

Analysis of Female Housework from the Perspective of Emotional Labor

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Abstract:

Previous research has primarily examined household labor from a singular perspective of gender roles. This study approaches the topic from the viewpoint of emotional labor, focusing on the surface and deep acting involved in women's household responsibilities. By further categorizing household labor, this research helps women adjust their moods according to different types of tasks, thereby reducing the emotional toll of labor. The author employed qualitative research methods, specifically in-depth interviews, to distinguish between surface and deep acting in household labor. Through interviews and participatory observation of subjects, it was found that common physical tasks such as cleaning, cooking, and shopping are classified as surface emotional labor. In contrast, organizing celebrations and encouraging family members, while also demanding emotional energy, still fall under surface emotional labor. Activities that involve conflict resolution, relationship maintenance, and emotional regulation require long-term deep investment and are classified as deep emotional labor. The study indicates that women often need to engage in emotional expressions to meet societal expectations within the division of household labor. To alleviate women's emotional burdens, both society and families need to take collective action to redistribute emotional labor, such as balancing responsibilities and setting labor boundaries.

Keywords: Emotional labor; women; household labor.

1. Introduction

In traditional patriarchal societies, the division of labor in families typically followed a model where "men work outside and women manage the household." However, as society continues to transform, this traditional division is gradually being challenged, leading to the emergence of roles where "men par-

ticipate in domestic tasks and women work outside." According to the fourth survey on the social status of women in China conducted in 2020, mothers are primarily responsible for the daily care of children aged 0-17, assisting with homework, and transportation, with percentages of 76.1%, 67.5%, and 63.6%, respectively. Women remain the main bearers of

household labor, yet their employment rates remain high; the survey indicates that women constitute 43.5% of the employed population aged 18-64. Nearly 70% of women are in the workforce, with employment rates of 66.3% in urban areas and 73.2% in rural areas. This suggests that in modern society despite achieving a certain level of economic status, household labor is still largely perceived as a woman's primary responsibility, both in mainstream views and among some women themselves.

In families, women, as mothers or wives, are expected to express appropriate emotions, while also needing to manage their authentic feelings and emotions as independent individuals. They must find a balance that minimizes emotional depletion without disrupting the family's normal functioning.

This study specifically examines the division of household labor, with the ultimate goal of analyzing surface and deep acting within this context. To achieve this objective, a literature analysis method was employed to search for and review relevant materials and studies. This approach effectively integrates theoretical frameworks with data collected through surveys, while also utilizing interviews to explore the emotional contributions involved in household labor, facilitating the research process. Previous studies have largely approached household labor from a singular perspective of gender roles or economic factors. This research, however, adopts an emotional labor perspective, focusing on the surface and deep acting involved in women's household responsibilities.

2. Literature Review

Historically, there are inequalities in the gender division of household labor, a situation that has long been taken for granted [1]. In recent years, the sociology of gender has garnered significant attention. The term *gender role* was coined, by a American gender theorist who reckons that a person's gender is complex, it's not limited to biological sex [2].

As a result of its influence, issues concerning the division of household labor are also receiving increasing attention. Household labor is generally considered to be an unpaid undesired but necessary activity, and consists of the vast majority of domestic work, in detail laundry and mopping, etc. It is widely acknowledged that Women contribute more and take on more responsibility in this activity Owing to historical and cultural factors. In other words, the current state of the division of labor in the family is that it is not fair and there is a serious imbalance between [3].

The notion of gender roles as proposed by Williams & Best is characterized by a stereotypical and ingrained perspective, which is shaped through the differentiation

of social behavioral patterns, role allocations, and gender interaction prototypes in conformity with established gender norms [3]. The traditional concept of gender roles believes that men's social roles are closely related to work and career. Women are mainly responsible for taking care of the family and children and play a secondary social role attached to men. The modern concept of gender roles emphasizes the equality between men and women. Both men and women have the same development space and responsibility in both their careers and families. The theory of social construction holds that social roles shape an individual's conceptual consciousness and further act on their behaviors [4]. From the perspective of gender, the gender division of housework is an important source of gender stratification and an important manifestation of gender inequality in the family [5]. With the increasing prominence of the blueprint of modernization, the gender division of labor mode of "men outside and women inside" in traditional Chinese society has been broken, which has made great changes in the content and structure of work and family. Women's entry into the workplace has opened up a new situation in which women are not allowed to be eyebrows, which not only intensifies the competitive pressure in the labor market but also threatens and crowds out the inherent social status and dignity of men.

Emotional labor was originally defined as the correct expression of employees' emotional response to the requirements of the enterprise in the process of interacting with customers. Generally speaking, emotional labor is mainly divided into three types: spontaneous emotional behavior, surface emotional behavior, and deep emotional behavior [6]. In the family, as a wife or mother, women will have an instinctive response to love, that is, women will subconsciously pay for housework, which is generally called spontaneous emotional behavior. However, when the frequency of such emotional labor is too high, women in the family always 'naturally' pay, it may appear that women's emotional 'overdraft', because people's ability to bear is limited. In this case, when women complete some involuntary housework, they need to show the emotional labor of the work they undertake perceptibly through facial expressions, language, voice, and posture, but the emotions they show are not the true emotions of women's hearts. Hochschild and Grandey call this emotional labor surface behavior [6]. To avoid excessive emotional consumption, women will consciously manage their emotions. On the one hand, they understand themselves as a mother or wife, to make appropriate emotional expressions for family harmony; On the other hand, women will also adjust their emotions appropriately, transform the bad emotions caused by housework into other emotions, and control the duration of emotions, to reduce emotional internal friction

without affecting family harmony [7].

Emotional labor is divided into spontaneous emotional behavior, surface emotional behavior, and deep emotional behavior. This paper divides spontaneous and surface emotional behavior into shallow performance, and deep emotional behavior into deep performance. In this way, the instinct or adjustment of the surface posture can be called shallow performance, and the management of emotions is called deep performance. In other words, shallow performance stays in people's surface emotions, and even adjustment will not go deep into the heart, but deep performance is the adjustment of inner emotions. In this case, people will have a sense of identity and think that they should do so, or this is their own responsibility. Deep performance is more like emotional discipline for people. People often make appropriate emotional expressions through inner self-suggestion, and even transform bad emotions to reduce their emotional internal friction.

The common shallow performances in life are taking care of drunk husbands, doing housework after work, etc. The common deep performances are taking care of children, taking care of the elderly, etc. Through examples in life, it can be found that deep acting in life requires more emotions than shallow acting. When women complete deep acting, they often feel 'tired', because they not only need to complete labor but also need to take care of the emotions of the elderly or children. Such emotional consumption is even more serious than physical consumption. In this case, women need to constantly adjust their inner emotions until they agree with the current emotional labor, and they need to learn to transform bad emotions and reduce their emotional burden.

Deep acting is an important concept in the theory of emotional labor proposed by Arlie Hochschild. Deep acting refers to the individual not only showing the required emotions on the surface but also truly feeling these emotions in the depths of the heart. This strategy is usually used to show emotions that meet social expectations and can help individuals better manage emotions in work and family life [8].

Social constructivism provides a special perspective for feminism, that is, from the perspective of gender to re-examine the reality that we are facing as human beings based on gender differences and dominated by men. In the perspective of feminism, the structures that are accustomed to in the world of daily life can be questioned. They hope to seek another theoretical perspective of "position" to break the silence of women. Therefore, social constructivism abandons empty words, re-understands and even further deconstructs the patriarchal consciousness, the knowledge system dominated by male power, and the social, economic, and political structure constructed by

class and gender differences, and examines and reflects on women's position in patriarchal society [9].

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Questionnaire Survey

The questionnaire was distributed randomly, yielding a total of 149 responses, of which 141 were valid. The survey aimed to gather information about respondents' age groups, marital status, employment status, educational background, family circumstances, and their attitudes and emotions regarding household labor. By analyzing the respondents' answers, we can outline the extent of involvement in household chores among different groups, their emotional expressions, and their approaches to maintaining family harmony. This data will assist in better understanding the current situation and influencing factors of household labor division within families, providing a reference for future policy formulation and service provision. The highest proportions of respondents were in the age groups of 26 to 30 and 31 to 40, accounting for 33.88% and 25.62% respectively, which together make up 59.5%. These two age groups are quite extensive in their representation. The largest segment of respondents was employed, comprising 39.67%, followed closely by freelancers at 34.71%. The proportion of unemployed individuals was 17.36%, slightly higher than that of students and retirees, as illustrated in Figures 1 and 2.

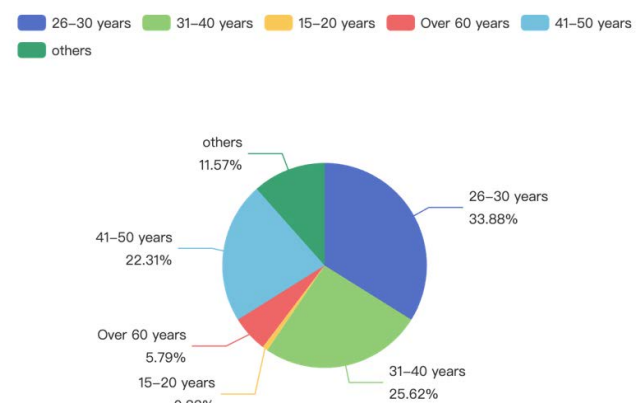


Fig. 1 Age distribution of respondents

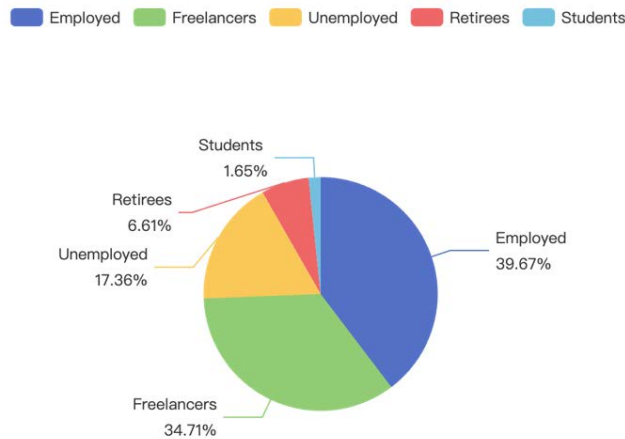


Fig. 2 Occupation distribution of respondents

3.2 Interview Method

During the research process, the author identified six interview subjects (hereafter referred to as Lady 1, Lady 2, etc.) and conducted structured interviews with them. The focus was on exploring the respondents’ family relationships and their emotional experiences within the household, aiming to understand the division of household labor and the proportion of emotional labor involved. Through these interviews, we conducted participatory observations of some women’s practices and patterns of emotional labor in the family, resulting in detailed observational and interview data.

4. Statistical Result

4.1 Results of Questionnaire

In terms of proportion, the main household chores undertaken in the family are, in order: tutoring children in homework (53.72 percent) tidying up the house (48.76 percent) doing laundry (44.63 percent), cooking (42.15 percent), washing dishes (38.84 percent), caring for the elderly (23.97 percent) caring for pets (23.97 percent) undertaking all household chores (14.88 percent) and Others

(3.31 percent). From the data, it can be seen that tutoring children in their homework, tidying up the room, and doing the laundry are the main household chores undertaken by the respondents. A portion of the respondents indicated that they undertake all the household chores in the family, which may put more pressure on the individual. On the question ‘Would you continue to undertake these chores if you had a choice?’ 21.49 percent were willing to undertake the choices in question 19, while 78.51 percent were unwilling to do so. This shows that the majority of the people are not willing to undertake this chore. When asked about attitudes towards Female’s responsibility for household chores, more than half of the respondents (54.54 percent) expressed their dissatisfaction with the fact that Females are expected to do most of the household chores, on a scale ranging from less favorable to not at all favorable. In contrast, only 38.84 percent of respondents agreed with this situation.

Therefore, it is recommended that a more balanced division of household chores be achieved in the family so that family members can share the responsibility for household chores to reduce the burden on Females. Reasonable plans for the division of household chores can be formulated through communication and negotiation among family members, so as to jointly create a harmonious family atmosphere. As a result, the majority of the respondents, 32.23 percent and 29.75 percent, respectively, had a negative or neutral attitude towards the issue of ‘doing housework when they are tired’, as they were obliged to do the housework that burdens Females. As seen in Figure 3. Comparatively speaking, the numbers of people who completely disagree and completely agree are relatively small, at 20.66 percent and 3.31 percent respectively. It is suggested that the division of labor and time schedule for household chores should be optimized and that a reasonable plan for the division of household chores can be formulated through communication and negotiation among family members, so as to alleviate the burden on individuals and enhance understanding and support among family members.

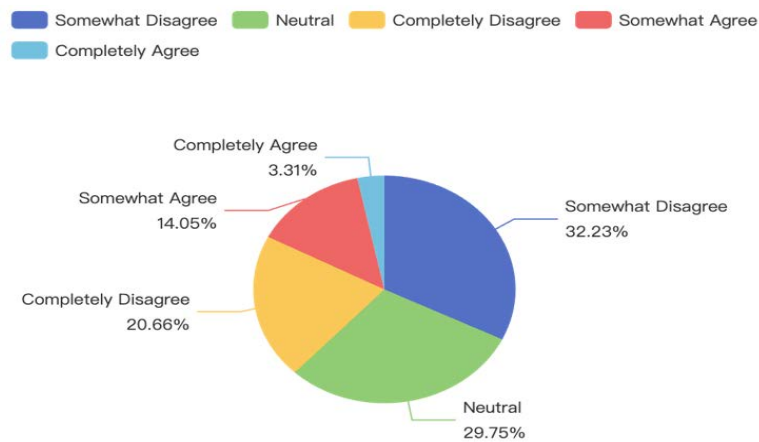


Fig. 3 An attitude towards ,Doing Housework When Weary‘

4.2 Interview Results

Through interviews and participatory observation of the subjects, the author found that Female’s emotional labor is an important part of their labor in the domestic labor process.

Females’ social roles are often defined as “understanding” and “gentle”, and they are better suited to maintaining family relationships and the family atmosphere, therefore Females also take on more emotional labor in the family.

Traditional gender roles affect the traditional division of labor in the family, and even in modern society, married Female are still bound by this division of labor, which puts them under double pressure in the public and private spheres and exposes them to irreconcilable work-family conflicts [10]. We briefly analyze the norms and requirements of Females as gender in an attempt to find out whether the relationship between their gender roles and emotions is conducive to undertaking emotional labor.

Ms 4 feels that “Chinese families are like this, and there is nothing you can do about being born a Female. When it comes to housework, if Females don’t do it, who will?” Ms 3 said, “Females just give more in the family and have work in their eyes.” Ms 5 also said, “In real life, Females are definitely in the family more than men.”

Based on the questionnaires and interviews, the analysis focuses on whether females are aware of or possess knowledge regarding emotional labor. It is not necessary to define emotional labor strictly; instead, the emphasis is on whether they recognize their involvement in emotional labor within the family context, such as being considerate of others at home or acting as a mediator. If they know emotional labor, they may feel that it affects their mood and energy. If they are aware of it, do they feel that it affects their mood and energy, that it is a form of domestic labor, or that it affects other labor? About emotional labor, our questions were “Should the study participant hold

back to maintain family relationships” and “What are the things in your life that make you mentally exhausted”.

In further interviews, our interviewees agreed that “of course, it is considered as domestic labor”, and when it comes to “whether it affects other work”, Ms. 1 and Ms. 2 agreed that “it doesn’t affect anything now. It’s more of a long-term thing. But it was more of a compromise in the long term, as Ms 2 said, “It used to be, it’s just a matter of getting over it.” Ms 4 confessed in the interview that “in decision-making on important matters, there are different ways of dealing with them, and when there are conflicts, sometimes I want to continue to argue, but I am worried that this will have a bad impact on my children and will not help to solve the problem, so I put up with it for the time being, but in the long run it has created a burden on my psyche”, she said such a situation also hurt her life and work outside the family, “Holding a breath in my heart, I can’t control it and I will hurt others by mistake.” Another Female, Ms 3, said she “suffered from inhuman torture in her last marriage, and that home was a prison.” Ms 6 felt that ‘life is already exhausting and too much emotional burden is unacceptable to me.’ Ms 5 thought, ‘One person in the family has to put up with it. I can accept catering to others and sacrificing myself for the sake of the family.’ She is still tacitly accepting that she has to swallow her anger. Ms 4 felt that she was ‘doubly burdened by the fact that her anger within the family affects people and things outside the family and that she regrets it when it happens.’

Female participation in emotional labor, whether active or passive, inevitably involves more energy and time, and since this potential labor is not even as visible as ordinary household chores, such as cooking or cleaning, its contribution is particularly undervalued and difficult to be rewarded accordingly. Whether Females do it voluntarily or not, it is a considerable burden that is not conducive to

harmony within the family or to the creation of more value from Female's work outside the home.

5. Discussion

The research indicates that women often need to engage in emotional labor within the division of household responsibilities to meet societal expectations. Surface acting suggests that even if women internally disagree with such behaviors, they are required to display unconditional love and patience in the family, taking on more domestic responsibilities. Deep acting, on the other hand, demands that women not only outwardly express warmth and care but also genuinely feel and identify with these emotions on a deeper level. This expectation places a greater burden of emotional labor on women within the household and impacts their self-identity and mental health.

Moreover, prolonged deep acting can lead to emotional exhaustion. To align with family members' emotional expectations, women may engage in deep acting for extended periods, resulting in emotional depletion. This emotional exhaustion not only affects their performance at home but can also negatively impact their professional lives. For instance, women may face limitations in career advancement due to excessive involvement in family responsibilities or may exhibit emotional detachment at work, thereby influencing their job performance and promotion opportunities.

To mitigate the negative effects of emotional labor on women's physical and mental health as well as their personal development, both society and families need to take collective action to redistribute emotional labor and domestic responsibilities. For example, encouraging men to participate more in emotional labor within the household, supported by family education and policy initiatives, can help balance these responsibilities. Additionally, raising awareness about deep acting and its adverse effects, while promoting a fair distribution of emotional labor in society, will contribute to improving women's unequal status both at home and in the workplace.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that both surface acting and deep acting significantly influence women's performance in household labor. Surface acting involves the display of outward emotions, while deep acting requires

a genuine internal emotional experience. The study concludes that women are often expected to engage in surface acting within the family, leading to emotional exhaustion and increased psychological burdens. Although deep acting may provide deeper emotional fulfillment, it can also create challenges regarding their identity and self-recognition. This research offers valuable insights for future studies in this area, fostering public awareness of the equitable distribution of emotional labor within families and the mental health of women. Future research should focus more on how to alleviate the burdens of emotional labor on women and explore ways to enhance emotional support among family members.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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