"What do you do?"
"Me? Oh, I'm just a housewife."

Scorned by many, and believing herself scorned by everyone, the contemporary Canadian housewife vacillates between defeatedly thinking her role meaningless and defensively declaring it to be unfairly under attack. The decision, the defensive-ness, the self-doubt are all aided by widespread ignorance about the housewife. Housework and the housewife are presumed so universal, so unchanging, so TRIVIAL and BORING, that few people bother to examine or study them closely. In this course we will try to cast a little light on these subjects.

We will see what constitutes housework in different societies from that of the !Kung woman of the Kalahari Desert whose household goods can be carried on her back to that of the secluded woman in some Muslim communities whose husband and sons do all the marketing for her.
We will look at the history of the housewife's role in Western Europe and in North America, tracing changes in domestic architecture, household technology, mothering and wifehood. We want also to assess the ways in which the housewife's tasks fit into and support the economy of the community in which she lives. We will examine the ways in which housewives around the world have exerted influence over their families and neighbours, and will conclude with a study of the means, ranging from pushing for wages for housework to the elimination of household tasks and even the individual household itself, by which Canadian housewives are seeking to provide themselves with increased autonomy and independence.

Required Readings

Ann Oakley, Woman's Work, The Housewife Past and Present
Jessie Bernard, The Future of Marriage
Sheila Kitzinger, Women As Mothers
Marilyn French, The Woman's Room
Reprint Packet, Available in class

Recommended Reading

Jessie Bernard, The Future of Motherhood

Class Scheduling:  Lectures  Mondays 1:30 - 2:20
                   Wednesdays 1:30 - 2:20
                   Tutorial  Mondays 2:30 - 3:20
                   Wednesdays 12:30 - 1:20