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Labor, Freedom, and Their Worth

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Labor, Freedom, and Their Worth

Good pay, a beautiful office, and a job with high standards. But, I left the job after just a month. Washing dirty dishes, working in the kitchen, and doing a mediocre job. But, this job gives me the freedom to study for one more semester at my university. It isn't as glamorous and interesting as my previous job, but the labor I do as a dishwasher is more valuable to me. I feel a sense of responsibility toward my labor like a mother feels responsible for her child. And, I feel no hesitation to sacrifice my freedom like a mother sacrifices her life taking care of her children and home.

Sociologist Arlie Hochschild explores how people's commitments to one another create a sense of responsibility toward their work. She asserts that "One reason that women took a deeper interest than men in the problems of juggling work with family life is that even when husbands happily shared the hours of work, their wives felt more responsible for home and children." In other words, women become mothers not only to their children but also to their houses. They feel a sense of responsibility towards their home and children rather than feeling forced to do it.

Each of my parents has taken on responsibilities toward their families, sacrificing their freedom and time for affection. My mother comes from a culture where she is told to stay in the house and do all the household chores for her children and husband. This comes from generations of the traditional culture of women being the caretaker of the house. Though this makes the life of my mother limited to her house only, she feels accountable for taking care of the house and the children. Likewise, my father was the only source of income in my family. He had to sacrifice time to bond with me, perhaps, for my own freedom. In other words, the culture of only fathers working in a family made my father sacrifice the relationship with his children, while the culture of only mothers working in a house made her sacrifice her freedom. I am here because my father sacrificed his youth and freedom as he started working from the age of 17. Leaving his

education behind, he took all the responsibilities of the house upon the death of his father. For my mother, taking care of her family is worth more than the freedom that a dollar can provide her. For my father, working for the betterment of his family was worth more than his youth and education. Likewise for me, studying late at night is worth more than going to frat parties with friends. As a first-generation student, I feel it is my turn to make the sacrifices that are worth it for a better future for me and my family. My labor and sacrifices today reflect the freedom that I and my family will have in the future.

In the chapter "A Speed-up in the family," Hochschild reports on the staggering increase in the number of working mothers and its effect on marriage, child care, and housework. The notion of mothers being the primary caretaker of a house is so ingrained in couples that even though both partners are working full-time, Hochschild calculates that fathers averaged only 17 minutes of housework while mothers averaged three hours. This has caused an increase in divorces, anxiousness in mothers, an increase in family frustration, and aggression. Hochschild's research goes beyond numbers as it reveals some deep emotional issues that are faced by both working fathers and mothers.

Agreeing with Hochschild, I believe that working couples should take a step back and look open-mindedly at how they can solve these problems. It is high time that we break the notion of mothers being the primary caretaker of their children and house as it has brought more harm than good.