"What do you do?"

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

The common assumption that housework and housewives are boring and trivial, though natural, means that they often fall outside the scope of scholarly activity. Since people often believe that housewives everywhere have done more or less the same work since humans moved out of the trees and into caves (only with washing machines and vacuum cleaners, of course, there's scarcely any work any more), they are consequently placed outside of history, outside of society.

But housework is not simply housework, and there are housewives and housewives. In this course, we will take housewives and housework seriously, exploring the kinds of domestic responsibilities assigned to women in different cultures, the manner in which these responsibilities have changed over time, and the relationship of housework to the economic and political system of the housewife's community. We will look closely at some common domestic tasks - shopping, for instance, the dwelling and the neighbourhood in which the housewife lives, and into her cupboards and closets to investigate the impact of technology upon her work. We will look into the making of a housewife, and into current efforts to reinvigorate, reimburse, or eliminate the housewife's role. Although the chief emphasis will be on housework, we will also look briefly at two other aspects of the housewife's role - wifing and mothering.

The course will depend heavily upon informed student participation. There will also be two medium length (8 - 10 pages) analytic papers and a take-home final exam assigned. Class participation will be worth 20%; first assignment, 25%; second assignment, 30%; take-home final exam, 25%.

Required Reading: Ellen Malos, The Politics of Housework
Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse
Jane Lazarre, The Mother Knot
Additional readings will be available in class (at cost to the student) and on reserve in the Library.