

For the past three years my wife and I have been engaged in an unusual experiment in domestic cooperation. On the first of each month one of us by turn takes over for the month's duration the kitchen responsibilities -- planning, shopping, cooking, serving of meals. For a month, if it is my month, I add to my various professional chores a new set of concerns: keeping a well stocked pantry, planning meals for a family of two with occasional guests and rather infrequent dinner parties, keeping up the supply of napkins, detergents, and paper towels -- in other words, I am a working homemaker.

At the time when the experiment began my wife, a psychologist, had been a working homemaker for twenty-six years. After our marriage, she cooked her way through M.A., pregnancy, childrearing, Ph.D., and up the academic ladder to a full professorship. I was a "helping husband." That is, I took care, more or less regularly, of washing pans, loading the dishwasher, and other minor chores. I shopped when required by emergencies and helped plan dinners for guests. Was that enough? That question is the key to how our present experiment started, and it was I who started it.

We were dining in town one June evening with two other couples more or less like us -- a psychiatrist with a professor wife and a professor of medicine with a publisher wife; utterly middle class all, by income if not necessarily by ideology. Conversation came around to "helping husbands," each of us three husbands feeling smugly righteous

in that respect, until ... Until I made the fatal remark: "Helping is not truly sharing." Upon which, with some mischievous encouragement from my psychologist wife, I embarked into an eloquent, if wholly impromptu explanation that for a homemaker the planning, shopping, cooking, and inspecting the larder for the stuff of future meals was every bit as much a demanding and absorbing occupation as was for me the teaching of students and the performing of experiments, or for my two male friends the carrying out of their own professional chores. Yet, none of us had given much thought to the plain fact that each of our three wives had actually two jobs, carrying a dual load of responsibilities, as professional worker and homemaker. My indictment was sharp, impassioned, and uncompromising. The only remedy, I proclaimed, was to share responsibilities as well as small chores.

No one spoke immediately: the women approving, the men stunned. Then my wife said softly: "Good idea. Let's try it." By the time we reached home, the plan had been hatched -- hatched, I must say, with the same feeling of excitement with which one starts a new research project or begins writing a book. The operational plan was simple. August in our Cape Cod cottage would be the instruction period; September would be my wife's month since I had to be away a lot, and October would see me in charge. The alternation has continued to this day (I did not consciously plan the small benefit of being at bat in February).

Shopping I had always enjoyed, from the day in September 1940 when, a refugee from Europe, I encountered for the first time the glory of an American supermarket. But shopping with my own shopping list was different, I soon found out, from shopping with my wife's list. As

different in fact, as performing my boss' experiments would be from planning and doing my own: a technician's job versus a scientist's.

Once the groceries were in, the next problem was to adjust the meal to the professional schedule. A late afternoon seminar called for left-overs, or a cheese fondue, or fish bought on the way home. We are not gourmets, but we have never stooped to TV dinners or other prefab foods.

We always have one drink before dinner: a vermouth for my wife, a scotch-on-the-rocks for me. This gives us time to let the pots simmer quietly. I soon discovered, however, that the scotch had to be drunk more slowly and more diluted if the meal was to be successful. It was the pre-meal drink that, one evening in the fateful October, brought home fully to me the extent of the unconscious chauvinism of my past life. On that evening I brought home with me a former student of mine, a young Israeli scientist who was passing through Boston and whom I had asked to join us for dinner. I soon went to fix dinner while my wife and our guest settled to a lively conversation in the living room. It suddenly dawned on me: My God, for twenty-six years it has been I who sat with guests, sipping my drink while she was cooking!

It was then that the meaning of inequality hit me with full force. And I felt guilty. Guilty with the sense of guilt that only the revelation of one's own insensitivity can give - the guilt of obtuseness, worse than the guilt that follows an angry outburst or even an unjust deed. Thus that October meal became something of a sacrificial meal: the roast chicken, the broccoli with cheese sauce, the

salad became offerings tendered (but not burned!) on the altar of my spiritual catharsis.

Insensitivity to the double burden of the working woman need not be limited to within the family. Some time ago, a short university course for about thirty executives was being taught by one woman and three men professors. The "natural" suggestion was made that each teacher invite one group of students to a home-cooked dinner. What none of the men gave a thought to was that the woman professor had no cooking mate at home. To the working male, the working woman is still an incongruity. Experimenting with equality comes hard.

Like all experiments, ours was not an immediate success. I do not mean just that not all my meals were perfect - neither are all of my wife's. Exploration at many levels was called for. What was the goal of cooking? to be fed, to enjoy, to please? I had to discover the secret frustration of the artisan. A homemaker practices an art without being artist; he is an amateur catching only now and then a glimpse of what artistry could be.

Books helped and, of course, my wife's advice. For a long time I stuck mostly to basics - roasts, steaks, casseroles and simple baking. I faced the terror of Julia Child's twin volumes as in my work I face the terrors of stereochemistry or population genetics. I read her books reluctantly and tested her recipes mostly when I was stuck at home with grippe or sciatica.

There were difficulties and there were rewards. I discovered that experimentation need not always be for discovery, as it is in the laboratory. In the kitchen one does not try to prove or disprove hypotheses: one makes a meal. Very seldom one has the satisfaction of successful innovation. ⁽¹⁾ Cooking was more like the practice of medicine, which I abandoned thirty years ago: you do what you can with the material at hand - whether human or edible.

In the same vein, I rediscovered in the kitchen the essential sloppiness of medical practice. In an emergency you grab a dirty spoon to stir any pot just as in surgery you grab any tool to stop a bleeding wound. And I rediscovered the end of finickiness: the hand dipped into the entrails of fowl or fish and the mopping up of a spilled sauce.

Cooking is also a branch of psychology. My wife and I, for example, emphasize different aspects of meals. She is prone to heartiness,

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My recipe for Scrambled Eggs Special:

1. Place in a serving dish 4 to 6 oz. of very cold cream cheese in lumps.
2. Scramble 4-6 eggs with 4-6 oz. milk, and salt. Cook stirring until tacky and fluffy. Add one tbs. dry vermouth. Heat one minute longer. Toss the eggs over the cream cheese. Sprinkle with black pepper from grinder. Serve without mixing (the cold cheese lumps should contrast with the hot eggs).

both in amounts and variety of victuals. I rather tend to daintiness, paying care to the presentation of dishes and I attempt to cook just about as much as will be eaten. But in an experiment like ours, I realized, one had better be careful. Cuisine is just another form of communication and one may communicate more than calories. Was my emphasis on well-presented dishes, with their decorations of parsley, tomato, or mushroom slices, a silent criticism of my wife's opulent casseroles, heaps of fried rice, mountains of salad? And vice versa, were her abundant dishes a mockery of my effete style of cooking? Fortunately, between us there is enough sensitivity, let alone enough love, for such misunderstanding not to arise or last. But let the young and psychologically unsophisticated beware. Let any couple that may wish to follow our example remember that two cooks, like two hearts or two bridge hands, must complement each other rather than compete if they are to come out on the winning side.

Barriers must be broken not only within the family but around it. Our housekeeper, a true friend of many years who in the few hours she can spare us manages to prepare some staple dishes and also helps us with dinner parties, was dismayed at first at seeing me in charge. I believe she did not so much distrust me as she feared that I would collapse under the double burden (she earnestly believes men are less strong than women). She accepted my taking over the kitchen with good cheer, though, probably because she was already accustomed to my role as the seasoner of fruit salads -- with wines and other spirits that her convictions do not allow her to appreciate. Ever since she has respected our arrangement and has been a willing collaborator.

One stereotype was broken.

With the new kitchen rule another barrier breaks down: that of conversational topics open to the two sexes in social situations. Until the experiment started, I had never thought of cocktail or dinner parties as anything but the opportunity for serious or light conversation, occasional innocent flirting, and frequent boredom. But now I look forward to another set of experiences: learning recipes of dishes that I have just tasted and liked, or even, in the course of conversations with expert homemakers, learning the formulas of dishes that still have the charm of the unknown. What a satisfaction I had recently, as I returned from a lecture tour bringing back a recipe for fläskpannkaka⁽¹⁾ contributed by a woman biochemist and homemaker at an otherwise unbearable cocktail party! A variety of flirting that leads to the kitchen rather than the bedroom. In my new role of homemaker I even have learned to extract recipes from restaurant cooks or waiters. My latest acquisition

 (1) Fläskpannkaka (bacon pancake)

3/4 cup flour	2 eggs
3/4 tsp. salt	1/2 lb. bacon
2 cups milk	

1. Batter: Sift flour and salt into a bowl. Add one-fourth of the milk, beat until smooth. Add eggs and remaining milk; beat well.
2. Cube and fry bacon, dry on paper towel. Put 2 tbs. fat in oven-proof skillet or pie plate, add meat. Pour stirred batter over bacon; bake for 30 - 35 minutes at 350° or until nicely brown. Cool a few minutes before serving. Serve sections with tart berries. Serves 4 - 6 as entree.

was *concombres à la niçoise*; but on this I am sworn to secrecy.

Fun apart, our experiment has been for me more than a fad or even a personal catharsis. To cook is not just to act on what I believe to be right, as for a vegetarian to avoid meats. It is also a political action, even if it is carried out in the privacy of the home. It is an exercise in internalizing the idea of equality between man and woman. The sex prejudice is something embedded deeply within each of us because it is part and parcel of our traditional culture. And it is part of our culture because the oppression of women is one of the foundations of our society. The unquestioned assumption of male superiority throughout the ages, reflected even in the writings of supposedly feminist thinkers from G. B. Shaw to Simone de Baeuvoir, in a subtle way serves as the backbone for all sort of prejudices about inequality. If one-half of humanity is intrinsically inferior to the other half, as male chauvinism maintains, why could black not be inferior to white? or Jew to Gentile? or Arab to Jew? or foreigner to native-born?

To internalize the assumption of equality between men and women -- not equality of physiological functions, of course, but equality of status, rights, and abilities -- is in my opinion the indispensable step toward becoming a fully integrated, just human being, in the same way as to internalize the belief in Christ the Savior is the indispensable element of being a Christian. No man who feels himself superior to woman can be fully human, nor can he be fully without prejudice of race, creed, or nationality. Contrariwise, I believe that a man who is truly without male chauvinism is also freed of all other bigoted beliefs. He who cannot utter or accept a joke about "broads" will never entertain the stereotype of "nigger" or "dago" or "kike."

I see a light ahead as I watch the younger generation, that of my own son, functioning in the sphere of relations between sexes with a freedom and honesty that would have been inconceivable in my own time. I believe that the reason these young people -- especially but exclusively the radicals among them -- can respect each other across sex lines is that all their relations among themselves have become less competitive and less acquisitive than has ever been the case before. In this new spirit of freedom and cooperativeness the tasks traditionally assigned to a given sex become shared opportunities. Boys cook, girls saw wood, and they have fun together or apart. Sharing becomes the source of a new understanding of the true nature of the tasks of life and of their meaning: drudgery as well as excitement.

Drudgery and excitement are inseparable aspects of work, in the laboratory as in the office, the factory, the studio, the classroom, or the kitchen. Only the person who has waited cross-fingered before opening an oven where a soufflé may rise or fall can truly understand my pride when I convey to the dinner table the superbly erected final product. A work of art, a humble one maybe; but also a small contribution to social justice.