Women's Work: Its Irreplaceability and Exploitability

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Only during the last fifty years in Britain has
a wife become the sole servant in the family

—Carole Pateman (1988b, 127)

Throughout her distinguished career, Carole Pateman has been sensitizing us to the importance of economic security in underwriting people's full participation in the political and social life of their community.¹

A precondition for securing economic security for women, in particular, is the recognition of the peculiar nature and value of the work that they do in society: a recognition, as Pateman puts it in her essay "The Patriarchal Welfare State," "that *as women* they have specific capacities, talents, needs and concerns"; that "their unpaid work providing welfare could be seen, as Wollstonecraft saw women's tasks as mothers, as women's work *as citizens*, just as their husband's paid work is central to men's citizenship" (1988b, 198, 197).

It is important that women's unpaid work be recognized as work—as productive labor—and valued as such. But it is equally important to recognize the *distinctiveness* of the productive contributions often lumped together under the category of "women's work."

Important though it is to get women's unpaid household labor properly counted in the national accounts or gross national product, it is important also to recognize that merely bringing those contributions under the measuring rod of money misses much that matters. It is not just that that metric miscounts the value of that work. It also inevitably mischaracterizes that work in certain ways, ways that are crucial to the dynamics of household formation

This chapter is in many ways a companion to my earlier collaborations with Nancy Folbre (Folbre and Goodin 2004) and Diane Gibson (Goodin and Gibson 2002). For conversations on these themes over many years, I am grateful to them, to Eva Kittay—and of course to Carole Pateman.

1. Represented, most recently, in her work in support of "basic income": Pateman 2004.

and functioning, and even more crucial (as I shall show) in household dissolution.

This in a nutshell is my central claim: The same features that make households valuable (to both the men and the women in them) make women exploitable within them. And I think I can show that in a way that even the most hard-bitten "Chicago economist" would have to accept.

"Chicago economics" is of course just shorthand for the market liberalism that has dominated mainstream social policy discourses for a quarter century, dating from the rise of Reagan and Thatcher. Its ethos is starkly individualist and radically subjectivist, with preferences and choices based on them driving social behavior (Hakim 2000). The slogan of the Chicago School in general is "free to choose" (Friedman and Friedman 1980), parodied by Roemer (1988) as "free to lose." But there is a distinctively "Chicago economics" way of looking at the family that I shall here be particularly concerned to critique. Its chief exponent, Gary Becker (1976, chap. 11; 1981), argues for a sharp division of labor within the family, in which the higher paid spouse (usually the husband) does all the household's paid labor while the lower paid spouse (usually the wife) does all the household work. Becker and his "Chicago economics" followers think that that is a "rational" way to organize your household, on the grounds that that way of organizing the family minimizes the total number of hours the household as a whole spends on paid plus unpaid work. But such ways of thinking misrepresents the distinctive nature of women's caring work within the family, which is irreplaceable and exploitable in ways to which Carole Pateman is sensitive but market liberals and Chicago economists are not.

Unpaid Household Labor

A major portion of women's labor is unpaid household labor. Being unpaid, it is unpriced. Being unpriced, it is uncouned in ordinary national-accounting conventions and undervalued by the standards of commercialized society, according to which only the countable counts, or anyway it counts for far more than the uncountable (Waring 1988; Schor 1992, chap. 4).

Natural though that now seems to some, it was not always so (Folbre 1991; 1994, pt. 2). As Carole Pateman reminded us in her discussion of "Wives, slaves and wage slaves" in *The Sexual Contract*:

The construction of the male worker as "breadwinner" and his wife as his "dependent" can be charted in the classifications of the Census

in Britain and Australia. In the Census of 1851 in Britain, women employed in unpaid domestic work were "placed . . . in one of the productive classes along with paid work of a similar kind." This classification changed after 1871, and by 1911 unpaid housewives had been separated from the economically active population. . . . The Australians divided up the population more decisively than the British, and the 1891 Census was based on two categories of "breadwinner" and "dependent." Unless explicitly stated otherwise, women's occupation was classed as domestic, and domestic workers were put in the dependent category. (Pateman 1988b, 137)

Thus was cast in statistical cement the view that "housework is not 'work'": the view that "work takes place [only] in the men's world of capitalism and workplaces" (Pateman 1988b, 136).

Accounting for All of Women's Work

Feminist economists have launched a campaign to crack that statistical cement, reforming national accounts statistics on precisely this point (Waring 1988). They have made some real headway, enlisting the support of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) no less (Beckerman 1978; Goldschmidt-Clermont and Pagnossin-Aligisakis 1995). Several countries are now attempting to produce "satellite accounts" designed to include, first and foremost, the value of "home production" (unpaid household labor) alongside more marketized measures of economic activity in fuller national accounts (Holloway et al. 2002).

These measures are problematic in myriad ways, of course. Not least among them is how to fix a monetary value for activities, like unpaid household labor, that do not fall under the measuring rod of money in the ordinary course of events. It is ordinarily thought that there are fundamentally just two options: an "opportunity cost" method that values the time spent in unpaid household labor at the rate of pay that that person could (given her human capital characteristics) command in the paid labor market; or a "replacement cost" method that values unpaid household labor at the price the household would have to pay to hire in someone else to perform the same services.²

2. Those two are both input-based valuations. There is a less-discussed output-based alternative: take what it would cost to purchase the service (a restaurant meal, for example), subtract the costs of capital and raw materials required to provide that service, and assign the residual as the value of the labor input. Under this approach, the value of labor is unconnected to actual wage rates. I am grateful to Nancy Folbre for this explication (cf. Ironmonger 1996; Holloway, Short and Tempkin 2002).

These two approaches differ in many respects, not least in "cost to whom?" "Opportunity cost" represents the cost to the individual herself: the earnings she has to forego in order to provide the service. "Replacement cost" represents more the "cost to society" of her doing it, rather than buying in substitutes (Folbre 2005).

Unsurprisingly, therefore, two methods can differ dramatically in the values that they assign to the same activity. Imagine a corporate lawyer who spends five hours a week cooking and cleaning her house—activities that she could in principle contract out to hired help. On the "opportunity cost" method, her five hours a week of unpaid household labor would be valued at her hourly wage rate net of tax (say, \$200 per billable hour, or \$1,000 in total). On the "replacement cost" method, those five hours a week would be valued only at what it would cost to get the cheapest cook-housekeeper to perform the same services (\$20 an hour, say, or \$100 in total).

There are things to be said for each way of doing the calculation (more of which shortly). But from the hardheaded Chicago economist's point of view, the choice might be thought to be easy. By a simple extension of Becker's (1976, chap. 11; 1981) basic logic sketched above, if the woman could earn the cost of a maid's wages in less time than it would have taken her to do the jobs the maid does for her, then the total number of hours she (and her household, as a whole) spends in paid and unpaid labor would be minimized.³

In cases like the corporate lawyer's, where "opportunity cost" exceeds "replacement cost," the Chicago economist would think that the "replacement cost" method of valuing her unpaid household labor simply *has* to be the right method, given the purposes of national accounts statistics. Here is the Chicago economist's reasoning: if the corporate lawyer could have purchased the same (*exactly* the same) services from someone else at lower cost than providing them herself, then bearing the extra cost of providing them herself was a "pure consumption act" on her part. National accounts statistics count production, not consumption.⁴

People always value what they have more than its market price. (Otherwise

3. Note the National Academy panel (Abraham and Mackie 2004, 28–34) takes a more moderate line, discussed below.

4. Conversely, in cases where "opportunity cost" is below "replacement cost," the Chicago economist would reckon that "opportunity cost" is the obviously right method, instead. To the Chicago economist's way of thinking, if women who could do the job more cheaply themselves choose to hire it out nonetheless, the difference (what they paid for those replacement services, less what it would have cost them to provide those services themselves) is once again a "pure consumption" act on the part of the women involved. That does not belong in the national accounts, either.

they would have sold it at that market price.) But no one thinks that national accounts statistics should try to figure in the value of all the extra pleasure, above and beyond their market price, that people's cars and homes give them. National accounts are a measure of *production*, and economic activity more generally—of the national capacity to enjoy welfare, not of the levels of welfare actually enjoyed.⁵

So what's wrong with that analysis? Well, one thing might be a general worry about "self-exploitation" (or worse). One cannot help but wonder why a corporate lawyer who spends almost every hour God gives her slaving away at the office should *also* put in lots of time slaving over the stove and at the vacuum, when she could hire in help to do those tasks. Those suspicions are exacerbated by dramatic evidence of waged women doing a "second shift" at home: time-use surveys invariably show that their unpaid labor hours do not decrease by anything like as much as their paid labor hours increase; and their partners' unpaid labor hours increase only very modestly.⁶ One suspects some perverse sociological-cum-psychological dynamic might be at work, such that "refusing to do the housework" or "hiring in help" are effectively not options for women even if they go out to paid work—or, anyway, they are much less eligible options, given the social or marital disapprobation attached to them.⁷

One striking piece of evidence in support of that suspicion is this. The time that a woman spends in unpaid household labor declines the more time she spends in paid labor: it declines less than hour-for-hour, as I have said; but it nonetheless declines, just as we would expect. But here is the interesting wrinkle. Once the woman's earnings exceed those of the man in the household, her unpaid household labor time declines *less quickly* as her paid labor time increases than it did when her earnings were lower than her partner's (Bittman et al. 2002).

That is just the opposite of what the Chicago School economist would expect. "The higher your market value, the more time you are spending on things outside the market rather than realizing your higher market potential? Crazy!"

5. The same can be said of "income" itself, even at the individual level: how much income someone has tells us her *potential* for well-being; but her actual well-being depends on how she spends it; a rich miser has a high income but an objectively low standard of living (Ringen 1988).

6. Pateman (1988b, 128–29) notes this in her discussion of the "patriarchal welfare state." For further evidence, see: Szalai 1975; Gershuny and Robinson 1988; Hochschild 1989, 1997; Baxter and Gibson 1990; Gershuny 2000, chaps. 3, 5.

7. Pateman 2004, 99. Collectively these enter Folbre's (1994, chap. 2) economic model of the family as the "structure of constraints."

While Chicago economists might be puzzled, Chicago sociologists would not be. Many men fancy themselves head of the household, and they are psychologically threatened when their womenfolk earn more than they do. To purchase domestic peace their women have to reassure them by "overachieving" in their traditional domestic roles.

Chicago economists, of course, pride themselves on expansive utility functions, capable of accommodating any awkward social fact by adding yet one more argument to the already long equation. Here, the response would presumably be simply to say, "Well, in this case the 'replacement costs' include not only the housekeeper's wage but also the disapprobation she would suffer from hiring a housekeeper" (Becker 1976, chap. 12; Brennan and Pettit 2004).

It is not only external disapprobation, from within the household or the wider society, that increases her costs if she does not provide unpaid household services herself, however. Women are sometimes also "prisoners of love," in this further sense: they value more than their partners do the household services and the affective sentiments they betoken (Folbre 2001; England and Folbre 2001). That puts them at a bargaining disadvantage within the household when it comes to any arguments over how much unpaid household work is to be done and by whom.

This does not necessarily depend on bargaining of the ordinarily sordid sense. The same disadvantage accrues in the absence of any hard bargaining. Imagine a case of completely sincere, nonstrategic preference revelation: the man simply puts in as many hours on housework as he thinks necessary and the woman puts in as many more as she thinks necessary. The woman does more because she *cares* more. And while in some sense the man benefits from that, it is not a benefit he would himself have valued highly enough to provide himself (Pollak and Watcher 1975; Lundberg and Pollak 1994).

Purely a Preference?

Chicago economist's point of view would be that the woman does more housework because she *prefers* it (or what is achieved by it) more (Hakim 2000). And that is just to say, once again, that the extra unpaid household labor she does, or the extra price she pays for it, is just a consumption act. She does it because, in her view, it makes her better off. That is at least on balance good for her, not bad: otherwise she would not have done it.⁸ In short, instead of

8. Canvassed by Abraham and Mackie (2004, 28–32), who transcend that analysis in their final conclusions.

regarding child care and other forms of unpaid household labor as labor—as a *cost*—the Chicago economist invites us to regard “children as pets.”⁹

The Chicago economist would go on to insist that the man in her household is not really taking advantage of her, either—at least assuming he is being completely sincere and nonstrategic in the expression of his preferences (though how would we, or even she, ever really know?). Although he certainly benefits from the extra unpaid labor she does in the household, it is not a benefit that he values highly enough to have paid the cost of providing it himself.

It is obviously unfair for people to impose benefits on us that we did not seek and do not want, and then simply send us the bill. Under the law of restitution or unjust enrichment, you have to give back a set of encyclopedias delivered to your house that you did not order; but under that same body of law, you cannot be made to pay for goods you did not order. Yet that is what the Chicago economist sees happening when a woman who values a tidy home more than her man expects recompense from him for doing more tidying than the man himself would have if left to his own devices.

One way to reply to the Chicago economist's insistence that the extra unpaid household labor that women do should be counted as a “pure consumption act” on their part—purely a preference, like any other—is to question where those preferences come from. Are they “really hers” or have they somehow been implanted in her (by social conditioning, manipulative advertising, and such like)? That is how Pateman (2004, 99) replies to arguments that women do more unpaid caring labor and men more paid labor “merely because of differences in individual tastes or preferences.”¹⁰

Even accepting that all preferences (like all beliefs) have in some sense “causal origins,” however, I am inclined ordinarily to say (with Lerner 1972) that “they’re hers now.” To refuse to respect her preferences, just because they have causal origins outside her, is to deny her identity and agency in a way she would be entitled to feel is morally offensive (Anderson 1999). Clearly

9. In Nancy Folbre's (2001, chap. 5) delightful phrase: as she put it in a more sober moment, “contrary to neoclassical theory, children are not consumer durables” (Folbre 1982, 325).

10. Here she is critiquing Philippe Van Parijs (1995), whose “example is that the partner who most strongly prefers tidiness will make sure that the home is tidy.” But, Pateman (2004, 99) replies, “female partners do not by some quirk happen to prefer tidiness more strongly than their male partners. The institution of marriage and social beliefs about what it means to be a ‘wife’ or ‘husband’ have vanished in Van Parijs's analysis, and there are merely two individuals, indistinguishable except for their different tastes for tidy surroundings. His theoretical approach in *Real Freedom for All* precludes analysis of the structure of relations between the sexes.”

there are cases—posthypnotic suggestions and the like—where we might think that it nonetheless is right to repudiate the preferences as “not really her own.” But this does not seem an attractive strategy in the general case.

A stronger reply, I think, would be to mount a challenge to the “individualistic subjectivism” at the heart of the Chicago economist’s theory of value.¹¹ That can be challenged in either (or both) of two ways. One way is to challenge that theory of value for being too “individualistic,” while still accepting its subjectivism. The second way is to challenge that theory for being too “subjectivist,” arguing instead for a more “objectivist” theory of value.

The second strategy is easier, and more obvious. There, we simply say that it is objectively good for more unpaid labor to be done in the household—at least of certain sorts, such as raising the children, for example—than the man would, left to his own devices, prefer to do.¹² Maybe it would even be a failure of objective moral duty for the man to neglect his children in the ways that, left to his own devices, he says he would. That is not to deny the sincerity of his protestations. Here, we are accepting that his preferences are as he says they are. We are simply saying that his subjective preferences fail to match the requirements of The Right or The Good, and that those are objective values that trump his mere preferences in cases of conflict.

The first strategy for rebutting the Chicago economist’s theory of value is more subtle. This strategy involves accepting that all value is subjective, but insisting that goods can be subjectively valuable to us collectively rather than to us as isolated individuals. In extremis, this might involve notions of collective minds and irreducibly social goods (Taylor 1985). But we need not go nearly that far to mount an effective critique of the Chicago economist’s theory of value on this score. We might simply say that the rest of society—understood just as various others outside your household—take a view about how much unpaid household labor your household does.¹³ Clearly, we all have a collective preference over how well people raise their children, for one obvious example (Coleman 1993). And if a father proposes to spend less time than we collectively prefer seeing to it that his children are properly reared, our collective preference should trump his personal predilections in the matter (Folbre 1994; England and Folbre 1999).

11. Other forms of “unpaid household labor” (ironing socks, washing windows, etc.) may not generate goods that are objectively good from a social point of view.

12. This is one way of reading Pateman’s (1989, 197) allusion to Wollstonecraft, quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

13. This is another reading of Pateman’s allusion to Wollstonecraft, quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

Those are two perfectly good ways of explaining why a woman who does more unpaid household labor than the man in her household thinks necessary might still be said to be performing socially useful (objectively good, socially preferred) productive labor, rather than just engaging in some sort of "pure consumption act" purely for her own benefit. But it does not yet explain the accounting puzzle with which we began.

Those responses to the individualistic subjectivism of the Chicago economist's theory of value both provide reasons for thinking that more labor should be done in the household than the man would prefer. But both those arguments specify an *amount* of labor that ought be done in the household, not *by whom* it ought be done. Neither of those arguments explains why the extra labor should necessarily be done by the woman herself (or by a member of the household itself, more generally), rather than by hired help. That was the puzzle with which we began: why the corporate lawyer ought not be regarded as performing a self-indulgent act of "pure consumption" in cleaning her own home, when it would have been so much cheaper to hire commercial cleaners.

To address that question, it seems, we really do (as I foreshadowed) have to treat certain sorts of goods produced by members of the household for the household as being different in kind from those that can be procured on the open market. Then we can say that the commercial lawyer is right to produce those goods herself, because there is something in the nature of those goods that they can be produced only by her (cf. Folbre and Nelson 2000). The unpaid household activities we are inclined to code as "caring labor" are valued in part as "labors of love," and to that extent they are not labors for which there are any close market substitutes (Kittay 1998).

It is a general, but underappreciated, fact about goods in general that they rarely have literally a perfect substitute. Any given good displays a wide array of "characteristics," for which they might be valued and under which description they might be chosen (Lancaster 1966; Sen 1980, 1985). Goods that are "close substitutes" for one another under one description (in respect of one valued characteristic) will often not be close substitutes at all for one another under other descriptions (in respect of other characteristics that might be valued instead).

It should therefore come as no surprise to any moderately reflective economist that substitutability might be imperfect when it comes to goods with as many potentially salient characteristics as has labor in the intimate setting of the household (Zelizer 2000). And if the labor is such that she alone can perform it, then her own "opportunity costs" rather than the "replacement

costs" of ostensible market substitutes is the right way to value her labor (Abraham and Mackie 2004, 32-34, rec. 1.4).

Why Inside the Household?

There is another reply to Chicago economists' disparagement of highly waged women doing their own housework, rather than hiring in help, that takes the argument more deeply into their home territory.

For this, recall the standard economic theory of the firm, owing to the founder of the Chicago School of "law and economics," R. H. Coase (1937). Why do we have firms at all? Why does anyone ever hire anyone else, rather than just buying all that they need on the open market? The Chicago economists' answer is that firms hire employees when it is easier to monitor the quality of the labor inputs than it would be to monitor the quality of the outputs, that is, the goods they would alternatively have to buy on the open market (Coase 1937).

The standard economic theory of the firm expresses all this in terms of information and monitoring. But the same thing would be true if there were some intrinsic quality of the good that was different, if the same thing simply could not be bought on the open market.

So play the Chicago economics game, for a moment, and think of the family as a firm. Ask the Chicago economist's question about the firm: why internalize production within the household-cum-firm, rather than just hiring in goods and services from outside? Why hire an employee (for which read, "a partner") rather than just buying in the goods and services she or he would produce?

Well, from the Chicago economics perspective, there are basically just two possible answers. One is that you could not obtain the same goods and services from the market. The other is that you could not be as sure of the quality of those goods and services if bought on the open market as you could if they were produced within the family.

But that then means that the "replacement cost" approach to valuing unpaid household labor simply has to be wrong. Replacements cannot be had, or anyway cannot reliably be had.¹⁴

From that it follows, by the Chicago School's own economic logic, that we cannot then say that women are just exploiting themselves, putting in more

14. Replacement cost is, at most, a lower bound on the value of her labor: and it is not even that, if her labor is literally irreplaceable.

hours than necessary in unpaid household labor, *merely* to satisfy their own preferences. They are doing at least some of it (the "caring labor" portion of it) in order to produce something that they could not, or not reliably, buy in from outside the household.

To be sure, they would not do it unless they wanted to do it (or wanted something that doing so does for them). The point remains that it is a productive act, an act producing something of value in the only way it can reliably be produced. It cannot be disparaged as a pure consumption act, like buying a Ferrari rather than a Ford—a preference one ought be welcome to indulge, but for which one ought reasonably expect to pay a price.

Asymmetrical Exits

So far I have been arguing that unpaid household labor is not just undervalued in the national accounts but that it is badly valued—because wrongly characterized—by either of the ways economists have for fitting it into the national accounts. Asking whether "opportunity costs" exceed "replacement costs"—whether it would be cheaper for the woman to hire in help with the housework or to do it herself—assumes that her unpaid household labor is fully replaceable by the labor of someone else from outside the household. Much of it undoubtedly is. But much of the characteristically "caring" labor of the household must, by its nature, be done by an intimate who "cares."¹⁵ That is one important reason why unpaid household labor is different from the ordinary labor market, and indeed one important reason why the household exists at all.

You Can't Take It with You

Just as the inputs into what Chicago economists might dub the "household production function" are different, so too are its outputs. The investment of caring labor is, I have argued, a productive (not just a consumption) act. But what is thereby produced is as peculiar to the particular household as are the inputs that produced it.

Economists generally distinguish between "fixed" and "mobile" capital. An

15. Zelizer 2000. For the sake of the analysis I am here developing, I continue to concentrate on that limiting case. For discussions of the more complex circumstances of the real world, see Folbre 1994; Kittay 1998; England and Folbre 1999; Folbre and Nelson 2000; Folbre 2001.

example of the first is a manufacturing plant: once it has been built somewhere, it is hard to relocate elsewhere. An example of the second is human capital: once you have an engineering degree, you can take it wherever you want to build a bridge.

Now, the products of "caring labor" within a household are particular to that household and the people entwined within the caring relationships within it. A mother's investment in caring for her family is not easily transferable to some other family. In that sense, the products of "caring labor" are more like a manufacturing plant than an engineering degree.

Caring labor can also be said to be characterized by "asset specificity." You need one specific set of assets (knowledge, experiences, attitudes) in one caring relationship, which is very different from the set of such assets you need in some other caring relationship. To some limited extent "good parenting" might be a skill that is transferable from one family to another; but to a substantially larger extent, the knowledge, experiences, and attitudes that make you a good parent of one set of children cannot possibly transfer to a completely different set of children.

Economists tell us that workers would rationally invest in acquiring job-specific skills only if they have some substantial guarantee of continuity in that same job over a long period. If they have no such guarantee, it would be much more rational for them to acquire more transferable skills that they can use in any job they find themselves in (Hall and Soskice 2001). If we want to encourage cultivation of job-specific skills—the sorts of assets specific to caring well for this set of people, in the household example—we have to give workers reasonable expectations of being in those positions for a moderately long time.

Conversely, once workers are in positions characterized by high asset specificity and relatively fixed capital investments, they are substantially less mobile than they would otherwise have been. They *can* still leave, of course: we are not talking about a literal slavery contract here. But the greater the ease of leaving the greater a proportion of your capital you can take with you and use productively elsewhere.

Economists are familiar with these issues in economic settings that are more standard. They know that it is easier to impose high taxes on fixed capital than on mobile capital that could easily flee to lower-tax locales, for example. Economistic analysts of the family should simply recognize the corollary of that, as applied to the family.

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Breaking Becker Families

Remember the basic Chicago economics story about the family. The rational way to organize it, Gary Becker (1976, chap. 12; 1981) tells us, is for whichever partner has the higher wage rate to do all the household's paid labor, and whichever partner has the lower wage rate to do all the household's unpaid labor. And for once, sociology tracks economics tolerably well: the woman in the household usually has the lower wage rate, and usually does indeed do the bulk of the caring labor within the household (even if she also performs paid labor).

But consider now the consequences of this division of labor, should the household split-up. The partner who has engaged in preponderantly caring labor ends up with relatively more assets that are specific to that particular household; her investments in it are relatively more "fixed," tied to that particular household and not easily transferred elsewhere. The upshot, then, is that a household hyperefficiently following Becker's prescription ends up being more of a trap for whichever partner (typically the female) who does the bulk of the unpaid caring labor, than it does for the other partner whose paid labor experiences and skills are easily transferable to any other household (Lundberg and Pollak 2003).

There are of course many other forces tying women to unpaid household labor than are captured by Chicago economists' models of a hyperefficient division of labor within the household (Folbre 1994, pt. 2). Historically "marriage bars" (restrictions on hiring married women and antinepotism laws) and trade union resistance have limited married women's employment options outside the home (Schor 1991, 95). To their credit, Chicago economists oppose such discrimination; to their discredit, they do so on grounds of inefficiency rather than injustice (Becker 1957). But whereas Chicago economists can join in opposition to marriage bars and trade union bans as unfortunate sociological facts without any economic justification, they cannot so easily dismiss the source of women's disadvantage that I here identify as merely some "unfortunate sociological fact." Instead, it is a direct corollary of their own efficiency-maximizing prescriptions.

This argument is different from the ordinary sociological one in another way as well. The standard story is that women are trapped in the home, and in unhappy homes all too often, by the lack of opportunities in the paid labor market. Marriage bars and trade union bans prevent them from getting jobs and work experience that would enable them to secure a living wage were

their marriage to break up. The lack of any realistic alternative to relying on their existing partner's breadwinning is what traps women, in the standard account.

The account I have here been offering has implications beyond that, however. Not only might women find it harder to secure employment at a living wage outside the home, and be discouraged from leaving for that reason. They are also discouraged from leaving because many of their assets are tied to their particular household, and many of the investments they have sunk into this household are fixed in it. In this account, the disadvantage that women suffer due to specializing as Chicago economists would have them do in unpaid caring labor in the household is that it leaves them with "sticky," immobile capital. And it is that, rather than (or in addition to) blocked labor options, that disadvantages women in the break-up of Becker-style families.

Exploitation, Self- and Otherwise

When Chicago economists see a woman doing unpaid household labor that she could have replaced more cheaply with hired help, they code it as a consumption act. (She must be cooking dinner herself, rather than buying take-aways, because she enjoys cooking.) When sociologists observe the same phenomenon, they are more likely to code it as socialization. (She does it because it is socially expected of her, and she cannot or will not go against those expectations.) When psychologists observe the same phenomenon, they might be tempted to code it as "self-exploitation." (Women, particularly "working women," internalize feelings of guilt that drive them to it.)

No doubt elements of all those explanations are true, in mixtures that vary from person to person and situation to situation. But there is another element of exploitation at work, beyond the narrowly psychological sense of "self-exploitation" (Bubeck 1995).

In his brilliant generalization of the basic Marxian model of exploitation, John Roemer (1982) suggests that we can differentiate a whole range of theories of exploitation, depending simply on "what you are allowed to take with you when you go." By setting the fallback position people would be in were they to withdraw from society, those withdrawal rules set the baseline for bargaining and exchanges that occur within society.

Different views about what counts as exploitation correspond to different views about what you should be able to withdraw when you go. From a capitalist perspective, the just withdrawal rule would be one that allows you to take your own labor power and your own capital with you when you go. By

that capitalist standard, feudalism is exploitative because it ties serfs to lords, not allowing them to leave and take with them even their own labor power. From a socialist perspective, the just withdrawal rule would be one that allows you to take your labor power and your per capita share of social capital with you when you go. By that socialist standard, capitalism is exploitative because it allows workers to take with them only their own labor, rather than their per capita share of total social capital.

Consider now an analogous "feminist withdrawal rule." From this feminist perspective, the just withdrawal rule would be one that allows both partners to take an equal share of all that has been invested in the household when they leave.¹⁶ By that standard, it is exploitative for the man to be able to withdraw a larger portion of his investments than the woman, simply because there are more "caring" investments in her portfolio.

People who are exploited are not physically forced to do something. When exploiting them, we certainly take advantage of them. But they are seemingly complicit in that, as well. They are given a choice: in the classically Marxian example, to work for increasingly miserable wages, or to starve outright; in the case of a woman with no marketable skills, to work in the home on whatever terms her husband sets, or to subsist on state support (Folbre 1982). The fact that housewives get what (in some sense) they chose seems to exonerate others from any blame for bad outcomes they suffer in consequence. Thus, the woman who spends more time in unpaid household labor than the Chicago economist tells her is really necessary has, on this model, only (or mainly) herself to blame.

Exploitation, on this analysis, is defined by reference to the "terms of exiting": what you can take with you when you go. The above examples all deal in terms of what you are *allowed* to take with you, how much capital, how much labor power. But there are also some other things that would be simply impossible to take with you when you go.

One such example would be assets specific to the particular household and the investments fixed in it by a woman's caring labor. Insofar as those are things that she cannot take with her when she goes, that forms the baseline for subsequent interactions within the household. She makes choices that are optimal from her own perspective, given that baseline. But what counts as "good" for her—an improvement on that baseline—obviously depends on where that baseline has been set.

16. This "symmetrical" rule governing the breakup of the family would seem to be a natural corollary of feminist prescriptions for "symmetry" within ongoing families (Thompson 1825; Young and Wilmott 1973).

The fact that that baseline allows her to take a smaller proportion of her investments in the household when she goes, compared to the man who has made fewer household-specific investments, makes her subject to exploitation (let's call it "gender exploitation"). Just as wage-laborers suffer capitalist exploitation by virtue of the fact that they cannot take their per capita share of social capital with them when they go, so too do women experience gender exploitation by virtue of the fact that they cannot take the full products of their caring labor with them when they go. Even if they take the children with them when they leave, women's heavier investments in "relationship work" will inevitably be lost with the dissolution of the relationship. If women decide not to leave as a consequence, then any bargains they strike within the household will be struck from that baseline and inflected by the fact that they could take less of their investments were they to go: just as the exploitative wage bargains struck by workers under capitalism are struck from the baseline of the capitalist withdrawal rule and the bargaining disadvantage under which that places propertyless wage-laborers.

Conclusion

A disproportionate share of women's work is in unpaid household labor. That is just as Chicago economists would recommend. At least some of that unpaid household labor is valued by those for whom it is done in part because of who is doing it rather than what is done. That is just a plain fact about the nature of caring work.

Insofar as the unpaid household labor is valued because of who is doing it rather than what is done, there are no close market substitutes for that person's unpaid labor in that household. That is not only a problem for keepers of the national accounts in trying to assess the value of that labor. It is more importantly a problem for women themselves, insofar as they cannot enjoy the full advantages of increasing participation in paid labor that they could have done in an economist's ideal world with perfect substitutes. However much they earn on the market, it cannot fully buy them out of the second shift at home.

Nonsubstitutable labor inputs often give rise to nontransferable outputs. Investments of caring labor cannot be withdrawn in the same way other investments in the household can be. Insofar as that is true, and insofar as women are the ones whose investments are more of that form, that makes

women more exploitable within the household. They are disadvantaged relative to their male partners by the rules ("facts of life") governing household breakup; and (assuming with ordinary economic models of bargaining that that "nonagreement point" is the baseline from which bargaining proceeds) that disadvantage is carried over into the way life is lived within the ongoing household as well.

What the Chicago economist prescribes as a matter of efficiency feminists rightly see as a source of the exploitability of women. The gendered division of unpaid (especially caring) labor within the household renders women susceptible to exploitation and forces them into overtime. Even Chicago economists would have to admit as much, if they only noticed these peculiar features of "women's work" within the household. Caring work is different—and even Chicago economists should care.

The policy implications of all this will be familiar enough. Men and women (and indeed all adults) should share equally in caring labor; otherwise, caregivers will be exploitable and quite probably exploited, even if they are "paid." Pay is important: there should be "basic income" for all, as Carole Pateman (2004) has recently argued. But behavior change is also needed—caring labor should be more equal, as Carole Pateman (1988a; 1988b, chap. 6; 1989) has long argued. There is nothing surprising in those conclusions themselves. The surprise is only that even Chicago economists—devoted though they may be to the advantages of specialization and division of labor—ought to be committed to that cause.

In *The Sexual Contract*, Pateman (1988b, 8) wrote: "Criticism . . . has been directed at exploitation, . . . in . . . that wives are not paid at all for their labour in the home. . . . However, exploitation is possible precisely because . . . contracts about property in the person place right of command in the hands of one party to the contract. Capitalists can exploit workers and husbands can exploit wives because workers and wives are constituted as subordinates through the employment contract and the marriage contract." Even after the most brutal excesses associated with allocation of "property in the person" have been overcome, women remain importantly exploitable because of the peculiar sort of caring labor they perform and the distinctive sorts of relationship-specific human capital they build up in the process. The same thing that makes women's work within the household irreplaceable renders the women doing it exploitable. Truly they can be seen as "prisoners of love" (Folbre 2001), in ways that follow on directly from Carole Pateman's pathbreaking insights.

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