

Is It Okay for Men and Women to Have Different Roles?

Around the world women do more unpaid work than men. The Gates Foundation says that needs to change in order to “unlock the potential of women”, according to a recent article for the [New York Times](#).

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development says that worldwide women spend “an average of 4.5 hours a day on unpaid work, including grocery shopping, child care and laundry”—more than twice as much as men do. In the United States, women spend an average of 4.1 hours per day on unpaid work versus an average of 2.7 for men.

The Gates Foundation wants to change this global disparity:

“When the time women spend on unpaid work shrinks to three hours a day from five hours, their labor force participation increases 10 percent, according to the O.E.C.D. When women are not able to go to school, their children are less healthy and more likely to stay in poverty. Women could do more paid work and get more education if men did more unpaid work, or if both did fewer chores.

‘We need to call work what it is – work – whether you do it at home or whether you do it out in the labor force, and then give men and women options to choose what they want to do,’ Ms. [Melinda] Gates said.”

Their plan to address the “time poverty” that results from unpaid work includes providing contraceptives and cellphones to women in developing countries, as well as encouraging cultural change by promoting men taking on more unpaid work.

While Melinda Gates’s emphasis on the ability to choose how to

work is worthwhile, the effort to simply reduce women's unpaid work may miss the mark.

Unpaid work is most often tied to motherhood, hence the Gates's emphasis on contraceptives. Yet, for many women, motherhood does "unlock their potential" in a way that paid work cannot.

Perhaps the problem is not the amount of unpaid work women do, but the lack of respect for it in modern society.

Image: Anthropologie