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Assigning care: Gender norms and economic outcomes

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In many different cultures, being female is associated with care for others. Women are generally held to higher standards of family responsibility than men. A daughter who neglects her parents, a wife who leaves a husband, a mother who abandons a child — all are considered more culpable than a son, husband or father who does the same. Gender norms governing interpretation of appropriate behaviour for women and men are closely linked to socially constructed concepts of familial altruism and individual self-interest. Women who seem highly independent or ambitious, like men who seem highly dependent or family-oriented, are often considered sexually unattractive. In the sociological literature, the interpersonal enactment of culturally specified roles is sometimes termed "doing gender" (Berk, 1985; Brines, 1994).

Doing gender typically involves assigning care. No matter who performs it, caring labour is expensive (England and Folbre, 1999). A parent who devotes time and energy to "family-specific" activities typically experiences a significant reduction in lifetime earnings (Joshi, 1990 and 1998; Waldfogel, 1997). The human capital that housewives and/or househusbands acquire is less transportable than that of a partner who specializes in market work, leaving them in a weaker bargaining position in the family and economically vulnerable to separation or divorce (Braunstein and Folbre, 1999; Weitzman, 1985). Furthermore, employees in caring occupations are typically paid less than others, even controlling for a large list of other personal and job characteristics (England, 1992; England et al., 1994). Women are disproportionately concentrated in these jobs.

This article offers an interdisciplinary analysis of the relationship between caring labour, social norms and economic outcomes, and explores some of the ways in which this relationship may be modified by the process of capitalist development. The first section reviews the feminist literature on caring labour, explaining its implications for both Marxist and neoclassical economic theories. The second section focuses on gender norms, arguing that an economic

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analysis of their consequences can shed some light on their remarkable durability. The final section presents a specific example of their resistance to change, describing research on the interaction between marriage markets and labour markets that helps explain why occupational segregation remains widespread.

Caring labour

Scandinavian feminists were the first to develop and dwell on the concept of caring labour, emphasizing the ways in which it departs from more traditional economistic definitions of work (Waerness, 1987). The concept describes a type of work that requires personal attention, services that are normally provided on a face-to-face or first-name basis, often for people who cannot clearly express their own needs, such as young children, the sick or the elderly. But in addition to describing a type of work, caring labour describes an intrinsic motive for performing that work — a sense of emotional attachment and connection to the persons being cared for (Folbre, 1995). In this respect, it is closely related to another concept that has received more attention in the sociological literature — emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983). Abel and Nelson put it this way: “Caregiving is an activity encompassing both instrumental tasks and affective relations. Despite the classic Parsonian distinction between these two modes of behavior, caregivers are expected to provide love as well as labour, ‘caring for’ while ‘caring about’”(1990, p. 4). Similarly, Sara Ruddick defines “maternal thinking” as a “unity of reflection, judgement, and emotion” (1983, p. 214).

The meaning of care

The meaning of care is often mediated by prepositions. To care for someone is different from “to care about”; “to care” is distinct from “take care” which in turn means less, somehow, than to “take care of”. The *American Heritage Dictionary* gives two rather negative definitions of the noun care: (1) A burdened state of mind, as that arising from heavy responsibilities; worry. (2) Mental suffering; grief. As a verb, its first two meanings are positive: (1) To be concerned or interested. (2) To provide needed assistance or watchful supervision. The upshot may be that to be concerned or interested is to assume a burden.

But these meanings do not seem quite right. Feminist thinkers have begun to use the word care in a more specific way, to describe something more than a feeling — a responsibility. It is useful to make a distinction between “care services”, a type of work, and “caring motives”, which are intrinsic to the worker. Care services are services that involve personal contact between provider and recipient. In activities such as teaching, nursing and counselling, personal identity is important. The service provider generally learns the first name of the service recipient or client. However, the service provider does not necessarily have an emotional or social connection to the client and may work simply to be paid or to avoid being punished.

Many, though certainly not all, care services are motivated by motives more complex than pecuniary or instrumental concerns. They involve a sense of connection with the care recipient that may be based on affection, altruism or social norms of obligation and respect. In this case, the delivery of the service includes an extra component, a sense of "being cared for" that may augment and enhance the delivery of the service itself. This extra component is often present even in wage employment. Individuals often choose caring jobs because they are a means of expressing caring motives, as well as earning a living. Even if they were not initially motivated by care, workers often come to acquire affection and/or a sense of responsibility for those they care for.

In describing caring services, therefore, it is necessary to go beyond standard economic dimensions such as output or pay and attend to personal and emotional content. Whether or not someone providing caring services is partially motivated by intrinsic rather than extrinsic motives has extremely important implications for the quality of her/his work. Because the feminist analysis of care is an emerging discourse that remains somewhat underdeveloped as an economic theory, it is useful to highlight its differences from both Marxist and neoclassical economic approaches to the labour process.

Care and alienation

Scholars influenced by the Marxian tradition often squeeze caring labour into their own category of unalienated labour — production for use rather than for exchange. The implication is that caring labour flourishes in non-capitalist institutions such as the family and is necessarily attenuated by capitalist organization of work. Sue Himmelweit (1995) argues persuasively that when non-market activities are interpreted simply as a form of unpaid "work" — as, for instance, in efforts to place a market value on household production — their personal and emotional dimensions are obscured. Nel Noddings (1984) goes further, hinting that care is an activity that is intrinsically rewarding (as well as morally transcendent).

But many feminists shun overly sweet descriptions of caring labour, rejecting the implication that it is necessarily more enjoyable or fulfilling than other types of work. Indeed, much attention focuses on the contradictory dimensions of care as an activity that is frustrating as well as rewarding. Arlie Hochschild (1983) treats the demands of emotional labour as a dimension of new forms of exploitation unique to the emerging service sector.

Not just the Marxian tradition, but also the broader legacy of Weberian scholarship tends to locate caring labour in the family and the community, outside the modern sphere of the market. It follows that the expansion of market relations must undermine care, and that a return to more personal, family-based relations would restore it, an implication of much communitarian writing (Etzioni, 1988). Feminist scholars are suspicious of this implication for the obvious reason that personal relations have often been patriarchal relations. Movement away from capitalist relations of production is not necessarily movement towards less alienated or more fulfilling forms of care provision.

The line between caring and "un-caring" labour does not coincide with the line between non-market production and work for pay. Indeed, feminist scholarship emphasizes the remarkable similarity between women's responsibilities for care in the home and their responsibilities for care in paid jobs such as teaching and nursing. By emphasizing this similarity, the concept of caring labour focuses attention on the gendered character of social norms that shape the division of labour in both the family and the market. Women are expected, even required, to provide more care than men.

The new institutional economics, like most functionalist brands of sociology, interprets social norms as essentially benign devices that make it easier for societies to solve coordination problems (Schotter, 1981). Marxist theorists in both economics and sociology often interpret norms as tools of collective domination, but tend to focus on class rather than gender implications. None of these approaches tells much about how we might try to modify norms of care. Nor is it clear what overall level of care can be sustained in an economy that rewards the individual pursuit of self-interest far more generously than the provision of care for others. Marxist analyses of alienation and feminist analyses of care come from different directions, but they converge on a set of questions and concerns about the future quality of life in a capitalist marketplace in which paid care services are playing an increasingly important role.

Care and utility maximization

Neoclassical economic theory largely relies on a stylized model of rational economic man, pursuing his own self-interest. Altruism is acknowledged only within the family, where it is treated as a stylized assumption. The notion that a paid worker might "care for" the person receiving his or her services confounds the self-interest assumption. If individual X derives some utility from the welfare of individual Y, then utility-maximizing individuals must make intersubjective utility comparisons. She (and even he) must ask whether doing something that will inconvenience them will leave the person being cared for sufficiently better-off to compensate. Neoclassical theory stipulates that such intersubjective comparisons are impossible, leaving rational economic man in a something of a pickle.

The standard analysis of labour supply presumes that individuals compare the utility they gain from income with the disutility resulting from labour and stop working when these countervailing forces equalize at the margin. Caring labour implies that people get some utility from caring work itself, as well as from the improvement in the welfare of the person being cared for. It shifts attention to the parameters of utility function — attention which generally makes neoclassical economists squirm. The social construction of individual preferences suddenly becomes relevant.

Neoclassical theorists have traditionally avoided this issue by drawing a strict boundary between a world of altruism (the family) and a world of self-interest (the market). But the feminist analysis of caring labour asserts that family work may sometimes be coerced rather than altruistic, and that the choice

of paid occupations may sometimes be motivated by altruistic concern for other people. This blurring of boundaries raises extremely uncomfortable questions: Why do some people — and also some distinctive groups of people — "care" more than others? Robert Frank (1998), among others, calls attention to the importance of both emotions and altruism but stops short of exploring the ways these may be related to the social construction of gender or the changing organization of family life.

It is difficult to name a precept more central to the neoclassical vision than its confidence in individual pursuit of self-interest. This confidence has historically been lodged in the presumption that the family, existing "outside" the economy, would provide the necessary levels of altruism and care. Needless to say, this presumption has been shaken by the destabilization of the patriarchal family and the movement of wives and mothers into paid employment. Once it becomes apparent that the family is susceptible to economic reorganization and change it can no longer be so easily excluded from the larger picture. Once it is included, it becomes apparent that the larger economy has never been entirely based on the individual pursuit of self-interest. It has always depended on some provision of care for others, especially dependants.

Dependants have been almost entirely omitted from mainstream economic (and political) theory. Rational economic man is a self-sufficient adult. We can trust his choices if we assume that he has decent preferences and rational capabilities. Consumer sovereignty implies that he knows what is best for him. But even if we accept this principle for adult men and women, it obviously does not apply to young children. Nor does it apply to many of the sick or the infirm elderly. Even if rational economic man could subsist entirely on his own during part of his life span, it seems unlikely that he could either reach adulthood or survive to old age without some distinctly altruistic assistance.

Gender and norms of care

Whether approaching the concept of caring labour from the Marxist or the neoclassical economic direction the analytical path leads to pressing questions about the evolution of social norms. In recent years, economists have begun to pay more attention to this topic. However, they generally treat norms as solutions to coordination problems, rather than acknowledging the ways that they may reflect collective forms of social power (Schotter, 1981). But groups often seek to enforce norms and preferences they find beneficial. As Edna Ullmann-Margalit writes, a norm may

> be conceived of as a sophisticated tool of coercion, used by the favoured party in a status quo of inequality to promote its interest in the maintenance of this status quo. It will be considered sophisticated to the extent that the air of impersonality remains intact and successfully disguises what really underlies the partiality of norms, viz. an exercise of power (1977, p. 189).

Feminist theory emphasizes the coercive dimensions of social norms of masculinity and femininity, describing norms as important elements of gendered structures of constraint (Folbre, 1994).

Socially imposed altruism

Men as a group have much to gain by encouraging women's caring propensities. Of course, the opposite is also true: women have much to gain by enforcing norms, and preferences of caring in men. But our constructs of gendered behaviour emerged from societies in which men had far more cultural and economic power than women. The result can be described as "socially imposed altruism" or a gender-biased system of coercive socialization (Folbre and Weisskopf, 1998). Another apt phrase is "discriminatory obligation" (Ward, 1993, p. 103).

The social imposition comes about through the development of highly gendered norms of familial obligation. Regardless of the extent of innate differences between men and women, social norms create strong pressures for differentiation of roles by gender. Specifically, they assign women greater responsibility for the care of dependants, an assignment that almost literally requires altruism. Experimental studies suggest that while there are no significant overall differences in *levels* of altruism between men and women, the forms in which it is expressed are quite gendered (Kohn, 1990). Helping behaviours are highly context dependent. Men are more likely to help someone carry their laundry, women are more likely to help someone fold it. On a less banal level, men are far more likely to go to war and risk death and injury than women are. However, women are more likely to behave in helping and altruistic ways towards kin and community. Their altruism is more likely to find expression in caring labour.

A telling example is the United States General Social Survey, which includes components designed to measure adherence to traditional gender norms. Several of these components explicitly link care, altruism and femininity. Since 1972, for instance, respondents have been asked if they strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the following statement: "It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family." Note that not only are women expected to do the housework — they are expected to "take care". In surveys administered in 1972-82, 65 per cent of all respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. By 1994, only 34 per cent did so (Cherlin, 1996). This substantial decline almost certainly reflects women's rapid entrance into paid employment and their enhanced cultural ability to contest traditional norms. Yet it is striking that — in a country often considered the most "modern" in the world — a third of respondents believe that women should specialize in family care.

Attitudinal surveys such as these are seldom conducted in developing countries, but in his classic study of differential mortality by gender among children Amartya Sen (1990) points out that women often lack a concept of themselves as individuals with interests separate from those of their family members (see also Kabeer, 1994). Indeed, explicit policies of male domination may actually exert less force than cultural norms equating femininity with selflessness.

Feminist theorist Joan Tronto points out that robbing individuals of opportunities to effectively pursue their own self-interest may encourage them to

live through others, using caring as a substitute for more selfish gratification (1987, pp. 647 and 650).

Maternal altruism often seems to be stronger than paternal altruism among a number of important dimensions. Mothers generally devote a significantly larger share of their income and earnings to family needs than fathers (Benería and Roldan, 1987; Chant and Campling, 1997). Income that is controlled by women is more likely to be spent on children's health and nutrition and less likely to be spent on, say, alcohol (Dwyer and Bruce, 1988; Hoddinott, Alderman and Haddad, 1998). In many countries, a large proportion of fathers provide little or no economic support for their children (Folbre, 1994).

Why do women tend to devote more time and effort to care than men do? Sociobiologists emphasize the greater biological investment in each child made by females (Daly and Wilson, 1983). But one can concede the importance of biology without dismissing the importance of culture. Even Edward O. Wilson, the most famous advocate of sociobiology, writes that divergence in male/female behaviour is "almost always widened in later psychological development by cultural sanctions and training" (1978, p.129). Gary Becker makes a similar point in his *Treatise on the family* (1991). Women are far more likely than men to care for the infirm elderly, as well as children — hardly a pattern that can be explained by the fact that female eggs are few in number compared to male sperm.

Most societies reinforce female altruism towards family and children far more strongly than male altruism. If women "naturally" choose to specialize in care, why do societies develop coercive rules and practices that make it difficult for them to do otherwise? The historical evolution of family structure and social policy in different countries strongly suggests that women's collective economic and political power affects their ability to persuade men — and society in general — to help bear the costs of caring for dependants (Folbre, 1994).

Cultural bargains

Caregivers are often held hostage by care itself. Most forms of bargaining are based on the threat to withhold something valuable. But caregivers, almost by definition, are motivated by intrinsic concerns that make it difficult for them to withhold their care. A mother (or father) cannot tell an infant to stop crying else it will no longer be loved. Nurses and teachers dislike going on strikes that hurt patients and students as much as, if not more than, employers. In the larger process of cultural bargaining, women may prefer a world in which they continue to provide a disproportionate share of care to a world in which no one provides any care at all.

Fundamentalist religions promote the gendered assignment of care responsibilities by threatening that if women don't provide care, no one will. Conservative Linda Weber puts it this way: "How can we possibly imitate the Creator in our relationship if we can't learn from our mothers to give of ourselves, to offer ourselves in love to another, and to control our fleshly impulses for the sake of another?" (Weber, 1994, p. 195). A speaker at a Moral Majority

conference in the United States explains: “The less time women spend thinking about themselves, the happier they are ... Women are ordained by their nature to spend time meeting the needs of others” (quoted in Mednick, 1989). And it is argued that if women fail in their selflessness, boys will grow up to be aggressive and out-of-control, and men will revert to barbarism (Gilder, 1992).

Care is often scripted in ways that require docility. In June 1998, the convention of Southern Baptists, the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, declared that a wife should “submit herself graciously” to her husband’s leadership (see Niebuhr, 1998). In Egypt, a 1985 Supreme Court decision struck down a law giving a woman the right to divorce her husband should he take a second wife. Sudan’s military regime does not allow women to leave the country without permission from a father, husband or brother (Beyer, 1990). The policies implemented by the Taliban in Afghanistan represent a more extreme version of the same response — using explicit laws as well as social norms to ban female employment outside the home.

The resurgence of religious fundamentalism around the world testifies to anxiety about the destabilization of traditional patriarchal relationships that have ensured a relatively cheap supply of caring labour. Some of this anxiety reflects political interests based on nation, race, class, and gender. But it also reflects a more generalized concern about the threat of what Benjamin Barber calls “McWorld” — a fast-care society in which individuals buy cheap, standardized, pre-packaged units of supervision, instruction and therapy. In a world of spot markets and instantaneous transactions, there is little room for the development of solidarity or affection. If more and more individuals opt for an individualistic strategy that emphasizes autonomy over commitment, the costs and risks of commitment will increase. The result can be a bit like an arms race, in which individual efforts to gain strategic superiority lead to a tremendous waste of social resources and, ultimately, a destructive war of all against all.

Conservatives often castigate feminists as proponents of western or liberal values of individualism (Fox-Genovese, 1991). This is inaccurate. Asserting that women should have exactly the same individual rights as men leaves open the questions of how individual rights should be defined, and how they should be balanced against social responsibilities. Women have always been especially aware of the tensions between care and individualism. A cultural bargain that simply allows women to act more like men, that redefines femininity in more masculine, self-interested terms, is less appealing than a bargain that redefines masculinity in more feminine, caring terms. Such a bargain, however, is particularly difficult to negotiate.

De-gendering care

Traditional social norms of masculinity are being questioned. Influential discussions of occupational segregation by gender conclude with the need to “challenge stereotypes” (Anker, 1998). This process, however, is a great deal more difficult than it sounds. Stereotypes are particularly resistant to change when they benefit those who have the economic and cultural power to defend them.

Many social scientists are optimistic about efforts to encourage male participation in care as a means of reducing gender inequality (Mahoney, 1995). Sociologist Scott Coltrane favours increasing men's involvement in family work (1998, p. B8). Male participation in child care, insists sociologist David Popenoe, is good for men themselves, as well as for society (1996, p. 218). One study of single fathers (none of whom had actively chosen their role) found that having responsibility for child care fostered nurturance and sympathy (Risman, 1987). Some cross-cultural anthropological research shows that children who are given responsibility for other children become more caring adults (Monroe, 1996, p. 176). Gay men have responded to the AIDS epidemic in personally and collectively caring ways.

A movement towards redefining masculinity is by no means limited to the United States and other developed countries. The Programme of Action of the United Nations 1994 International Conference on Population and Development states that:

> Special efforts should be made to emphasize men's shared responsibility and promote their active involvement in responsible parenthood, sexual and reproductive behaviour, including family planning; prenatal, maternal and child health; prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV; prevention of unwanted and high-risk pregnancies; shared control and contribution to family income, children's education, health and nutrition; and recognition and promotion of the equal value of children of both sexes. Male responsibilities in family life must be included in the education of children from the earliest ages (United Nations, 1995, p. 27, para. 4.27).

Such exhortations are noble and worthwhile. But it is important to examine the sources of resistance to change. Care is costly. Men are reluctant to assume responsibilities that will lower their market income, just as they are reluctant to enter caring occupations that pay less than most male jobs. In a global economy characterized by increased competition, the relative costs of care are probably increasing. There is another reason why traditional gender norms are resistant to change. They are reproduced by interaction between the job market and the marriage market.

Reproducing gender

Two of the most significant demographic trends of the twentieth century — fertility decline and increased female labour force participation — have had a destabilizing effect on traditional gender roles. A major counterforce, however, has been occupational segregation in the labour force, a pattern that reflects the traditional division of labour in the home. Even in a country like the United States where women acquire, on average, slightly more education than men, and legal sanctions prohibit gender discrimination, women continue to be highly segregated in female occupations. By one recent estimate, 53 per cent of men and women would need to change occupations to equalize the occupational distributions (Blau, 1998); occupational segregation accounts for as much as 40 per cent of the gap in earnings between men and women (Petersen and Morgan, 1995).

Occupational segregation and care

That women are for the most part concentrated in "feminine" jobs implies that their jobs tend to involve responsibilities for care. It is difficult to assess this relationship, because the conventional international standards for occupational categories emerged from a theoretical framework that distinguished the production of material goods (called "production") and the provision of less tangible services, and placed great emphasis on the educational credentials required for different jobs as well as authority roles within the hierarchical firm. However, some distinctly "caring occupations" are discernible.

Most conspicuous are nursing and teaching, two subcategories of "professional, technical and related" occupations that are poorly paid, especially relative to the education they require. In the United States, almost one-half of all women in professional and technical work were either nurses or teachers in 1991, and these two occupations help explain why women throughout the world are overrepresented in this occupational category (Anker, 1998, p. 163).

In the OECD countries, considerable attention is now focused on two relatively low-paid occupations — child care workers and elder care workers — that are generally included in the larger category of "service workers". Growth in women's labour force participation has led to significant reductions in informal family care, leading to concerns about low pay, high turnover, and resulting low quality in the provision of social care (Christopherson, 1997).

But caring responsibilities are not limited to the most explicitly caring occupations. Ethnographic studies of work show that secretaries are expected to protect their bosses from stress and construct a supportive and reassuring environment (Alexander, 1987; Kanter, 1993). Waitresses are encouraged to be kind as well as personable (Spradly and Mann, 1975). Airline attendants are expected to be heroic in crises as well as cheerful in serving beverages (Hochschild, 1983). Paralegals are expected to mother the lawyers engaged in "Rambo" litigation (Pierce, 1995). Conventional categories cannot be used to tally up the exact percentage of jobs that fit the profile of caring labour.

In any case, the more important question is why women continue to enter these jobs, even in economic environments in which they seem to have some choice, and when the earnings advantages of going into male-dominated jobs are clear. One obvious explanation is that they are socialized as young children to specialize in traditionally female tasks (England, 1992; Jacobs, 1989). Still, one would expect such forms of socialization to be weakened, if not eroded, by a growing awareness of the economic penalty. Another possibility is that women may face a double bind: the gains from choosing a non-traditional occupation may be countervailed by losses in access to male income.

Gender norms and the marriage markets

Marriages tend to join individuals of similar class, race and educational attainment (South, 1991). On the one hand, men have an economic incentive to marry a high-earning wife who will contribute more to family income. On the

other, they may worry about marrying a partner with increased bargaining power who will pressure them to take on more household responsibilities and threaten their masculinity (Mason and Lu, 1988; Goldscheider and Waite, 1991).

Anecdotal evidence has long suggested that certain career paths — those dominated by men — are clearly considered "unfeminine" either because they are predominantly held by men or because they also make it difficult for women to live up to norms of femininity in dress and behaviour. What is often overlooked is the economic impact of this normative influence. Conventional models of investment in human capital, including occupational choice, point to rates of return in the labour market as a primary influence (Mincer and Polachek, 1974). But occupational choice may have implications for the marriage market as well.

Whether and whom a woman marries has a significant impact on her economic position. Even in countries like the United States, where women's paid labour force participation is relatively high, women benefit greatly from the earnings of a spouse. In 1997, the median married couple family enjoyed US$51,591 in income. Assuming a married woman had access to half this amount, her income exceeded the median income of a family headed by a women with no spouse present by 23 per cent (United States Department of Commerce, 1998, table 6).

Women who choose non-traditional occupations may have a harder time finding and keeping a high-income husband. Consider the following experiment conducted by Austrian economist Doris Weichselbaumer in a free newspaper published in Massachusetts. She placed ads by two fictive single white females who differed significantly only in the gender conformity of their occupation (one described herself as a nurse, the other as an electrician). The ads read as follows:

> SWF, 31, good looking, slender nurse. Enjoys x-country skiing and films. Financially stable. Would like to meet a man for a lasting relationship.
> SWF, slim, attractive, electrician 30, financially stable, likes movies and rollerblading, seeks man for lasting relationship (Weichselbaumer, 1999).

The ads ran for five weeks. The nurse received 77 responses, the electrician 39. This result suggests a significant penalty for gender nonconformity.

Badgett and Folbre (1999) pursued this theme using factorial surveys designed to identify the importance of many different characteristics of a choice option. They tested the attractiveness of certain characteristics of different individuals by asking groups of students from three large lecture classes of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst (introductory courses in physics, sociology, and economics) to rate ten short vignettes describing individuals. The respondent sample was chosen partly for convenience but also because individuals in college are typically actively engaged in the two relevant activities: preparation for particular occupations and search for romantic partners.

The vignettes were systematically varied to allow comparison of outcomes for gender-conforming and nonconforming individuals, controlling for status (which is correlated with earnings). The occupations were sorted into four

categories: low status/high femininity (e.g. nurse), high status/high femininity (e.g. pediatrician), low status/low femininity (e.g. carpenter), and high status/low femininity (e.g. airline pilot). To give the occupations more interesting detail, as would be present in a personal ad, and to be clear about the level of education needed for certain occupations, a specific level of education was assigned to each occupation. The prediction was that, holding status and physical characteristics constant, the conformity between a vignette's sex and occupation would have a significant impact on the desirability rating. More specifically, men would rate the women in traditionally female occupations higher than those in traditionally male occupations. And if women did, in fact, consider the gender implications of their occupational aspirations and choices, then women would rate a gender-nonconforming woman as less attractive to men, as well. Similarly, male vignettes that described a man in a female-dominated field would be rated lower by both men and women.

The results generally confirmed the hypothesis that gender nonconformity — controlling for status and education — reduces ratings of likely responses to the personal ad, and therefore the pool of suitors. Individuals who hold traditional attitudes towards "appropriate" gender roles impose a higher penalty on nonconformity than others. The effects are particularly strong for women who enter traditionally masculine jobs that do not require educational credentials and do not offer relatively high status or prestige. A female orthopaedic surgeon, for instance, is penalized less than a female electrician.

Men as well as women in gender-atypical occupations are considered less attractive — but their earning power seems to matter more than their gender conformity. The main point of this comparison is that men who invest in market-specific human capital enjoy two positive payoffs — one in the labour market and one in the marriage market. Women also enjoy a positive payoff in the labour market (though it may be lowered by discrimination) but their payoff in the marriage market is much reduced if they enter what is considered an "unfeminine" occupation.

Less is known about how gender nonconformity might affect dating and marriage outcomes in developing countries, though research opportunities are ample. Marriage searches are often conducted by third parties, either parents or professional matchmakers, and some are conducted via the Web. The following ad, for instance, appeared on a Sri Lankan website in December 1998 (www.lanka.net/lakehouse): "Govi Buddhist parents seek professionally qualified teetotaller nonsmoker partner same caste below 43 for pretty well educated slim excellent charactered daughter 37, qualified computer field executive ... Reply with horoscope and details."

Educational credentials can serve as a substitute for a dowry for young women — especially if they provide access to the small number of lucrative occupations culturally coded as appropriate for women. Indeed, educational credentials that provide access to feminine professions or to relatively new jobs such as computer programming that have not yet been heavily "gendered" may be the only way that women can escape the cultural sanctions against entering traditionally masculine jobs. Women without access to higher education remain

stuck behind a particularly high occupational barrier that is probably reinforced by threats of sexual harassment against women who try to “wear pants”.

The interaction between marriage markets and job markets probably varies considerably between countries and over time. None the less, the basic dynamic described here has significant implications for the evolution of gender norms. The impact of childhood socialization is likely to diminish over time if conformity to traditional gender norms becomes increasingly costly for women. Stereotypes tend to weaken over time. If, however, women’s decisions are informed by concerns about future family formation, their response to opportunities to enter better-paying non-traditional jobs may be slow. The benefits of earning a male salary may be diminished by a fear of reduced success in marriage — or simply by the more diffuse fear of being considered unattractive.

Conclusion

Social norms of masculinity and femininity can be and have been openly contested. At a key juncture in the struggle to end foot-binding in China in the early twentieth century, a group of men including the young Mao Tse-Tung publically vowed never to marry a woman whose feet had been bound. They sought to counteract the widespread fear among parents that their daughters would not be able to find a husband unless their feet were appropriately stunted and misshapen. The young men obviously did not seek to eliminate all differences between men and women, though they were accused of such. Rather, they challenged a social construction of femininity that they felt was not only distasteful but morally wrong.

The assumption that women have a greater responsibility than men to subordinate themselves to the needs of children and family is in some respects analogous to binding women’s feet. It restricts their mobility, their independence and their productivity. Social norms that closely link being female to care of others have significant economic consequences that contribute to gender inequality within both the household and the labour market. As women enter paid employment, these gender norms are reproduced by occupational segregation and enforced by sanctions against women who are deemed unfeminine. Not surprisingly, women often mobilize collectively to challenge oppressive gender stereotypes, and as the example above indicates, they are sometimes joined by men.

Patriarchal power retains strong economic as well as cultural influence. But there is a more profound reason why women may choose to assume greater responsibilities for care even though they recognize its costs. Sometimes it seems that the only alternative to a world without patriarchy is a world without any care at all. Global capitalist development may help destabilize traditional forms of patriarchal power, but it also promotes an individualist war of all against all (Folbre and Weisskopf, 1998). Particularly in countries with high levels of income inequality and racial/ethnic conflict, economic development is associated with significant disruption of family ties, increases in the percentage

of families maintained by women alone, and high levels of poverty among mothers and children (Folbre, 1994). Cheap market substitutes for family care are often designed simply to cut costs rather than to develop human capabilities.

We need to remind ourselves that there are alternatives between the devil and the deep blue sea. We can reassign responsibilities for care. We can forge a new social contract that shares responsibilities for care between men and women. We can develop new gender norms that balance strength with tenderness, autonomy with connectedness, money with love. We could even refuse to marry, partner with (or even date) individuals who specialize in one side of these dualisms at the expense of the other. But we will also have to address the basic dynamics of global capitalism. The only way to support and protect caring work is to reduce the pressures of paid employment on family life, to impose strict quality standards on the provision of market care, and to foster the development of new levels of skill and commitment among paid care workers. Rather than binding women's feet, we could bind capitalism to its domestic responsibilities and restrict it to its proper, limited sphere.

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