve the issue. What they did do was to bestow an important critical framework through which to judge gender expectations in terms of cooking and eating and beyond.
Chapter 5

Finding a Holistic Solution

In the last chapter, Harriet Bye’s 1976 piece, “The MacDonalidization of America,” described the horrors of the industrial food system. She listed problems such as: environmental devastation from agribusiness’s pesticide and herbicide use, issues with food transportation, workers’ rights dilemmas, and the problematic aspects of the corporate control of the American food system. The state of American food certainly sounded dire in 1976. Flash forward to the 2010s: could things really have gotten worse?

This chapter aims to serve a variety of functions. First, I explore the current state of the food system in order to better understand the solutions that are being offered to fix it. Next, I analyze the solutions proffered by some prominent leaders of the current food movement. By using a critical framework derived from the work of the

---

241 The phrase “food system” includes everything from preparing the land to grow food, growing or raising the food, harvesting or slaughtering, transportation, distribution, consumption, and waste.

242 The food movement is a trend of people trying to eradicate many of the social and environmental injustices that come with the current food system. It is a social undertaking of people who are dissatisfied with their food. The movement has various factions and tactics. Groups whose advocacy is included under the food movement are campaigns against genetically modified organisms (GMOs); animal rights and welfare; school lunch reform campaign to serve healthier lunches to the youth of the nation; “food sovereignty” (the principle that nations should be allowed to decide their agricultural policies rather than submit to free trade regimes); human health and efforts to combat obesity and type 2 diabetes, reform of the Farm Bill (the primary agricultural and food policy tool of the federal government that deals with all the affairs under the purview of the United States Department of Agriculture), food safety regulation; university campus food issues; accessibility to food for all people and anti-poverty groups; farmland preservation; promotion of small local businesses and farms; farm worker rights; nutrition and ingredient labeling; feedlot pollution; promotion of urban agriculture; regulation of food marketing; environmentalists concentrating on greenhouse gas production; and anti-corporate control (for example currently six companies (Monsanto, Syngenta, DuPont, Mitsui, Aventis, and Dow) control 98 percent of the world’s seed sales); people worried about the loss of biodiversity, and much more. All of these seemingly vast issues arise from the current food system. The food movement tries to tackle these issues through a variety of means.
material feminists of the late 1960s through mid-1970s, I will be able to critique those solutions. Finally, I will propose an ecofeminist approach for handling the “cooking problem,” by taking into account gender, economic, race, class, labor, and environmental issues.\textsuperscript{243} This chapter, thus, is an attempt to reconcile multiple social and environmental justice issues that arise when dealing with the issue of domestic food production.

\textsuperscript{243} Ecofeminism, in the words of Greta Gaard, is “a theory that has evolved from various fields of feminist inquiry and activism: peace movements, labor movements, women’s health care, and the anti-nuclear, environmental, and animal liberation movements. Drawing on the insights of ecology, feminism, and socialism, ecofeminism’s basic premise is that ideology, which authorizes oppressions such as those, based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology, which sanctions the oppression of nature. Ecofeminism calls for an end to all oppressions, arguing that no attempt to liberate women (or any other oppressed group) will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature. Its theoretical base is a sense of self most commonly expressed by women and various other non-dominant groups- a self that is interconnected with all life.” Furthermore, ecofeminists argue, “Merely redistributing power relationships is no answer. We must change the fact of power-based relationships and hierarchy, and move toward an ethic based on mutual respect. We must move beyond power.” Ecofeminism takes into account the intersectionality of social justice issues and environmental and labor issues. It is through this ecofeminist lens that I would like to craft my holistic solution to the gender and environment problem within domestic food production. Ecofeminism is more useful than solely environmentalism for this solution making because it takes into account the intersectionality of social justice issues and environmental and labor issues. Ecofeminists have been concerned that “a major impediment to social change is an old source of friction found in the green movement itself: patriarchy within its own ranks… This is revealed in the movement’s backgrounding of women, and its distance from the grassroots and people of color.” This is exactly what I am trying to do- to solve the solution of domestic food production and come up with a solution that is environmentally and social justice friendly. The movement stemmed from the work French feminist Francoise d’Eaubonne’s work on ecofeminisme in the 1974, but did not truly take hold until after the time my material feminists of the late 1960s to mid1970s were writing. However, ecofeminism has material feminism roots and has given rise, in part to a new material feminism. The new material feminism is, as Stacy Alaimo argues in Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space (2000), the merging of feminist theories with “nature.” Those that have tried to distance themselves from nature have “implicitly or explicitly reconfirmed as the treacherous quicksand of misogyny. Unlike the material feminists of the past, the new material feminists root their materiality in nature and biology rather than home life. Gaard, Greta Claire. Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1993. Print. 1 and 5. Alaimo, Stacy, and Susan J. Hekman. Material Feminisms. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2008. Print.
State of the Current Food System

The state of American food has changed since the 1970s in complicated ways. Corporate control of the United States’ food ways has strengthened. Farmland continues to be conglomerated. Obesity is now a national epidemic, claiming 1 in 3 adults; Type 2 diabetes is also on the rise. Pesticides and herbicides threaten the health of people and the planet. Wars rage over the control of fossil fuels. The current food system wreaks environmental havoc through, for example, its polluting of the waterways with runoff chemicals and the emission of large amounts of greenhouse gases. Issues with workers rights and food accessibility continue to plague the country. However, on the other hand since the early 2000s, there has been a rise of publicity given to these problems. Now more than ever, food is on the table for discussion.

In order to better understand the ways that the food system of the United States has transformed, I will begin with a history of some of the changes that occurred with American food in the twentieth through twenty-first centuries. I am including these topics, however briefly, in order to paint a picture of the general problems with domestic food production which must be taken into consideration when discussing issues of gender, labor, and the environment.

---

245 Michael Pollan wrote a compelling piece for the New York Review of Books that does a wonderful job of summarizing some of the transformations. His review is useful because it provides a useful summary of five books that really speak to the diversity of the movement and also tell its history: Everything I Want to Do Is Illegal: War Stories from the Local Food Front by Joel Salatin, All You Can Eat: How Hungry Is America? by Joel Berg, Eating Animals by Jonathan Safran Foer, Terra Madre: Forging a New Global Network of Sustainable Food Communities by Carlo Petrini, with a foreword by Alice Waters, and The Taste for Civilization: Food, Politics, and Civil Society by Janet...
Brief History of Political and Economic Shifts

The shift to industrial agriculture did have its advantages. For much of human history, procuring food dominated daily, economic, and political life.\textsuperscript{246} With the current economic slump, more people have become food insecure.\textsuperscript{247} However, as an overall population in the United States, it has only been fairly recently, within the last sixty or so years, that people have had to worry as little about getting their daily sustenance.\textsuperscript{248} The shift took place after the end of the Second World War when American farmers were able to increase the productivity of their land through the use of cheap fossil fuel (which is the key ingredient in both chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and runs farming and transportation equipment) and through changes in agricultural policies. These transformations, occurring due to a series of research, development, and technology transfer initiatives occurring between the 1940s and late 1970s, were referred to as the “Green Revolution.” By increasing agricultural production they were intended to save America from any future fears about food.

Although the industrialization of growing food, and later of packaging and making pre-made foods, was an ongoing process stretching throughout the mid to late twentieth century, one of the most significant factors contributing to the current food system came with the hiring of Agriculture Secretary Earl Butz. When President Nixon asked Butz to drive down the cost of food after its spike in the early 1970s, Butz shifted the focus of the federal farm policy from supporting prices for farmers to


\textsuperscript{247} Food insecurity means that people do not have reliable access to food.

\textsuperscript{248} Pollan, Michael. "The Food Movement, Rising."
boosting yields of a small handful of commodity crops, namely corn and soy.\textsuperscript{249} Butz famously told farmers to “get big or get out.”\textsuperscript{250} Small farmers were unable to compete and corporations seized more and more control over American land, generating a deep depression in the farm belt in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{251} American farms grew to enormous sizes and this farm commodification resulted in large industrial control over the food being grown.\textsuperscript{252} These subsidized commodity crops were seemingly cheap at the market price and so industrial food processors began to make corn, high fructose corn syrup, and soy as the base of many processed foods, sweetened beverages, and feedlot meat. Crops such as broccoli, spinach, tomatoes, and basically any other crop that was not corn or soy were relegated to the federal classification of “specialty crops” and were disadvantaged in the marketplace without federal subsidies. While processed foods became artificially cheaper, prices for fresh produce have continued to increase since the 1980s, forcing many poorer Americans to purchase only processed foods.

Government policy alone did not create the rise of processed foods. While corn and soy subsidies were an added bonus for corporations that created this processed food, it did not matter how cheap products were if no one bought them. Therefore, the success of such a food system would depend on changes within the household and the economic systems.

\textsuperscript{249} Pollan, Michael. “The Food Movement, Rising.”
\textsuperscript{250} \textit{King Corn: You Are What You Eat}. Dir. Aaron Woolf. Perf. Ian Cheney and Curt Ellis. Mosaic Films, 2007. DVD.
\textsuperscript{251} Pollan, Michael. “The Food Movement, Rising.”
\textsuperscript{252} \textit{King Corn: You Are What You Eat}. Dir. Aaron Woolf.
Gender Shifts

As discussed in Chapter 1, before Betty Friedan wrote the Feminine Mystique, already a third of women were in the work force outside of the home. For many families, even those in two person households, it had already not been economically feasible to have one person solely doing unremunerated household labor. However, after the release of the Feminine Mystique and the rise of the women’s liberation movement in the 1960s through mid-1970s, many women entered workplaces outside of the home for personal, in addition to economic, reasons. This created an abundance of cheap labor that drove down wages. As wages lowered, it became necessary for more people throughout the classes to work. Many Americans became dependent on having two incomes, especially as their lifestyles grew to match their means.

A Marxist perspective on capitalism is useful for understanding what effects the transition of the workforce had on American food. The capitalist, as discussed in Chapter 1, benefits from the unpaid reproductive labor, such as being raised, being fed, etc., that maintains the laborer himself. Even when families that had initially depended on one partner working inside the home while the other worked outside changed to a model where both worked outside of the home, reproductive labor still needed to be done. Bedell and others discussed this problem of the double burden of working all day within the household and then returning home to do the reproductive labor.253 The cold reality was, as the material feminists in earlier chapters made clear, that there was still the expectation that women be responsible for providing food for

253 In fact in 1989, Arlie Rochs Hochshild gave a name to this dilemma, which she called the “Second Shift.” She used this phrase to describe the household labor done by women after working a full day outside of the home. Hochschild, Arlie Russell, and Anne Machung. The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home. New York, NY: Viking, 1989. Print.
their families. The prospect of buying food seemed like an efficient way to relieve this burden. This is not to blame the women’s liberation movement for the prevalence of industrialized processed foods within the home. As explained above, there were many inventions, governmental policies, corporate pushes, etc. that led to the rise of processed foods. Nonetheless, these systems were ultimately successful, in part, because they allowed for processed foods to be accessible and appealing for many families that did not want to or were not able to spend much money or time on their food.254

**Critique and Activism**

The industrialized American food system has faced much criticism. In the 1970s, many writers along with Harriet Bye critiqued industrial agriculture and its resulting food ways. Some of these authors include Wendell Berry, Francis Moore Americans do not ostensibly seem to value their food highly. Currently Americans spend less than ten percent of their income on food, a smaller percentage than any other people throughout history. Furthermore, they spend less time preparing it than most other cultures. The average American spent less than 31 minutes a day preparing and cleaning up their food. Food thus no longer seems to be a priority for the average American. The production process has been so highly shortened and so has the cost. These might seem like advantages that would free up more time for other activities, but such conveniences come at a high cost. Rather than spending the time on cooking, people are buying. The solution proposed by some second wave feminists such as Bedell and earlier Gilman in the last chapter of buying one’s own food has for many Americans become a reality. The greater shift of food production to the industrial realm has in fact occurred. Supermarkets brim with food from all around the world. The middle rows of the grocery store and in the freezer sections filled with pre-prepared meals that claim to be the equivalent of a home-cooked meal are crowded with an overwhelming amount of food products. In fact, so great are the varieties that 17,000 new products come to shelves a year and seek to meet every niche market of ethnic foods. Many of these foods just require a pop into the microwave or the opening of a wrapper, all of which disposable at the end of supper. Or for those who prefer never to enter their own kitchen, industrialized food is also available at the drive through fast food restaurant or chain store. However, as books like *Omnivore’s Dilemma*, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, and films like *King Corn* and *Food, Inc.* remind, these highly processed foods are not the equivalent in the end to the home cooked meal. These meals are in fact hurting the health of human bodies and of the planet, neither of which is an exclusionary independent category. Human and planetary health is interlinked. Pollan, Michael. "The Food Movement, Rising.”
Lappé, and Barry Commoner. Although they did bring these issues to the attention of the public, eventually many mainstream Americans, who did not choose to reject this industrial food system and grow their own food and/or live on communes, forgot about them. However, the work of these 1970s writers was picked up again at the turn of the new millennium. Starting in 2001, with the release of Eric Schlosser’s *Fast Food Nation*, a surprise best-seller, and, the following year, Marion Nestle’s *Food Politics*, “food journalism of the last decade has succeeded in clearly drawing connections between the methods of industrial food production, agricultural policy, food-borne illness, childhood obesity, the decline of the family meal as an institution, and, notably, the decline of family income beginning in the 1970s.”

Activists have demonstrated the importance of changing this food system. It is important as an audience and for other activists to not just blindly accept all of their propositions. Rather, it is necessary to analyze their proposals in order to see the direction that the movement is headed in. A good analytical starting point is to examine how these solutions work within the frameworks of critique developed by the material feminists. This material feminist framework is an appropriate lens because it highlights some of the social justice issues within the movement, especially in regards to gender. A holistic solution for fixing the food system would not ameliorate some forms of social injustice while perpetuating others.

---

Solutions Proposed for the Current Food System

The current food movement has many diverse facets ranging from groups that focus on the ecological degradation, to those that focus on human health concerns or on economic issues. While the movement is fragmented in many directions, there are some general trends. As the material feminists discussed in Chapter 4, the proposed solutions are primarily targeted to changing the modes of consumption rather than the modes of production.

This section will most specifically look at the solutions proffered by Michael Pollan, Barbara Kingsolver, and Slow Food U.S.A. due to their notoriety and prominence within the current food movement. Although there are many other voices within the movement, these are the writers and organizations that are most often accessed by larger American audiences, cited in other sources, and promoted in the popular media. These authors and organizations also tend to reference the others in their bibliographies or suggested reading lists, which further promotes the proliferation of these sources’ ideas. In order to draw attention to some of the problems within the movement, this chapter focuses on these more dominant sources.

Neoliberal Individuals

While Barbara Kingsolver and Michael Pollan discuss how larger systematic changes need to be made to the role of production, for example by addressing the federal Farm Bill and issues of corporate power, they generally encourage their readers to reclaim food on a more individual level. Rather than waiting for
government officials to vote for change, Kingsolver and Pollan put the emphasis on the power of the consumer. 256

Barbara Kingsolver and her family experimented with living on a local-only diet for a year. They grew and processed most of their own food and procured other ingredients within a nearby (50 mile) radius from their home. Although they only lived in this manner for a year and they write about how difficult some of these measures can be, the take away message is that it is important to challenge the current industrial food system as an individual or individual family unit. 257 Kingsolver advocates purchasing food from your local community by supporting local farmers’ markets and promotes eating seasonably. Even if one’s neighborhood farmer does not grow your food, hopefully his produce is not being transported from across country. She further emphasizes the value of growing one’s own food, even just a portion of it. 258 Kingsolver wants her readers to challenge the food system through where they put their money, choosing local over corporate conglomerates. She does not emphasize petitioning Congress or participating in other political measures beyond individual consumption choices.

Michael Pollan’s Omnivore’s Dilemma and other works carry with them similar advice. His books also advocate eating more locally, growing some of one’s own food, and foraging. In some of his New York Times op-eds and other pieces he

256 These two writers’s ideas furthermore are promoted by the power of the consumer as Americans access their ideas through buying their books and other materials.
258 Kingsolver, Barbara. Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life.
does address the tactic of challenging larger governmental structures. However, his overall take-away message, especially from his most popular and most widely read works, is that as an individual consumer, it is one’s responsibility to fix the system through what one consumes. This argument rests on the belief that in a capitalist system, the corporations will only do what they find to be financially beneficial. If no one will buy processed foods pumped full of corn and soy products, companies will stop making them and the economy and governmental policies will shift. While these efforts have actually had some effect on the market, for instance resulting in the rise of organic products available at grocers, a huge increase in farmers markets, and an augmented awareness about food politics within the United States, these solutions fall short of affecting substantial change.

One critique of these solutions is that they are situated within a neoliberal framework that puts all of the pressure upon the individual consumer. These kinds of solutions are lacking in the minds of critics because they allow companies to often go without much blame or consequences for their deleterious actions that hurt local

---

259 For example, “Pollan’s 2008 essay, “Farmer in Chief” (2008b), [which was an open letter to Barack Obama and John McCain, explained] how the next president could resolve crises in healthcare, energy, climate change, and national security by reworking what is currently a baffling and schizophrenic US food policy. Pollan offered three broad suggestions in the letter. First, redesign farm subsidies to reward sustainable growth of “specialty crops” (fruits and vegetables that people actually eat) instead of “commodity crops” (like corn bound for the feedlot or ethanol plant). Second, decentralize the American food system by promoting farmers’ markets and relaxing USDA regulations that only benefit large agricultural producers. Third, rebuild a national food culture by teaching children to grow, prepare, and appreciate fresh foods and through symbolic gestures like planting a vegetable garden on the White House lawn. But this essay is not only a letter to the presidential candidates.” Lavin, Chad. "Pollanated Politics." Politics and Culture. 27 Oct. 2010. Web. 21 Feb. 2012. <http://www.politicsandculture.org/2010/10/27/pollanated-politics-or-the-neoliberal%E2%80%99s-dilemma/>.

In the tradition of neoliberalism, the privatization and deregulation of nationalized industries is supposed to enhance the role of the private sector. As a result, large corporations are granted extended self-governance and are able to exploit ecologies and people without as much state regulation. Under this movement’s ideology, individuals are responsible for their fate rather than the government. While neoliberalism does empower some individuals, mostly a small wealthy group, it generally results in the disempowerment and less ideal living conditions for the majority of the population. However, since the ideology of neoliberalism rests on self-determination, the suffering of these individuals is blamed on them alone rather than structural systematic influences. Thus the concern is that under neoliberalism the people least responsible for creating these problems (such as environmental devastation) receive the blame and it becomes their burden to fix. Political agency is relegated to individuals via consumerism since sovereignty is a beleaguered concept increasingly difficult to apply to the actions of states and citizen participants.

There are benefits to buying local, growing one’s own food, and making other changes to one’s consumption habits. However, placing the entire responsibility of changing the food system on individuals is far from holistic. The ability to create more immediate, although smaller-scale, change can be possible by collective individuals’ alterations. Another reason for the perpetuation of these types of

---

263 Lavin, Chad. "Pollanated Politics."
solutions is because they also are most easily legible in the current neoliberal based political rhetoric of the United States.\textsuperscript{264} In order to have a holistic solution, individual consumers cannot be the only ones held accountable. Large-scale systematic changes will also be necessary. This issue of neoliberalism is definitely noteworthy, but this chapter is actually more concerned about another pressing matter: gender issues.

**Gender Issues**

Once Pollan and Kingsolver procure this food that they deem to be “better (usually organic and home grown or grown by the small scale local farmer), they do not devote enough time to the complex issue of who is going to cook the meal. Each writer discusses the ways in which the American food system has arrived at its current state and how little time Americans spend cooking their food. However, neither author devotes enough time to the fact that many of the issues with industrial work and family life still exist that complicate domestic food production.

Their solution, of changing the modes of consumption, relies on the American public returning to the kitchen. Barbara Kingsolver devotes multiple pages to describing her asparagus and other seasonably themed meals. Michael Pollan dedicates an entire chapter of the *Omnivore’s Dilemma* to the preparation of one meal, entitled the “Perfect Meal.”\textsuperscript{265} They both show how these meals take a lot of

\textsuperscript{264} Ibid.
work, but stress that this labor is important. However, they gloss over the many intersecting social justice issues that come into play while cooking.

A marked moment occurs in Kingsolver’s book when she is in a Quebecois farmer’s market and asks about the variety of the rennet used in a particular cheese. The woman asks why she is so curious and she shares that she makes her own at home. The woman declares, “You are a real housewife.” Kingsolver comments “It has taken me many years to take that as a compliment.”\textsuperscript{266} This instance, which receives two sentences of space in the chapter, is actually one of the most significant moments of the book.

As has been discussed throughout this thesis, since the industrial revolution, namely by the 1830s in this country, domestic food production has shifted from a shared task to becoming mostly the burden of women. This burden grew to be so great that many women’s liberationists in the late 1960s through mid-1970s devoted numerous books, articles, and workshops to this topic. Cooking in particular has been an issue for the material feminists.

Would not Pollan’s and Kingsolver’s asking for food to be once again cooked at home sequester women back into the kitchen? Despite all of the problems with industrial food production, pre-made foods do seem to provide women some liberation. How would it be possible to not make domestic food production the burden of women again? Even though Michael Pollan is a man, who cooks, would

\textsuperscript{266} Kingsolver, Barbara, \textit{Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life}. 156.
other men share the burden of cooking when there is a history of almost 200 years and a culture that had raised them with a lessened responsibility to cook? These same questions arise especially when looking at the mission statement of Slow Food U.S.A.

At its core, Slow Food U.S.A., one of the most widely known advocacy groups within the current food movement, advocates a re-centering of food as important within American culture. According to its mission statement, Slow Food U.S.A. “is part of a global, grassroots organization with supporters in over 150 countries who believe that food and farming should be sources of health and well being for everyone. Through international and national advocacy, local projects and bringing people together through the common language of food, Slow Food members and supporters are making it easier to access real food that is good for us, good for those who produce it and good for the planet.”267 It was founded in Italy in 1989 by Carlo Petrini to counter the rise of fast food and fast life. Petrini recognized that thousands of food varieties and food traditions were disappearing and industrial food had begun to overrun local varieties.268 In the U.S.A. alone, there are over 250,000 Slow Food supporters and the organization has 225 chapters. 269 Slow Food U.S.A. specifically focuses on how “food and farming are sources of health and pleasure for


269 “What Is Slow Food : Slow Food USA."
everyone.\textsuperscript{270} The group wants to increase access and affordability for real, non-processed foods that celebrate local cultures and traditions.

Slow Food’s manifesto takes into account the intersections of food and the planet, but what about other factors? It speaks about class issues, but what does it say specifically about gender? Again the question arises, “who will be cooking these foods?”\textsuperscript{271}

In order to provide a fair and balanced representation of the organization, I will be letting Josh Viertel, the current president of Slow Food U.S.A., speak for himself about some matters I discussed with him this year in an interview. As he indicates, Slow Food is not completely oblivious to the intersections of its work with gender and labor issues. When asked about how Slow Food could be more sensitive to the issue of gender, Josh Viertel responded that,

\begin{quote}
We need to talk about it. We need to value work that is about caregiving, and nurturing -- growing food, cooking food, cleaning the dishes, feeding kids, packing lunch. We need to treat that work as important work, honorable work that we all rely on. And we need to see it as work that is not gendered. I'd like to raise a son who would feel proud to spend a large portion of his life doing that work. It is meaningful work, it should not be shameful. It should be recognized, and it should [be] rewarded, and admired.\textsuperscript{272}
\end{quote}

Viertel recognizes how gender is an important issue within the movement. Part of Slow Food’s mission is to bring back the importance of pleasure and the valuing of

\textsuperscript{270} "About Us : Slow Food USA."

\textsuperscript{271} Since this is a similar critique that I would like to mount against Kingsolver and Pollan, I will let the issue be dealt with by specifically talking about these issues within Slow Food, as both Kingsolver and Pollan cite the movement prominently in their books and that Slow Food has their books on its suggested reading list. I would say both groups share a lot of values in common and such a technique is fair.

\textsuperscript{272} "Gender and Slow Food USA Interview with Josh Viertel." Personal interview. 19 and 26 Oct. 2011.
food. Here he recognizes that traits such as caregiving and nurturing that have been often associated with women are important qualities for healthy living for all individuals regardless of gender identity. Furthermore, these nurturing tasks, specifically those that are paired with domestic food production, deserve to be elevated in society. Slow Food U.S.A.’s mission is in part trying to alter how Americans perceive food and food labor. For its members, food is not “good” based on its being only cheap and easy to eat. Rather, food is “good” if it retains local flavors, is not produced in a way that is harmful to the earth, and inspires community building. This kind of work for Viertel is not gendered, since he considers it vital for all human beings to survive in a way that nourishes their bodies and souls and is not in conflict with the ecological living systems. Doing this kind of work deserves respect, claims Viertel. However wonderful sounding these claims are, domestic food production, as this thesis explores, carries with it a history that does not just fall away. Food is a cultural production and conveys the norms of society. Changing these norms is not easy work. Nor is it possible to depart this work from its history.

The historical groundings for much of the gender divide of food preparation have provoked critique from both inside and outside of the movement. When asked about how he believes that the movement’s relation to gender is seen from inside and out, Viertel responded that

It comes up quite a bit. It comes up as a critique from without: “Your movement is just trying to get women back in the kitchen.” (I believe this is a weak critique, as we discussed). It comes up as a source of pride from within: “I am proud to have made the choice to spend a large part of my time raising and feeding my children.” (NOTE: this could be a man or a woman speaking, though more often than not, it is a woman). And it comes up as a more nuanced critique both from within and from
without: "We need to account for the fact that women are expected to keep on doing the work of feeding the family, while also holding down 2 jobs. We need to address this in our work. What is our vision for how this work happens. This last critique, I think is the most interesting one." 273

Viertel does not see his movement as pointedly trying to disempower women and force them to leave the sphere of work outside of the home to return to the kitchen. Slow Food does not seek to disempower women. However, Slow Food would like for both women and men to spend more time in the kitchen, preparing and cherishing their foods. The people in this movement respect the kitchen and do not see it as a negative, but rather as a wonderful space in which culture, pleasure, and nourishment are created. When they go into the kitchen and labor there they see themselves as doing important work. They value these skills and see them as a source of significance for the world. Nevertheless, the ultimate issue is the historical basis of this work. The issue is about who society at large continues to expect to do the work of preparing food for their families.

In the forty years since the material feminists began to write about the issues of unremunerated domestic food production, many conditions have improved for women, but many of the burdens women have faced continue to linger. Although it is now not considered unheard of for a man to cook for his family, families in which a male is the primary cook are still the minority. Granted, the rise of single parent households, non-heteronormative family structures, and alternative work structures have led to changes in how some household tasks are divided. However, these are not

273 "Gender and Slow Food USA Interview with Josh Viertel."
considered to be the norm. Since this thesis has primarily focused on the way that norms affect lives, it is imperative to first look to advertising and popular media to understand the current norms.

**Current Norms and Reactions**

The dominant norm in American society that deals with food still casts women as the ones responsible for domestic food production. Although many families now purchase pre-prepared foods, women are still most often expected to procure food for their families either by purchasing the food or ordering in. Look no further than advertisements to see this expectation in action. Ads regarding food products and housework still continue to be marketed almost exclusively towards women.  

Apart from advertising, these norms and a rebellion from these norms are evident on popular television shows. Just as Donna Reed was a reflection of society’s norms of her time, modern television reflects today’s norms. Mother characters on television shows most often cook the family dinner, or at least microwave it. Even characters that want to be seen as rebelling from stereotypical dominant feminine norms, rebel via food. Sarah Jessica Parker’s character Carrie on *Sex and the City* often establishes that she is not like other women because her “oven is used for shoes storage.”  

---

declaring that she is playing house and acting like a “typical wife.” These norms are further shown through other characters’ rebellion such as how Rory and Lorelai, the fast-talking mother and daughter duo on *Gilmore Girls*, never cook and emphasize that this makes them different from other women. In one episode, when Rory’s boyfriend Dean says that he “like[s] the idea of a wife cooking dinner for her husband,” Rory is so upset their relationship is jeopardized. Women’s characters are still largely defined by their relationship with the kitchen.

Although these are but a few examples of media perceptions of women’s role as cooks and food preparers (which also tend to be portrayals of white, able bodied, middle or upper middle class women), the expectations are clear. After a loaded history, stemming from the 1830s in which women have been expected to be primarily in charge of housework whether or not they had another job, it is important to see that the norm persists today.

This history is why critiques of gender in the general food movement and with more specifically Slow Food U.S.A. are so important. It is great that Viertel has recognized that Slow Food needs to “account for the fact that women are expected to

---

276 Heinberg, Allan. “Sex and the City: Sex and the Country: Season 4; Episode 9.” *Sex and the City*. HBO. 22 July 2001. Television. In fact, later in the episode Carrie buys a pie from McDonald’s. She says, while eating her pie, “Why would you go to all the trouble of making one when you can buy one that is so perfect and individually sized?”

277 Palladino, Amy-Sherman, and Daniel Palladino. “Gilmore Girls: That Damn Donna Reed: Season 1; Episode 14.” *Gilmore Girls*. CW. 22 Feb. 2001. Television. Interestingly, the women who cook most regularly on the show are paid for their labor. Sookie is a professional cook that works at the various inns with Lorelai. Her mother always employs maids from all over the world to cook her dinner. Mrs. Kim is the only woman shown cooking with regularity for most of the episodes and she is also a small business owner. The majority of food that is consumed on the show is produced by Luke Danes, the male owner of the local diner.
keep on doing the work of feeding the family, while also holding down two jobs.”

He says that they need to address that type of critique in their work. He realizes that such a move would change the organization from focusing on pleasure, local foods, and the environment. He acknowledges that this would make them an “anti-poverty, pro-justice, pro-community movement, working with food as a medium.” However he recognizes that such a move may never be possible for Slow Food. He says, “This is not to say I believe we will inhabit this world in our lifetimes, but it is to say that there is no better way to live a life than in an effort to build such a world. In this way, I see Slow Food as a gateway drug to deeper engagement in an effort to better the world.” Perhaps the movement will not be able to reach this goal, but it is important that they work towards it. In a particularly astute comment, he noted, “What I was trying to be sensitive to is that a critique of women’s lib movement, from a white man who grew up after it, would be likely to be read way out of context.” It is wonderful that he recognizes that although he does not fully understand all of the complications of the history of women’s connection to food, he still finds gender a necessary point of interrogation for the current food movement.

Knowing that a perfect gender balance within the movement may be difficult to create, nonetheless we must interrogate the way that Slow Food U.S.A. is representing itself. The literature they release online and the way that the public perceives them is an important site of analysis. Currently some of their materials

---

278 “Gender and Slow Food USA Interview with Josh Viertel.”
279 Ibid.
280 Ibid.
281 Ibid.
continue to re-inscribe limited gender narratives about how people can connect with food.

Perception matters. That members within Slow Food have raised concerns about gender issues shows that these problems exist. How specifically then is Slow Food reinforcing gender stereotypes and heteronormative structures? On February 19, 2012, on the main page of Slow Food U.S.A.’s website, they linked to a video from justlabelit.org. In it, a white, blond haired woman, Robyn O’Brien, surrounded by her children, talks about why she thinks it is important to label G.M.O.s on food products. While this is an important message to be shared, when she speaks about the issues, she adds to the message an anecdote about how she feeds her family. The audience is given the message that the responsibility of feeding the children rests on her. Who knows what her reality is? Maybe she is a single mother. Maybe she lives in a non-heteronormative household. Maybe her partner, if she has one, does the cooking and she does the grocery shopping. These storylines are plausible, but none of that information is revealed. Instead, the video depicts a woman talking about providing food to her children. In doing so, it re-inscribes the same narrative of women needing to be the one’s concerned about their families’ food. Furthermore, although the argument could be readily made that she should be the one delivering this message since she is the founder of the AllergyKids Foundation, why are the only voices in the video women’s? Robyn does most of the talking but at the start and end

282 Genetically modified organisms
of the video, there is another woman’s voice claiming, “I have the right to know what is in my food.”

The website is filled with more problematic imagery. On that same date of February 19, 2012, the image of a man on the programs page does not seem to relate to cooking. Instead, he is holding a wooden pole outdoors. He might be mashing up grapes to make wine or about to secure in some fencing. This picture reinforces the dominant narrative of men working outside and not cooking the daily meals. On the events page, the image is of a white woman sitting next to starter greens, looking like she is taking a break from her community garden project. The image of the local chapters page is of a white man leading a group of people on what looks like a farm tour. In the past, images from their campaigns about reforming school lunch primarily showed pictures of women. Maybe more women were involved in the campaigns, but I have heard it casually referred to as the “moms for better lunch” campaign. Fathers were definitely involved as well.

The issue is not that a white woman who is a food advocate is shown talking about food or that a white man is leading a farm tour. The issue is that these are the only images being shown on the website. These images re-inscribe cultural assumptions about what men and women do within the movement and also within their greater communities. Men lead tours and build things outside, whereas women make lunches for their kids and worry about purchasing foods without G.M.O. labels. These images, aside from the picture of the man on the Events page with the wooden pole, are not representative of the diversity of people involved in the movement.


pole whose ethnicity is not readily apparent, are all of white people. The kind of limited imagery that Slow Food promotes through their publicity materials does not align with the vision at least of its president.

Even if Josh Viertel recognizes that there are issues within the economy and within American history that make it difficult for people to cook their food at home, the website’s imagery and other aspects of some of their media campaigns do not reflect this vision. Even if the organization has wonderful intentions, the images in their marketing matters because they have the potential to make the movement more or less accessible for different audiences.

**Economic Ideologies**

Part of these gender issues originates from the group’s, or at least Josh Viertel’s, belief that the economy is not an overriding factor in these issues. When asked about Slow Food’s relationship to capitalism, Viertel shared,

I'd like to share a worldview. It is, admittedly radical: I don't live in an economy. I live in a community. This doesn't mean that I don't ENGAGE in an economy. I don't mean to pretend that there is no capitalism. And it doesn't mean that the economy does not shape us. I just mean that there is a possibility to see the world through a different lens. One that deals with love, power, resources, reciprocity, and value. This does not, in any way, guarantee that everyone will be treated well, or that there will be no prejudice. But it is a lens that is human first, and economic second. Money is just one way of articulating value and power. I’d like us to value and see the power that exists in feeding each other. I think if we try to look at spending time cooking through the capitalist lens, and then engage in a discourse about how to remunerate cooking time, we have abandoned any possibility of inhabiting a better kind of world.

Instead the question becomes: How do we value the work that nurtures and supports us? That IS the work of Slow Food. We have to lift up and celebrate the people who devote themselves to nurturing and feeding others (whether they are working the land, or cooking the dinner, whether they are men or women). We have to raise children who
Such a statement can be emotionally gratifying. However, the issue is that our engagement with the economy is not solely what we experience right now. In order to deal with many of these social and environmental justice issues that Viertel recognizes that Slow Food needs to address, there has to be a greater understanding of the history of labor, why these matters are important, and why these social constructions of ideals and norms are staying so steadfast. We engage in an economy and we also engage in a society that is imbued with strong norms.

The economic system is a large contributor to the gender issues within these solutions. As has been made clear throughout this thesis, the gender division of labor that allocated the responsibility of housework to women found its roots in the industrial revolution and was most cemented by the 1830s. The patterns of work that continue to drive the workplace culture and many of our lives are based on the industrial man’s work schedule, not built around keeping up hearth and home. As discussed in Chapter 1, the whole system was built on the assumption that women would stay home and work unpaid in the house. This history is why one’s understanding and work with the food system cannot be fully divorced from understandings of the economy if one wishes to remain an active member in many of the aspects of dominant society, such as partaking in the general workforce.\footnote{287}{If one}

\footnote{286}{“Gender and Slow Food USA Interview with Josh Viertel.”}

\footnote{287}{The structure of the industrial workday is not conducive to a socially just, environmentally sustainable lifestyle. For people to be able to have the time necessary to flourish within their communities, production time in the work place must be regulated more and people need time to take care of their health, relaxation, and happiness. Americans work more hours than people in any other nation. This national epidemic of workaholism is hurting us in so many ways. However, work can be very satisfying.}
does continue to work on the industrial man’s model, which is so deeply imbedded
within American corporate culture, producing good food for one’s family will be at
odds with the time restraints on the paid laborers within this system. Gender issues
and the economy are deeply imbedded within each other.

If Slow Food U.S.A. truly wants to make an anti-economical, anti-capitalist
claim, they need to be more aggressive about the entire value system of the Gross
Domestic Product (G.D.P.). Groups like Slow Food and activists like Pollan and
Kingsolver often try to talk about how the efforts of their work will not hurt the
almighty G.D.P. of the nation. The issue is that what these groups actually want to
accomplish could potentially affect the G.D.P. The G.D.P., which is supposed to
monitor the health of the nation, does not take into account many of the factors that
make healthy communities.288 For example, a clean environment, crime rates, health
care systems, and distribution of wealth are not taken into consideration. Slow Food
advocates for a reclaiming of food systems by people. Pollan and Kingsolver
courage people to grow more of their own food. These changes would likely affect
the profit of some of the nation’s biggest chemical and seed companies, such as
Monsanto and Dow. We as a nation have put too much faith into the G.D.P.,
listening to economists that our world will collapse if there are changes with it. But in
fact, the G.D.P. only measures the total market value of all the goods and services we
produce in a given period. Market production has little to do with wellbeing and
vitality of the nation’s people. Instead the Genuine Progress Indicator (G.P.I.) is an
alternative measurement made by social and economic scientists that in addition to

---

measuring consumer spending, tracks housework and volunteer efforts and balances it against factors such as environmental health, crime, income inequality, and loss of time.  

**What does this mean?**

Viertel and Slow Food U.S.A. need to pick a side. You can challenge the entire system that elevates the G.D.P. as the be-all/end-all, or you can go along with it. However, if you are to go along with it, then you have to acknowledge the entire economic history that comes with it as well. As this thesis has shown, that economic history is highly gendered.

While Slow Food U.S.A.’s heart seems to be in the right place, it is missing the mark at merging its environmental and pleasure-based ideologies with the gender economic system that people live or “engage” in.

How can gender, labor, and the environment merge together to work for an economy (or work against an economic model)? Are there any solutions?

**Shannon Hayes’ Radical Homemaking Model:**

**An Incomplete Merge of Feminism and Environmentalism**

As evidenced in Chapter 4, issues between feminists and environmentalists have existed since the 1970s. Some of the current work by people within the food movement similarly has a limited understanding of the issues of gender and other intersecting identities. Shannon Hayes, author of Radical Homemakers, tries to bridge

---

the work of feminism and environmentalist food work and household labor. She is not
the first person to suggest many of the principles of homesteading and/or devoting
one’s time to production within the home, but she notably attempts to craft her
solution as a feminist one.

Hayes recognizes the tension between the labor that is necessary for
environmentalist food production and many feminist works. She claims that she
“never intended to write this book.” 290 She speaks of how her “mother’s generation
fought for the right to go to work, to achieve personal fulfillment though personal
accomplishments.” 291 In that tradition, Hayes was a hardworking student who by age
twenty-seven already had her Ph.D. She hoped to work for her local government or
agricultural university near her beloved hometown of West Fulton, New York.
However, she never landed an interview and her husband was soon fired from work.
They realized that they would have to move to the city and were heartbroken. That
was until they did the math and realized that with a mortgage in the city, the two cars
they would need to commute to work, childcare, and other bills, they would end up
with little more money than if they moved onto her family’s farm and lived mostly
off of the system. 292 This choice posed some difficulty for Hayes. She had spent her
entire life training for a career in the industrialized work force. Now she would be
moving in with her family, and she and her husband would be devoting themselves to
homework. How could she reconcile this move, especially in light of the women’s
movement that had made the workplace more, although not entirely, accessible for
women?

290 Ibid. 7.
291 Ibid.
292 Ibid. 9.
Hayes views her work of “bringing back the homemaker” as a feminist choice. Hayes’ “homemaker” is different than what first comes to mind. As we have seen throughout this thesis, the household has changed since the 18th century in America. It transformed from a unit of production to a unit of consumption. Radical homemakers live in the pre-industrial model of households in that they meet their own needs by “growing their own food, providing much of their own health care, living within their means, and relying on community.”293 Unlike conventional households that require money for their consumption of “food, clothing, household technologies, repair and debt services, electricity, entertainment, health-care services, and environmental services,” the radical household is not as dependent on income for its wellbeing.294 In this way, radical homemakers and radical households shift the dialogue about economics, gender, environmentalism, and the food movement.

Hayes grappled with how to reconcile her work with living a more environmentally sustainable life, which was not dependant on an extractive economy, with feminism. She says that by advocating for homemaking, she garners fairly intense reactions. She recognizes that the “homemaker banner has come to represent two primary struggles. In the first, the homemaker is viewed as a subservient loser in the battle of the sexes, where a man has presumably gained power over a woman if she stays home. In the second struggle, woman faces off against woman; the struggle for autonomy, self-fulfillment and economic independence is pitted against society’s

293 Ibid.
294 Ibid.
need for nurturers." Hayes continues to complicate the issue by bringing in the argument that many second wave feminists had made against being a homemaker.

Hayes believes that even though second wave feminists viewed being a homemaker as a dangerous position for a woman, the workplace, how it currently exists, is a more dangerous realm. Betty Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* drew attention to the fact women who had the economic ability to be homemakers and not also work outside of the home were often depressed and unsatisfied with their lives of housekeeping and purchasing household products. Friedan also spoke of how dangerous it was for a woman in a heterosexual relationship to rely fully upon a man for her wellbeing. They spoke of how divorce left women penniless, as would death of a spouse. This was a dangerous dependence.

In regards to the first argument, Hayes argues that the housewives were depressed because the art of homemaking disappeared in America. Hayes calls upon Ruth Schwartz Cowan, whose work has been discussed in Chapter 1, who claims that although the number of labor hours for women did not decrease by bringing tools into the household, the work itself changed. The mechanization and industrialization of the household took away some of the drudgery, but oftentimes simultaneously erased many of the skills and arts associated with them. Granted, it was an improvement that laundry did not involve scrubbing each piece against a washboard and that one could turn on the stove rather than spending a huge part of the day stoking the hearth. However, many crafts such as clothes making, knitting, baking, and cooking actually disappeared at different rates as these articles became available for purchase. The emphasis of money and consumption in the industrialized economy took away many

---

295 Ibid. 23.
of the skill sets of women who were now mindlessly driving around in their cars and buying product after product. Hayes argues that radical homemakers are able to find fulfillment in their work because they are actively employing skill sets rather than credit cards. Although she does specifically use the words, she is speaking about Marxist alienation of labor.\textsuperscript{296}

In respect to the other argument that homemaking makes one vulnerable, Hayes speaks about how reliance on a job is also a vulnerable position. Just as one’s partner can divorce or leave hir, a boss can fire hir. The truth is that dependence on the work place for Hayes is actually worse, because one is likely working in a system that is anti-social justice, anti-family, anti-environmentalist, and anti-community.

Hayes is not trying to get women “back into the home” in order for them to be controlled but for them to be empowered. Actually, although quite a few of her anecdotes deal with women, Hayes sees radical homemaking as a wonderful task, regardless of one’s gender. She sees homeworkers as men and women across the U.S. who focus on home and hearth as a political and ecological act; who center their lives around family and community for personal fulfillment and cultural change. [She explores] what domesticity looks like in an era that has benefited from feminism; where domination and oppression are cast aside, where the choice to stay home is no longer equated with mind-numbing drudgery, economic insecurity, or relentless servitude.\textsuperscript{297}

In fact, Hayes is not advocating women and men to fully leave the workforce if they enjoy their jobs and are part of a work environment that takes into consideration

\textsuperscript{296} Marx’s theory about the alienation of labor states that under the capitalist system workers lose self determination over their lives. They are no longer able to conceive of themselves as the director of their actions, determine the character of their actions, know their relationship to other people, and know the use and or value of what is produced by their actions. Cox, Judy. "An Introduction to Marx's Theory of Alienation." \textit{Socialist Review Contents}. Britain's Socialist Workers Party, Summer 1998. Web. 30 Mar. 2012. <http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/issj79/cox.htm>.

Issue 79 of International Socialism, quarterly journal

\textsuperscript{297} Ibid. Back cover.
“family, community, social justice and health of the planet.”

She realizes that on top of her homemaking duties of farming, childrearing, etc, she is also a writer and traveling lecturer. She instead argues that many Americans currently live in a way that does not promote social justice and that is hurting the planet. She views this lifestyle as an unhealthy set-up, which is harmful to health of humans and the earth. By changing the emphasis of our value system, Hayes sees a lot of potential. Men and women need to commit to this together, or else there is no point.

But is this really the way to merge feminism and the food movement? While some aspects of *Radical Homemakers* are problematic, I respect Hayes’ overall framework. She offers a lot of valuable ways to re-conceptualize homework. The reason for this chapter’s emphasis on Hayes is that she too is trying to merge the work of second wave feminists with an environmental solution. Below I will use my critique of Hayes as the basis from which I will articulate my own solution.

---

298 Ibid.13. Even Hayes admits that few will be fully outside of the industrial work system completely. It is one of the reasons why the market moved towards specialization in the first place. Money will still be necessary as an easier exchange within the economy, but as Josh Viertel and Hayes reminded us, we need to remember that it is just a symbolic piece for exchange and it shouldn’t drive our entire lives.

299 Ibid.

300 Hayes, Shannon. *Radical Homemakers*. 13. Although Hayes never explicitly says that she is approaching these issues though an ecofeminist framework, she is using part of those frameworks. Hayes offers an interesting framework within which to work. Particularly her emphasis on the four pillars of what to work towards in one’s life work are “family, community, social justice and health of the planet” most useful. Using these as the guidelines through which to measure one’s work is a large part of positioning how an ecofeminist solution can solve the cooking problem. The proposed solution needs to emphasize these aspects.
Hayes’ model of radical homemaking has problems. To begin, she over-glorifies certain types of work while excluding other forms that can be useful. 301 The term “homemaker” is too loaded historically for it to be radical. 302 Furthermore, there were other advantages to life that have come from the industrial revolution. She mentions that the average lifespan since the pre-industrial era has risen from 45 to 80, but she brushes this aside. Even though the industrial revolution has caused a lot of harm, not all of the developments were bad. We must try to restructure the system so that we can retain many or most of the benefits that we have received from the industrial revolution, rid the system of the bad, and do a better job of taking care of the planet and of our health. These kinds of changes need to be orchestrated within every sector, especially in the work force and structuring of work outside of the home. Such changes will make life more livable and more sustainable.

301 For example, she stresses how working for wages binds one to hir job and puts hir in a vulnerable position at the whim of hir boss. However, depending on one’s family or community is also a vulnerable position. Humans are vulnerable. Hayes thinks that families and communities offer greater protection, and in some cases, this may be true. But the argument that humans are subjugated by wages ignores the dependence on survival by any means. Working to survive, whether that be within the productive or the consumptive household model, is part of living.

302 Another part of the issue of the gender equality within this book comes from the fact that the term “homemaker” itself has been imbued with so much meaning. Although I sometimes support reclaiming words, in this case, I do not think that such a change is possible. The word carries with it a history of subservience and inequity. As the material feminists in Chapter three demonstrated, words do matter. I understand that the point Hayes is trying to make is that working on one’s home and community is important, and I agree, but a different term would be more useful. Instead people who focus the work on their home and sustainability should be called “domestic-producers” or “hearth developers.” These terms differentiate the current role that Hayes discusses from the 1950s, 1960s housewife whose work focuses mostly on consumption. Although homemakers did in fact produce in their own homes much more before the industrial revolution, since then the term has morphed and also become loaded with the connotation that it refers to a female worker. Although Hayes limits the term to just men and women, I would like the role and the discussion about the role to be accessible to all people whether or not they are gender conforming.
The workplace does not have to be eradicated to make these necessary social changes. Instead the workplace conditions have to be shifted. This is not an easy task because the current system encourages the capitalist to extract the most amount of labor out of workers as possible. The workplace outside of the home is not inherently evil or anti-social justice, anti-family, anti-community, and anti-environment, although Hayes gives that impression.

Hayes’ entire argument rests on the belief that working within the home will be satisfying. She makes the argument that Americans are depressed from their current work schedules and that they lack a feeling of belonging to their community and family. Furthermore, Hayes believes that Americans are suffering because they are not connected to their food and the planet. She believes that domestic production, when seen from start to finish, will satisfy the soul. The issue is that there is more to life than survival.³⁰³

The difficulty with work inside the home, whether or not both or many partners (as my model is not limited to couples) share it, is that even if it helps one survive, it is not always valued. It is wonderful that Hayes feels fulfilled canning tomatoes and educating her children. Yet, even her book begins with the anecdote of

³⁰³ Life is more complex and we have developed differentiation within society because people have various interests. This does not mean that we have the right to violate the earth and consume and consume and consume, but this does not mean that craft work can be the only form of self expression. For example, when Hayes completely disparages fashion as nothing more than a farce created to encourage consumption, she neglects a long history of human artistic expression and the value in that. Whether or not people express themselves through fashion or modeling chemical compounds, playing music, researching history, swimming, or writing, people have different passions and things they would like to explore and a life without that would also not be very satisfying. Hayes neglects this, thinking that only doing one’s work to provide for one’s home will fulfill the needs of a human.
a young woman who chose this lifestyle and was now starting to question if she had made the correct decision. This work might not be respected.

The material feminists from the late 1960s through mid-1970s focused specifically on how much this kind of work can be taken for granted even if one does enjoy doing it. In the words of Noel Furie of Bloodroot Feminist Vegetarian Restaurant, “As a housewife I never really felt appreciated. I would do all this work and they ate it or they did not [eat] it and it wasn’t particularly noticed. And I wasn’t paid for it.” However, she cooks each day at Bloodroot and has for over 30 years and loves it. Selma Miriam and Noel Furie both speak about how important it is that the people they cook for value their efforts and how rewarding working at Bloodroot has been because of that.

When something is done day-in and day-out and is expected of someone, the appreciation that people might need to feel can be lost. Hayes’ model of feeling completely fulfilled through the domestic work is thus lacking. Even she also works outside of the home.

This is not to say that the work inside the home that Hayes advocates is not without merits. In fact, this work is important—extremely important. However, the model needs to be changed. My goal is to help create a model that allows for social justice, more human happiness and personal fulfillment, and community building. Below I have formulated a plan in order to maintain the benefits that American society has gained since the industrial revolution without as many of the negatives.

304 interview
This is crafted in an ecofeminist framework that pays respect to the work of the material feminists of the late 1960s and mid-1970s.

**Working Towards a Holistic Solution**

My goal is to develop a model in which women do not solely feel the burden of cooking. I do not want the solution to be one that is deleterious to the earth and human flourishing. I want to keep the benefits, such as longer life expectancy, easier communication, and greater access to knowledge, that have come since the industrial revolution. Using the frameworks of the new material feminists that have built on the work of the material feminists from the late 1960s through mid-1970s and the ecofeminists of the mid-1980s and 1990s, in this section, I formulate my recommendations to work towards further development of a solution to the grievances of the 1960s and 1970s material feminists about the issues of unremunerated domestic food production and environmental concerns that continue today.

This model should be inclusive to people of all different gender, race, ability, and class backgrounds. Hayes’ model depended too much upon heterosexual couples and strong families. Although she did talk about people whose families are dangerous, she downplayed the fact that for some people, their families may be unaccepting of them or violent. The same happens within communities. Thus when I

---

305 Unlike the material feminists of the past, the new material feminists root their materiality in nature and biology rather than home life. Alaimo, Stacy, and Susan J. Hekman. *Material Feminisms*. 5. For more information see Footnote 243.
below speak of families, I intend for them to be the families that one creates. They can be the families that people are born into or the ones that they make from a community of friends and loved ones. This model is also open to people that are single, in a heterosexual or non-heterosexual relationship, or in a polyamorous relationship. My model is accessible to people who live with friends, family, or alone. The model does work best if people are not too self-isolated but work with others. However, individuals will be able to function in this model.

This model furthermore is not restricted to people living in a rural setting, but can also work in suburban or urban sites when certain alterations are made.

Domestic work needs to be done. People need to eat. The current models of industrial food production from the growth, harvest, transportation, transformation into food products, and waste management are deleterious to the earth. A mélange is possible between domestic and greater than domestic but not yet fully industrial production. Food needs to be grown in an organic way without the use of industrial chemicals such as herbicides, pesticides, and non-organic fertilizers. Growing one’s own food in an organic way eliminates many negative environmental inputs from fossil fuel and other chemical usage. Some people nevertheless will not be able to do this kind of work, such as people with certain physical disabilities and the elderly.

---

306 Organic means: foods that are produced using methods that do not involve modern synthetic inputs such as synthetic pesticides and chemical fertilizers. This definition of organic is thus not restricted to products with the USDA accreditation.

307 McRuer, Robert. *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*. New York: New York UP, 2006. Print. A big underlying part of my model stems from Crip Theory. The fact is, as Robert McRuer, makes clear, we all are in fact crip. The idea of a perfectly able bodied person is solely that, an ideal. In fact all of our bodies are disabled or crip to various degrees. The body will go through transformations of temporary disability such as a broken bone, to permanent damage, to disabilities from birth. Crip theory encourages us to look at disability as not a bad thing but rather a natural part of life. Since our bodies are always changing, this theory is really important to think about when we are making theories of how to create a more socially just world. Crip theory also opens up the door to
To account for this, growing food in a community setting is possible. Since my model does not try to fully eradicate wage labor like Hayes’, the purchase of food from one’s own community continues to be a viable option.

Although I am not for the entire eradication of wage labor, I do believe in the devaluing or de-escalation of the importance of wages. Instead, a return to a mixed economy that existed at the turn of the 19th century would be more ideal.308 Some wage exchange with cash would exist, but so would a barter system.

Hayes speaks about how in the history of home labor, even when the home was a productive unit, labor was divided on a gender basis so that everyone had the opportunity to learn the necessary skills for a household to operate. However, if we consider a queer two-person domestic partnership in which both partners identify and were raised as women, how would their household function if they had only learned the skills necessary for women but not for men? In fact, my answer is two-fold.

Changes on Both an Institutional and an Individual Level

My two-part plan in order to aid the development of solving these issues is to make changes on both the institutional and individual levels. As the material feminists of the late 1960s through mid-1970s demonstrated, there cannot be just one solution but a variety of solutions. The first solution has to do with changing the thinking not only about the different limitations posed upon one’s work and life through the various disabilities, but also about the many abilities that we all have. Of course some tasks, such as breastfeeding, will be limited to only certain members of society. Other people might only be able to do heavy lifting. While these tasks might tend to be done by more males or by more females, people will not be expected to do them because of their sex because even if they are correlated they are not a result of causation. Each of us is talented in many ways. The goal with this solution is to be able to harness these talents and allow for individuals to flourish while still maintaining the health of our bodies, communities, and ecology.

308 As was discussed in Chapter 1.
educational system and the second has to do with individual parenting. I recognize that the problems with domestic food production stem from systematic issues and that they are not caused by individual actors, but large-scale social transformation is difficult. Thus, I have also provided solutions for individuals to enact while simultaneously working also for larger-scale political changes.

**Systematic/ Institutional Changes**

Education is one of the most important factors to solving the burden of cooking. No matter how a person identifies, it is important that children learn all different types of household tasks. Of course, a person may have some proclivity for some over others, but they will be drawn to what they are most interested in and best at rather than being forced to perform something due to their gender. Granted, in life we must all do things we do not necessarily enjoy but are necessary to function, such as brushing one’s teeth or cleaning the bathroom. However, the skills will not be limited for people who have only had the education about certain tasks due to gender. Learning all tasks, regardless to whether or not they have been socially constructed as masculine or feminine, will allow people to live in many different community and family formations. For people who choose to live in a community of four adults, they would be able to decide to divide the work as they saw fit. They could come to an agreement about performing certain tasks that they enjoy more than others and they could compromise on how they would allocate the tasks that they do not enjoy as much. For people who live in queer couples, their household arrangements would not be limited due to lacking knowledge that had been reserved for someone of a different
gender. Furthermore, this solution will be beneficial even for heterosexual couples. Just because someone is a woman does not mean she is a good cook and because someone is a man does not mean that he is good at fixing the plumbing. However, if people learn both skill sets they will not be limited by gender. Furthermore, this knowledge gives people the ability to be independent when necessary.

Hayes makes the important point of how important community is. It can be beneficial and also necessary to rely on other people. Individualism can be isolating. However, if a family member dies or for some reason people are separated, with an expanded education they would have many of the skills necessary to survive due to the knowledge that they have received in their childhood. Of course they will still limited by their bodies’ abilities, but this model still allows for greater independence when necessary.

Knowledge is empowering. Skills of homemaking should be taught to every child regardless of gender and in the school system and not be limited to their parents’ skill sets.\textsuperscript{309} What could be more valuable than learning how to survive?

The education of children to be more self-sufficient away from the system so that they require less money to maintain themselves is necessary. It is going to be difficult to mandate that kind of curriculum for school systems when they currently

\textsuperscript{309} The homemakers, that Hayes studied, all home-schooled their children. This is far from ideal. Again I agree with Hayes that family, whether the ones you are born with or the ones you make, are important. However, I know that I would never want to homeschool my children as much as I would want to spend time with them. Firstly, I believe that I am rather well educated, but I would not want to limit my children to only the knowledge that I have. Granted I could teach them quite a bit about the humanities, but who would teach them physics? The people that Hayes interviewed spoke about how they did not want to send their children to a school that taught them about a consumer value system that was antithetical to their own beliefs. They did not want to have to fight the values of the school on a daily basis. However, I think that it is important that children are exposed to many differing opinions. As parents it is not one’s role to force their children into a certain life style, but to give your children a framework and skill set that you hope they will use to be contributing members of society. I do not pretend to be an expert on parenting, but I believe in the power of knowledge and access to knowledge.
send part out in droves to corporate America and the rest earlier on to prison.

However, since school is mandatory in the U.S.A., it is one of the easiest ways to give this kind of skill set to many people.

These kinds of changes will not be easy and will not happen immediately. Think back to the communes of the 1970s. Work continued to divide along gender lines because people had been socialized to act a certain way. Such a transformation will happen over multiple generations when work, especially work within the domestic sphere becomes less gendered.310

This kind of transformation will require a learning and relearning and constant recommitment to this goal. This change requires a shift in social values and those are never quick to happen. But these transformations can begin to happen on a more individual level, while people are simultaneously working towards large-scale systematic changes, when parents, whose consciousness has been raised, teach and rear their own children with all domestic skills regardless of gender.

Education reform will aid in solving some of the grievances with domestic work. However, for people to be able to accurately deal with domestic work, we first need to interrogate the industrial work system to which so many people are a part.

In the industrial system, people do not have the time to cook the food that their bodies need, whether they be masculine or feminine. In households where both people work outside of the home, dinner is a rushed event, often done with badly processed foods that are part of the unsustainable industrial system.

310 I believe that the most important part of this transformation is educating the youth of the country about all of these skills, like Heyden-Vronwode from “Cinderella doesn’t live here anymore.”
Economic regulations could help ameliorate the problem. One necessary requirement is a mandatory living wage for work. People in the work force in America oftentimes are balancing more than one job to pay the bills. Work should be fairly compensated. Working hours also need to be further regulated. If people had the time to produce much of their own food through growing it and had the time for other domestic tasks, they would not need as much money to survive (that is Hayes’ point). However, work schedules that have more flexible and shorter hours and longer vacation time that allow people rest would help the health of the nation. All of these changes, of course, are going to be difficult to accomplish with a government that is currently largely influenced by corporations that want to only further exceed a profit and capitalize on peoples’ labor.

Hayes is correct about generally moving away from the industrial work system, but working outside of the home and creating smaller businesses is a different model. As Selma Miriam from Bloodroot said in Chapter 4, work and business is not inherently bad. Exploitation is bad.

**Enacting More Immediate Changes by Individual Actions**

What about more immediate results? Women who still feel burdened by the social expectation that they cook might be glad to know that in three generations that problem might be eradicated, but what about now?
Part of this effort has to do with the work of organizations that are committed to food justice. For the groups that are involved in this kind of work, like Slow Food U.S.A., they need to really think about the kinds of messages that they are sending. A large component of that effort has to do with the socialization that they are doing through their marketing. Media imagery has the possibility to open up or limit what people imagine that they can do. Much more than public service announcements, other forms of media have the ability to educate people about the kind of roles that they can perform.

Furthermore, work will still have to be done by those in families where they are feeling undo burden from domestic food production. Although the material feminists showed the difficulty of certain solutions such as splitting the work, these tactics still need to be employed. However, when any tactic is undertaken, awareness is necessary about the repercussions these measures make on social and environmental justice. Thus a combined framework of late 1960s to mid-1970s material feminism and ecofeminism is a necessary lens when determining which tactics women need to use on an individual level. While leaving advocating for change up to those who are already over-burdened further ads to their load, it is

---

311 Gottlieb, Robert, and Anupama Joshi. *Food Justice*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2010. Print. Foreword. Food justice as defined by Gottlieb and Joshi explores “the global and local dimensions of food systems and examines issues of access, justice, and environmental and community well-being. It includes …[a] focus on the way food is grown, processed, manufactured, distributed, sold, and consumed. Among the matters addressed are what foods are available to communities and individuals, how those foods are obtained, and what health and environmental factors are embedded in food-system choices and outcomes.[It] focuses not only on food security and well-being but also on regional, state, national, and international policy decisions and economic and cultural forces.” It combines the ideas of social justice and food issues.
necessary work to be done in combination with continued advocacy for larger social change.

Conclusion

Cooking is complex. The issues of gender, race, class, labor, and the environment all stew together in every prepared meal. The division of work through labor, based on social constructions creates many of the problems explored by the material feminists of the late 1960s and mid-1970s, and by the new material feminists, and the ecofeminists of today. These issues are complicated and are not uniform in every community or family.

Although this thesis was written from the context of the United States, these industrial food systems affect people throughout the world via the role of corporate control of seeds, chemicals, and transportation. Although I do not have time to divulge into all of these details, other authors such as Vanadana Shiva and Carlo Petrini have written wonderful books on the subject. 312

This thesis sought to explore, critique, and innovate new solutions for these issues. These matters were discussed in order to work towards the direction of further development of future solutions. Change will not be immediate. People have been advocating for transformation for decades. However, a heightened awareness and a commitment towards change brings hope for the future.

It may be tempting to shy away from this extremely complicated topic. Here in the kitchen, at this site of extreme contention, many of the issues that one must deal with are the same that plague the larger world. These issues of cooking thus are not only the problem of upper middle class white housewives of the 1960s and 1970s. Rather, these are some of the most important issues facing everyone: social justice, family, health, labor, and the environment. These are issues that affect us all.

The reason why cooking is such an important microcosm that speaks to this entire macrosom is because cooking is about food-- our life force. To change food, to change how it is grown, prepared, and consumed… that is revolutionary. To shift what is going on within the kitchen is to change the world.
Photo Appendix

1.

2.

176
"Oh! This living?"

Alice: "Well, yes, it's quite nice here."

Woman: "But it's all so quiet."

Alice: "Yes, I suppose it is."

Woman: "But I dreamt of..."

Alice: "Well, do you think I could take you away from all this!"

Alice: "I'm a bit of an outcast."

Woman: "I'm a bit of a Convenient person."

Alice: "Yes, Alice, all this can be yours too! Now's your chance to stop consuming and start creating! To stop coming and start relating!"

Alice: "Meanwhile, our sister here will make you a nice cup of nettle tea, while I go and see a man about a windmill!"

Sprout Wine

100% Dairy-Free, Soy-Free, Nut-Free

Alternative Women's Own

Women's own brand

Women's own label

Women's own design

Women's own marketing
Image Descriptions:

**Image 1:** This image was in an edition of the feminist newsletter, *KNOW Inc.* The authors are encouraging readers to write to the creator of *The Family Circus* comic, Bill Keane, and inform him of how his work is sexist. This comic displays how the expectation that women be responsible for domestic food production was evident in many forms of popular media.


**Image 2:** This document was the certificate of incorporation of the Women’s Restaurant, Inc., which was the financial organizing unit for Bread and Roses Restaurant of Cambridge, Massachusetts.


**Image 3 and 4:** Photographs of women working on the land excerpted from *Country Women* magazine. Many of these women were seeking to live in alternative communities that were more environmentally sustainable and upheld values of gender equality.


**Images 5 and 6:** The “Alice’s Adventures with Atman” comic described the issues of gender and labor within the alternative lifestyle movements.

Bibliography


Women's Newsletter and Periodicals Collection, PR 4 Carton 1. Folder General C. Schlesinger Archive at the Radcliffe Institute of Harvard University.


Print.


<http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=D1cJDHUZSw#!>.


"We Must Feed Ourselves." Women on Land (7 Sept. 1976). Print. ALFA Box 14, File 23. Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture of Duke University.

