

Dust

What is dust? I looked it up in Wikipedia online and read everything about it, from dust at home to dust in outer space. Did you know that dust is the reason most computers crash? Despite all I read, I suspect that no one really knows what dust is.

Dusting was my least favorite chore when I was a girl. Dust on the Venetian blinds in my childhood home was a fine, white powder. Now my husband and I live in Manhattan, where there is vehicular traffic and air pollution. We use a special long-handled mop to remove clumps of greasy, black dirt off our kitchen walls.

Some scientists say that dust is really dead skin cells sloughed off our human bodies. I mentioned this dead-skin-cell theory of dust to a friend of mine, and he said: “Hogwash!” It is rare to hear anyone in New York City say *hogwash*, but this man was born in an agricultural state, where, presumably, pigs are actually washed.

In English we can say the same thing in many different ways. Someone from Brooklyn might say, of the dead-skin-cell theory of dust: “No shit!” or “Bullshit!” People from Brooklyn are known for their earthy speech. A cultured person might say, “That’s absurd!” referring to the surreal quality of modern life. Someone else might say, “You don’t say.” This is a rather cool statement, similar to: “I hear you.” Another person might say, “*Tell* me about it,” which would be an invitation for you to continue speaking—maybe about how much you hate to do your housework.

Hearing about dust mites, the microscopic animals that are said to live in bedding and feed off dust, an over-emotional person might say: “That’s the craziest thing I’ve ever heard!” I don’t want to be the one to tell you this, but dust mites really do exist.

“That’s ridiculous” or “That sounds ridiculous” are good, general statements of surprised disapproval or disbelief.

Who does the dusting in New York City? A working man usually hires a cleaning service to visit his apartment for one day a week when he is not home. A cleaning woman will come and run a vacuum cleaner around, do the laundry, and dust for a fee of \$70. Sometimes whole families form cleaning services, and a mother might show up with her daughter and husband. While the mother cleans the stove, the daughter dusts the blinds, and the husband washes the floors.

The typical working woman is less likely to hire a cleaning service, but I have never met a successful businesswoman or busy professional woman who did not use the services of a good housekeeper at least once a week.

Many ordinary people cannot afford maids, however, or they don’t want strangers in their homes. In the United States, both men and women clean and dust. Enlightened men do not want to use their female companions as domestic servants, and the modern woman stands up for herself. Sometimes a man agrees to be a househusband, and that means he stays home, cooks, and raises the children, while his wife goes out to work. I know how unbelievable this role reversal might sound to people living in different cultures, but I assure you that what I am saying is absolutely true. We don’t have rules about these matters, so every couple works things out between themselves.

I have observed that men do cleaning tasks more efficiently than women. Men tend not to give housework more time and attention than it really deserves. They tackle most cleaning jobs with a spray cleaner in one hand and a dust cloth or paper towel in the other, and they are finished in a few minutes. Many men live alone or with roommates.

Why shouldn't they know how to do housework? As for my husband and me, we share the household chores.

If you dislike dusting, here's a way to motivate yourself to do it. Invite a friend or relative to come over. In the time before your guest arrives, you'll find yourself becoming highly motivated to clean up your home, for the obvious reason.

Questions:

- (1) Where you live, do you have to dust?
- (2) Do you enjoy doing housework?
- (3) If you are a woman, do you think men should help out more with the chores around the home?
- (4) If you are a man, what do you think about sharing or not sharing the household chores?
- (5) If you are a mother, do you think you might teach your sons as well as your daughters how to cook, do laundry, and clean the house, or would that be impossible for some reason?