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# The Ethical Ramifications of the Sexual Division of Labor in the Modern World

Alexandra L. Baker

## What is the Sexual Division of Labor?:

The sexual division of labor is the concept that men and women are meant to engage in specific tasks that conform to their gender norms. This concept can be found cross-culturally and has roots far in the past but was exacerbated by the rise of capitalism in the seventeenth century.

“Though overtly this concept [of the sexual division of labor] seems to suggest that men and women simply divide different tasks between themselves, it hides the fact that men’s tasks are usually considered as truly human ones (that is, conscious, rational, planned, productive, etc.), whereas women’s tasks are again determined by their ‘nature’” – Maria Mies

## The Problem:

As long as the sexual division of labor exists, human flourishing will be stunted for people of all genders, races, sexualities, and walks of life.

## How Did We Get Here?:

In the seventeenth century, those with authority began to use capitalism to establish a pattern of accumulating power at the expense of less privileged groups. Women found themselves pushed into various forms of coerced labor. Most often, this labor was in the form of childbearing and rearing, despite its devaluation at the time. The birth of the proletariat signaled the beginning of a new class of war against women. Wage discrimination became the newest form of oppression.

## Present Dilemmas:

The wage gap remains a reality for women everywhere, and their disparity in pay promotes economic dependence on men.

The development of “housewifization” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century prompted a slew of mental health issues as the modern woman attempted to fit herself into a pre-determined role. Though this social norm is becoming obsolete, even today when an individual pursues a career that deviates from their gender’s norm, they are perceived in a negative light.

## Three Potential Solutions:

*Huelga Feminista*: This radical movement seeks to destroy sexist oppression, violence, and exploitation through the complete abolition of capitalism.

*Feminism for the 99%*: This more viable option seeks to redefine “work” and foster unity. Through valuing all forms of labor (including unpaid reproductive work) equally, prosocial groups would be able to change social norms for the better.

*Liberal Feminism*: This option wants to abolish the sexual division of labor without abolishing capitalism. Liberal feminists want to redistribute capitalist power, so men and women hold equal amounts.

## Conclusion:

In order to combat the biases and discriminations present in the labor force, people need to band together with other prosocial organizations to create palpable change. The sexual division of labor causes us all to suffer in ways we are oblivious to. Only through conscious and effortful education will we be able to work towards the successful abolition of the sexual division of labor.