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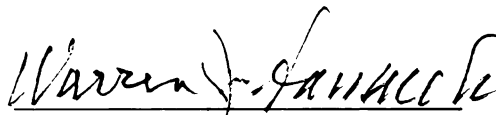
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A CRITIQUE  
OF THE MARXIST AND NEOCLASSICAL  
THEORIES OF THE SEXUAL DIVISION OF LABOR  
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Zohreh Emami-Khoyi

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A CRITIQUE  
OF THE MARXIST AND NEOCLASSICAL  
THEORIES OF THE SEXUAL DIVISION OF LABOR

By  
Zohreh Emami-Khoyi

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ABSTRACT

A CRITIQUE  
OF THE MARXIST AND NEOCLASSICAL  
THEORIES OF THE SEXUAL DIVISION OF LABOR

By

Zohreh Emami-Khoyi

The phenomenon of the sexual division of labor, namely, the predominant and exclusive division of tasks between men and women, is the theoretical topic of this dissertation. Its significance as a topic for economic investigation rests with the fact that the sexual division of labor has persisted throughout the history of human society - such that its understanding might begin to contribute to the elimination of sexual inequality, and with the possibility that a focused and coherent understanding of the sexual division of labor might well lead to revision and reconsideration of the economic theory itself. Since a critical approach is particularly appropriate to a topic in which fundamental theoretical questions have not been resolved and definite conclusions have yet to be reached, this work is devoted to the critique of two main economic theories of the sexual division of labor, namely, Marxism and neoclassicism. It argues that both the Marxian and the neoclassical theories suffer from problems of reductionism, circularity, and functionalism, precisely because they

attempt to provide strictly economic explanation of the phenomenon of the sexual division of labor. Furthermore, these inadequacies ultimately lead these theories in the direction of naturalistic explanations which ignore the social, cultural, and historical aspects of the process of gender constitution essential to an understanding of the sexual division of labor. Therefore, though making positive contributions to an understanding of the sexual division of labor by recognizing the economic necessity of household production and the economic rationality inherent in the family, these theories remain incomplete without incorporation of some analysis of noneconomic power-relationships. This work concludes that the Marxian theory shows more promise in developing a complete theory of the sexual division of labor, since it is more responsive to considerations of power and self-consciously seeks to develop noneconomic frameworks of analysis. Neoclassical theory, on the other hand, neglects power considerations and does not go beyond strictly economic categories.



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## INTRODUCTION

The theoretical problem of this work is the sexual division of labor, i.e., the predominant and exclusive division of tasks between men and women in society. This problem is significant for several reasons. First, though the sexual division of tasks has varied at different points of time and at any point in time in different societies, the existence of some sexual division of labor has been a persistent phenomenon in human society. Second, one of the most dramatic changes in the contemporary history of capitalist societies has been the increased labor force participation of women of both working-class and middle-class backgrounds. This dramatic change has occurred simultaneously with other profound transformations in the socio-economic structures of the industrialized societies, namely, the ascendancy of monopoly capitalism, the decline of farming and competitive, small, family enterprises; the penetration of capitalism into different facets of the home; and the emergence of new forms of social interaction as implied by changing birth, death, marriage, and divorce rates. However, coincident with all of these changes, reproduction of the sexual division of labor and of sexual inequality has continued. There still is a 40% gap between the earnings of women and men, and women are still

occupationally segregated, while experiencing higher rates of unemployment than men. Moreover, the sexual division of labor has not been confined to the sphere of wage work. In non-wage work such as farming, self-employment in manufacturing or trading, and domestic work, e.g., child and house care, the sexual division of labor also has been a continuing phenomenon. Third, an understanding of the sexual division of labor is crucial to any attempt to analyze, understand, and eliminate sexual inequality. Fourth, since sexual division of labor has been a relatively neglected problem in economic theory, a focused historical and theoretical investigation into the issue has the potential of bringing into question not only previous understandings of this phenomenon but also the accepted economic analyses of the division of labor in the economy. The implications of the study of the sexual division of labor therefore go beyond issues concerning women per se and are significant for economic theory and an understanding of the economy as a whole.

This work will approach the theoretical problem of the sexual division of labor through a critique of the two traditions in economic theory that have made contributions to an understanding of this issue. The approach here is critical specifically because the topic is one in which fundamental theoretical questions have not been resolved and definite theoretical conclusions have yet to be reached. The questions themselves are in a process of theoretical

development. Thus, a critical approach that articulates the problems and questions in the economic theories of the sexual division of labor is particularly appropriate.

The two schools of economic thought that are examined here are the Marxist and the neoclassical. Chapter I presents and critiques the analysis of the sexual division of labor and the subordinate position of women developed by Marx and Engels. Chapter II critically traces the development of contemporary Marxist theory through an examination of the reactions of recent Marxist theorists to the limitations of orthodox Marxism discussed in Chapter I. With respect to the neoclassical school, two camps in this tradition can be distinguished according to their views concerning the possibility of economic reform enacted by capitalist government. Chapter III critiques the conservative camp of neoclassicism, namely, the Chicago School, with respect to its treatment of the sexual division of labor and what has more generally been called to as the "new home economics". In Chapter IV the Chicago School's "new home economics" is contrasted with liberal neoclassicists' analysis of women's labor supply. Chapter IV closes with an evaluation of liberal neoclassicism's reform orientation and its fundamental assumptions about the nature of power in society. The final Chapter, after a brief summary of the Marxist and neoclassical literature on the sexual division of labor, compares and contrasts these two schools with respect to their theories of the position of

women in the economy and the sexual division of labor. The chapter concludes with an assessment of the state of our knowledge on this topic in light of the understanding acquired through the examination of the economic theories of Marxism and neoclassicism. It is argued that an awareness of the limitations of a specifically economic treatment of the sexual division of labor leads us to a greater understanding of what we do know and still need to learn about this phenomenon.



## CHAPTER I

### MARX AND ENGELS

In the midst of the Industrial Revolution there emerged a social philosopher, Karl Marx, whose influence on socialist thought has survived to the present. Together with Friedrich Engels, Marx expounded the philosophy of historical materialism on which he based his study of capitalism. According to this perspective, although all social institutions and intellectual traditions are related through a complex structure of cause and effect relationships. A society's mode of production and thereby its material economic base is the most important influence in determining social institutions and the ideological, religious, and intellectual traditions of society. Marx identified his notion of the mode of production by dividing it into two elements, namely, the forces of production and the relations of production. The forces of production were in turn defined as the general level of technology, including production skills and knowledge, and tools, equipment, and factories. The relations of production were for Marx the social relations between the human beings in society in terms of their relationship to the means of production. Marx called the mode of production the

foundation or the economic base, while the modes of thought (including ethical, religious, and intellectual ideas) and the social institutions he identified as the society's superstructure.

Marx was a methodological collectivist since by referring to the relations of production he was interested in class -- as a collection of human beings defined by their relationship to the means of production -- as his category for analyzing the economic structure of society. Viewing the class structure of society as the most important single aspect of the mode of production, Marx proclaimed the antagonism between classes as the propelling force in history. In each of the four separate economic systems that Marx identified -- 1) primitive communal, 2) slave, 3) feudal, 4) capitalist -- the contradictions that develop between the forces of production and the relations of production show themselves in the form of class struggle. Within his historical approach Marx employed the dialectical method of identifying the nature of conflicts and contradictions between classes as the dynamic sources of struggle and historical change.

Marx believed that, although in all pre-capitalist economic systems the intensification of class struggle had destroyed one class system only to replace it with another based on the exploitation of a large class by a new ruling class, capitalism and thereby the class of capitalists would be overthrown by the proletariat which would eventually

establish a classless society. According to Marx capitalism has two features that distinguish it from the systems prior to it. First, there is a class of owners and a class of workers who are separated from the means of production. Second, under capitalism the market extends into all human relations.

Marx's normative analysis can be clearly identified through his moral condemnations of capitalism which he saw as a system in which people cannot develop their potentialities. Humans, according to Marx, are different from animals because through their work they can shape and control their environment. It is through work that humans refine and develop their senses and intellect and achieve pleasure and self-realization. In pre-capitalist systems, despite the existence of exploitative class structures, humans could achieve this self-realization through their work. Since these exploitative class relations were at the same time personal and paternalistic, the purpose of work was not merely making money.

All this changes with the advent of capitalism. Marx and Engels wrote in the Communist Manifesto:

. . . the bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors," and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment." It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine

sentimentalism, in the icy water of egoistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value . . . 1

Marx condemned in the capitalist system this degradation and dehumanization of the working class, which he termed alienation.<sup>2</sup> Marx's analysis and method were both positive and normative. While in his theoretical endeavor he attempted to analyze the "laws of motion" of capitalism, he also claimed that "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it."<sup>3</sup>

Both Marx's historical materialist method and his analysis of capitalism have been criticized as economic determinism.<sup>4</sup> More specifically, for having emphasized the economic base and the category of class, Marx has been accused of underestimating the influence of ideological (or what he calls superstructural) factors on the development of society. The dichotomy of base/superstructure, has been considered responsible for his reductionist characterization of the other forms of oppression present in capitalism such as racism and sexism. In this chapter we examine Marx's historical materialist analysis of the position of women and thereby the sexual division of labor in capitalist society.

Friedrich Engels referred to The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State as a "bequest," a "debt I owe to Marx."<sup>5</sup> In the winter of 1880-1881 Marx read Lewis Morgan's Ancient Society, or Researches in the Lines of



Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarism to Civilization, and was struck by its relevance to his own theory. But ill health prevented his doing more than take ninety-eight pages of notes on the book. In 1884, a year after Marx's death, Engels published the work that his friend apparently had wished to write.<sup>6</sup>

It was Engels, therefore, who attempted a systematic exposition of the historical materialistic approach to the question of woman's status and the sexual division of labor in modern society, using as his basis the anthropological work of Lewis Morgan. He employed Morgan's three-fold classification of the stages of history -- savagery, marked by gathering and hunting; barbarism, marked by animal breeding and agriculture; civilization, marked by art and industry -- to demonstrate how women's position deteriorates outside the communist structure. In savagery, group marriage or unrestricted sexual freedom prevails, paternity is unknown, and only the female line or Mother Right is recognized. The childbearing function, and hence woman, is held in high esteem. In this communist structure everyone contributes to the economy, no one is dependent, and there is no distinction between the public and the domestic. With barbarism the pairing family emerges and, to insure paternity, women are held to strict fidelity. The division of labor becomes segregated, since without the need to hunt men turn to flocks and crops. Private property and paternity effect the overthrow of Mother Right, and women are rendered

economically dependent. With civilization, monogamy prevails and the patriarchal family solidifies male supremacy. Thus the first class struggle emerges as antagonism among the sexes. Engels believed that wives are essentially slaves, part of men's property just as are land and cattle. Engels predicted that only under socialism, with the abolition of private property, would the relationship between men and women change. Wives would no longer belong to husbands. When marriage is determined by love, not economy, both marriage and divorce will become much simpler.

In the Preface to The Origins of the Family Engels pointed out that up to 1861, which was the year of the publication of Bachofen's "Mutterrecht" (Maternal Law), there had been no systematic attempt to study the history of the family. Indeed, prior to 1861 the patriarchal form of the family "was not only without further comment considered as the most ancient, but also as identical with the family of our times. No historical development of the family was even recognized."<sup>7</sup> Even though historical cases of monogamy, oriental polygamy, and Indo-Tibetan polyandry were known, these forms were never arranged in any historical order and were simply treated as "queer customs" without any connections.

According to Engels, Bachofen's work was the first attempt to systematically develop the history of the family. And, although Engels found Bachofen's volume somewhat troublesome and at times frustrating because of its biased

nature stemming from Bachofen's mystical conceptions, he nevertheless believed that, "all this does not curtail the value of his fundamental work."<sup>8</sup> According to Engels, Bachofen was the first to question the assumption of a timeless and ahistorical patriarchal form of the family "by the demonstration that ancient classical literature points out a multitude of traces proving the actual existence among Greeks and Asiatics of other sexual relations before monogamy."<sup>9</sup> Engels agrees with Bachofen that with economic development undermining what he calls "the old communism" and with increasing population, "traditional sexual relations lost their innocent character suited to the primitive forest,"<sup>10</sup> and the new form of relation that emerged became more debasing and oppressive to women. Engels' normative position was that:

[The monogamous family] is founded on male supremacy for the pronounced purpose of breeding children of indisputable paternal lineage. The latter is required, because these children shall later on inherit the fortune of their father. The monogamous family is distinguished from the pairing family by the far greater durability of wedlock, which can no longer be dissolved at the pleasure of either party. As a rule, it is only the man who can still dissolve it and cast off his wife. The privilege of conjugal faithlessness remains sanctioned for men at least by custom (the Code Napoleon concedes it directly to them, as long as they do not bring their concubines into the houses of their wives). This privilege is more and more enjoyed with the increasing development of society. If the woman remembers the ancient sexual practices and attempts to revive them, she is punished more severely than ever. 11



The monogamous family, represents the subjugation of one sex by the other as far as Engels was concerned. Indeed, rather than being the highest form of marriage and a reconciliation between the husband and wife, the monogamous family reflects an antagonism between the two sexes that is unprecedented in history. Engels again mixed historical and normative analysis in order to conclude that

The first class antagonism appearing in history coincides with the development of the antagonism of man and wife in monogamy, and the first class oppression with that of the female sex by the male sex. Monogamy was a great historical progress. But by the side of slavery and private property it marks at the same time that epoch which, reaching down to our days, takes with all progress also a step backwards, relatively speaking, and develops the welfare and advancement of one by the woe and submission of the other.<sup>12</sup>

In the monogamous family, this cellular form of civilized society, Engels sought to understand the contrasts and contradictions inherent in this society.

Accepting Morgan's analysis in Ancient Society, Engels argued that the victory of the monogamous family by no means implies the complete defeat and disappearance of "the old relative freedom of sexual intercourse".<sup>13</sup> This freedom for both sexes, however, is transformed in civilization into what Engels, following Morgan, called hetaerism by which they meant sexual intercourse of men with unmarried women outside of the monogamous family. This hetaerism, which according to Engels flourishes during the whole period of civilization in many different forms, tends more and more

towards open prostitution.

To Engels hetaerism is a social institution which continues the old sexual freedom, for the benefit however, of men only. Even when denounced, and it is only nominally denounced, this denunciation strikes by no means the men who indulge in it, but only the women. In fact, it is not only permitted for men, but it is assiduously practiced by the of the ruling class. Women, however, are "ostracized and cast out by society, in order to proclaim once more the fundamental law of unconditional male supremacy over the female sex."<sup>14</sup>

Thus, Engels was led to see a second contradiction inherent in the nature of monogamy itself.

By the side of the husband, who is making his life pleasant by hetaerism, stands the neglected wife. And you cannot have one side of the contradiction without the other, just as you can not have the whole apple after eating half of it. Nevertheless this seems to have been the idea of the men, until their wives taught them a lesson. Monogamy introduces two permanent social characters that were formerly unknown: the standing lover of the wife and the cuckold. The men had gained the victory over the women but the vanquished magnanimously provided the coronation. In addition to monogamy and hetaerism, adultery became an unavoidable social institution - denounced, severely punished, but irrepressible.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, Engels saw in the monogamous family a clear expression of the conflict between men and women created by the exclusive supremacy of men, a miniature picture of the contrasts and contradiction of society as a whole. Engels

quoted Marx to prove that indeed they are in general agreement on this point:

The modern family contains the germ not only of slavery (servitus), but also of serfdom, because it has from the start a relation to agriculture service. It comprises in miniature all those contrasts that later on develop more broadly in society and the state.<sup>16</sup>

In both the advent of the pairing and the transition of this family form to the monogamous patriarchal family, Engels saw the reliability of paternal lineage guaranteed by securing the faithfulness of the wife and delivering women absolutely into the power of men. Indeed, for Engels the monogamous family has the specific character of being monogamy for women alone and not for men.

Engels saw the formal and informal inequalities between men and women being caused in the final analysis by the economic dependence and oppression of women. More specifically, in the old communistic societies the administration of the household (which comprised many adults and children) was entrusted to women, and this was as much a social and public function as the job of providing food which was for men. With the advent of the patriarchal, and especially the monogamous, family women lose their equal social-economic footing in public life. Women retain their job of administering the household, while the administration of the household loses its public character, and stops being a concern of society. Indeed, woman's job in the household acquires the character of a private service. In fact, even

with the availability of access to social production for some women, "they remain excluded from public production and cannot earn anything, if they fulfill their duties in the private service of the family; or that they are unable to attend their family duties, if they wish to participate in public industries and earn a living independently."<sup>17</sup>

Modern society is composed of "molecules" in the form of monogamous families, while the foundation of modern family is the overt and covert domestic slavery of women. The man with his public responsibility of earning a living and supporting the family has obtained a superior position. "In the family, he is the bourgeois, the woman represents the proletariat."<sup>18</sup> Thus, for Engels, achieving legal equality between the sexes is only the prerequisite for their emancipation. Legal equality simply offers the battleground on which the struggle for the re-introduction of the whole female sex into the public industries can be fought, and this can only be accomplished when the monogamous family ceases to be the industrial unit of society.

Engels predicted a social revolution that would abolish the historical basis of the economic foundation of both monogamy and prostitution. This impending revolution, by socializing the means of production and thus abolishing the conditions of accumulation of wealth in only a few hands, would reduce and ultimately eliminate the need for private inheritance which is the foundation upon which monogamy is

based. Since for Engels the legal and social oppression of women, as portrayed in the historic monogamous family is ultimately founded on the economic dependency of women in class society, the question that he had to answer is whether monogamy would disappear when the class system of capitalism is abolished. Engels' reply was that not only would monogamy not disappear but it would become perfectly realized. He argued that with the transformation of society and collectivization of the means of production, wage labor and thus the proletariat itself would disappear. With the elimination of wage labor, the necessity for a certain number of women to surrender for money through prostitution will also disappear. With the abolition of prostitution monogamy will not only not go out of existence but it will finally apply to men as well as to women.

Engels claimed that after the revolution the monogamous family would cease being the fundamental economic unit of society, thereby, radically changing the situation of both men and women. The functions that were formerly entrusted to the private unit of the family, such as care and basic education of children and private housekeeping, would become matters of public responsibility and a social industry. This would finally be the time when "a new element becomes active, an element which at best existed only in the germ at the time when monogamy developed: individual sexlove."<sup>19</sup>

Engels believed that what he calls sexlove is by its very nature exclusive and thus by nature monogamous. Hence,

once the economic conditions are removed that have tended to make monogamy apply to women alone by forcing them to submit to the customary disloyalty of men, women will be placed on an equal footing with men. Thus, it was Engels' belief that rather than giving rise to a gradual increase in unconventional intercourse and making women polyandrous, the realization of individual sexlove would make men truly monogamous.

Indeed, society would finally see monogamy with none of the peculiarities and distortions that are stamped upon it because of its rise out of private property relations. More specifically, when male supremacy, which is the result of man's economic independence and superiority, vanishes, there would disappear with it the very basis of male supremacy in monogamy. The direction of causation is from economic change to the establishment of equality and thereby elimination of supremacy, subordination, and dependency.

What we may anticipate about the adjustment of sexual relations after the impending downfall of capitalist production is mainly of a negative nature and mostly confined to elements that will disappear. But what will be added? That will be decided after a new generation has come to maturity: a race of men who never in their lives have had any occasion for buying with money or other economic means of power the surrender of women; a race of women who have never had any occasion for surrendering to any man for any other reason but love, or for refusing to surrender to their lover for fear of economic consequences. Once such people are in the world, they will not give a moment's thought to what we today believe should be their course. They will follow their own practice and fashion their own

public opinion about the individual practice of every person - only this and nothing more. 20

While Engels was the one who in The Origin of the Family formulated the Marxian theory of the family, there are partial statements on the family and women's exploitation in The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,<sup>21</sup> The Communist Manifesto, The German Ideology, and Capital. Marx and Engels stated their position on the bourgeois family in The Communist Manifesto, where they saw the family relation as having been reduced to a mere money relation.

The bourgeois sees in his wife a mere instrument of production. On what foundation is the present family based? On capital, on private gain . . . . The bourgeois clap-trap about the family and education, about hallowed correlation of parent and child, becomes all the more disgusting the more by the action of modern industry, all family ties among the proletarians are torn asunder, and then children transformed into simple articles of commerce and instruments of labor. 22

The relations of private property become the mode of exchange. The development of these bourgeois priorities transform social relations in the family and, as Marx made clear in The German Ideology, the family, which was seen as the only truly social relationship, becomes a subordinate<sup>23</sup> need. The concerns of private property and possession pervade man-woman relations. In "On The Jewish Question," Marx wrote: "The species relation itself between man and woman etc., becomes an object of commerce. The woman is<sup>24</sup> bought and sold." The mentality of "having" twists species relationships into those of ownership and domination, and

marriage into prostitution.

Marx saw women's problem as arising from their status as mere instruments of reproduction and the solution in the socialist revolution. In the Manifesto Marx and Engels wrote that "the abolition of the present system of production must bring with it the abolition of the community of women springing from that system, i.e., of prostitution, both public and private."<sup>25</sup>

Marx did not propose the abolition of the family. He denounced the incompatibility of the family, such as he observed it, with the woman working outside the home. He deplored the consequences of the hard life of the working woman for rearing her children, for parental authority, and for family morality. And he certainly did not consider the European family as it existed at that time to be the only possible form of conjugal union. However, what is harmful for children and parents alike is the destruction of the family without any new structure being offered to replace it. Even in its most depressing aspects, therefore, capitalism represents an important step toward a new type of family:

However terrible and disgusting, therefore, the dissolution, under the capitalist system, of the old family ties may appear, nevertheless, modern industry, by assigning as it does an important part in the process of production outside the domestic sphere to women, to young persons, and to children of both sexes, creates a new economic foundation for a higher form of the family and of the relations between the sexes. 26





Apropos of Marx's economic determinism, in the final instance, capitalism not only creates the conditions of existence of the present family with all its problems; but it also creates the conditions under which the nature of this family can be transformed into a "higher form".

Marx was far from preaching anarchic sexual freedom; for him that meant making woman even more the mere object of man's pleasure than she is already. He rejected that vulgar communism which contemplates the establishment of a community of women.<sup>27</sup> Strengthening woman strengthens man as well, for he who obtains gratification from an object, who has no need to enter into relations with another human being, loses all humanity. Thus, for Marx the genuine liberation of women was part of the more general process of humanization of the entire species. The relationship that exists between man and woman is a good indication of the state of human essence.

Since Marx never considered the woman problem as something isolated from society, whatever its structural type, he steadfastly refused to accept simple reformist measures that proposed to protect women or provide sugar coating for their real suffering. It is rather the root causes of the degradation of women which he sought.<sup>28</sup> He sees bourgeois institutions as parasitic to the core: the bourgeoisie make the laws for others to observe. The transgression of the laws is the bourgeoisie's special talent. They violate the laws of marriage, family, and

property, yet these institutions remain intact and form the very foundation of class society. Since the only real ties existing within the bourgeois family are those of boredom, money, and adultery, an infraction of its outward juridical form is in fact of no importance. On the contrary, it is maintained as it exists in fact, not as it appears within the juridical superstructure. This is the line Marx took in countering the charge that communists want to introduce a community of women. Since for the bourgeoisie, he explained, woman is a mere instrument of production, and the communists propose to introduce common ownership of the instruments of production, they conclude from this that communists want to introduce a community of women. But for the bourgeoisie such a community already exists. "Our bourgeois, not content with having the wives and daughters of the proletarians at their disposal... takes the greatest pleasure in seducing each other's wives."<sup>29</sup>

Thus, for Marx the determining factor of woman's social existence derived from a system of production premised upon the oppression of class by class -- a system which alienates and corrupts the body as well the mind. The solution, then, lies in the destruction of this phase of the historical, or rather prehistorical development of humankind. Therefore, Marx believed that women, like men, would only attain true freedom under socialism.

Evaluation:

Marx saw the bourgeois family as an instrument of capitalist society with no dimension particular unto itself. Woman's oppression is her exploitation in a class society through bourgeois marriage and the family. Woman is perceived as just another victim, undistinguished from the proletariat in general, of the class division of labor. The sexual division of labor, as the definition of roles, purposes, activities, etc., had no independent existence for Marx. He did not understand, for instance, that the sexual division of labor in society assigns noncreative and isolative work particularly for women. As a result, Marx perceives the exploitation of men and women as deriving from the same source and assumed that their oppression could be understood in the same structural terms.

It has since been argued however that capital and private property are not the cause of the oppression of women qua women, and that in fact women's inferior status predates both private property and capitalism. In this view, the end of capitalism and private property alone will not result in the end of women's oppression. It might very well be that in communist society, where all are to achieve species existence, life would still be structured by a sexual division of labor which would entail different life options for men and women. Sex roles would preassign tasks to women which would necessitate continued alienation and isolation.

In The German Ideology, Marx and Engels discussed the division of labor in early pre-capitalist society in familial terms. The first division of labor was the "natural" division of labor in the family through the act of child-breeding. The act of child-breeding, therefore, began the division of labor. It is through this act that the first appearance of property arose within the family. For Marx and Engels, this is when the wife and child became slaves of the husband.

This latent slavery in the family, though still very crude, is the first property, but even at this stage it corresponds perfectly to the definition of modern economists who call it the power of disposing of the labor power of others. Division of labor and private property are moreover identical expressions . . .31

Here are the seeds of an early, although crude, insight into the nature of the sexual division of labor, although there is no discussion of it as such. What weakens and finally limits the insight is that for Marx and Engels the division of labor deriving from the act of child-breeding is coincidental and identical with the birth of private property: "division of labor and private property are  
<sup>32</sup> moreover identical expressions." The division of labor has no specific quality of its own; property arising from a division of labor in the act of procreation is not differentiated from property arising from the relations of capital. Reproduction and production are seen as one, as they come to be analyzed in relation to the capitalist

division of labor in society. There is no notion here that inequalities might arise from the act of child-breeding and childrearing. Although reproduction was acknowledged as the first source of the division of labor, it never received specific further examination. The German Ideology presented, then, a skeletal analysis of women's condition as it changes through material conditions.

The division of labor is at this stage still very elementary and is confined to a further extension of the natural division of labor imposed by the family.<sup>33</sup>

The division of labor "imposed by the family" is here spoken of as "natural", and whether this means necessary or good it is a division which was accepted by Marx and Engels. Here, then, the division of labor in the family is not viewed as reflective of the economic society which defines and surrounds it -- as it is in the later Communist Manifesto -- but rather at this early stage Marx and Engels saw the family structuring the society and its division of labor. Marx and Engels' analysis of the family continued: "there develops the division of labor in the sexual act, then that division of labor which develops spontaneously or naturally by virtue of natural predisposition (e.g., physical strength) needs, accidents, etc."<sup>34</sup>

In The Origins of the Family, Engels repeated the theme developed in The German Ideology: that the "first division of labor is that between man and woman for child-breeding."<sup>35</sup> The first class antagonism thus arose with the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, but

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what this antagonism is based on is never made clear. Engels' claim was that the first class antagonism accompanied (arose with) the antagonism between man and woman. One would not think that the antagonism referred to is one of class. Yet he ultimately wrote of the conflict between man and woman as class conflict. The man represents the bourgeoisie within the family, the wife represents the proletariat.<sup>37</sup> But the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are respectively positions of power and powerlessness deriving from a relation to the economic means of production, not to the act of reproduction. By categorizing men and women as classes and using the category of class as a metaphor, the relations of reproduction are subsumed under the relations of production. It is contradictory that Engels acknowledged male-female relations within the family as defining the division of labor in society and yet completely subsumed them under the categories of analysis related to production. He offered no explanation that could resolve this dilemma because it stands outside the terms of his analysis.

Engels acknowledged that the division of labor emanated from the family to society. Yet his categories of analysis explaining the slavery of women in the family derived entirely from the relations of production. These categories simply take the form of metaphors. The family comes to be defined by the historical economic modes; it does not itself take part in defining the economy as well as the society, and it is no longer spoken of as a source of the division of

labor coincident with economic relations. Economic existence comes to determine the family. Hence, Engels forgot his own analysis of the "first division of labor" and assumed that the family will disintegrate and the first division of labor will simply disappear with the elimination of capitalism instead of analyzing how the family itself comes to support an economic mode. Although he acknowledged the problem of women's existence within a private domestic sphere, he saw this reflecting the relations of production rooted in private property. Women's activity in reproduction, which limits her activity in production, is not seen as problematic, as socially derivative.

The family has become a microcosm of the political economy for Engels.<sup>38</sup> The bourgeoisie and proletariat became metaphors: the man being the bourgeois and the woman the proletariat. Interestingly Engels did not use the metaphoric categories of male as bourgeois and female as proletariat outside of the family. There people were assigned class positions according to their relation to the means of production, not their sex. He used different criteria inside and outside the family to define membership in a class. In the family, economic dependency and subordination distinguish class membership while in the economy it is relationship to the means of production. If these categories were built on like bases of power, the same criterion would be applicable both in and out of the family. And if one wants to say that the family is economic, there





are evidently still other considerations involved. If this were not so, then he would not have (1) class divisions in the family as bourgeois-male/proletariat-female, and (2) class divisions in society in terms of ownership of the means of production. Even though, for Engels these ultimately meant the same thing, what do they say about the relations of the family and capitalism?

Most of the time Engels worked from the simple equation that oppression equals exploitation. Even though Engels recognized that the family conceals domestic slavery, he believed at the same time that there are no differences in kind between the domestic slavery of the wife and the wage slavery of the worker under capitalism. They are both derived from capitalism. The real equality of women would come with the end of exploitation by capital and the transference of private housework to public industry. But given his lack of understanding of the sexual division of labor and the hierarchical sexual ordering of society per se, even the public domestic world would, for Engels, most probably remain woman's work.

In conclusion, the analysis sketched by Marx and Engels in The German Ideology, and then further developed by Engels in The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State, reveals their belief that the family, at some time in the historic past, structured the division of labor in society, and that this division of labor reflected the division of labor in the act of procreation. Initially, the

family structure defined the structure of society:

According to the material conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of immediate life. This, again, is of a two-fold character: on the one side, the production of the means of existence, of food, clothing and shelter and the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species. The social organization under which the people of a particular historical epoch and a particular country live is determined by both kinds of production; by the stage of development of labor on the one hand and of the family on the other.<sup>39</sup>

This perception is lost, however, in the discussion of the family in capitalist society, for here the family comes to be viewed as just another part of the superstructure, totally reflective of class society and relations of production. The point is not that the family does not reflect society, but that through both its patriarchal structure and patriarchal ideology the family and the need for reproduction also structure society. This reciprocal relationship between the family and society, and between  
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production and reproduction, defines the life of women.

The study of women's situation then, must deal with both sexual and economic material conditions if we are to understand sexual oppression as well as economic exploitation.

## FOOTNOTES

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## CHAPTER II

### THE CONTEMPORARY MARXISTS

Contemporary Marxist analysis of the woman question has taken three main forms. First, contemporary Marxists have incorporated women into an analysis of everyday life in capitalism. From this perspective men and women are both viewed as workers and all aspects of women's lives are seen to reproduce the capitalist system.<sup>1</sup> Second, Marxist-Feminists have emphasized the importance of searching for the material base of male domination and have attempted to create a broad theoretical framework which locates sexual inequality directly within the social relations of specific historical social structures.<sup>2</sup> Third, Marxists have focused on housework and its relation to capital, some arguing that housework produces surplus value and that houseworkers work directly for capitalists.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps the most popular work exemplifying the first Marxist approach is the series of articles by Eli Zaretsky in Socialist Revolution.<sup>4</sup> Recognizing that traditionally Marxist analysis has subsumed the issues of sexism and the sexual division of labor under the specific category of class and the general analysis of capitalism, Zaretsky argues that sexism is not a new phenomenon produced by

capitalism but that the particular form which sexism now takes has been shaped by capitalism. Zaretsky's analysis focuses on the differential experiences of men and women under capitalism by emphasizing that capitalism has not incorporated women into the labor force on equal terms with men. In fact, Zaretsky who sees a clear separation between the home, family, and personal life, on the one hand and the workplace, on the other, argues that this has been created by capital.

According to Zaretsky, it is this separation between housework and wage work that has made sexism so strong and destructive under capitalism by excluding women from wage work and thereby increasing the level of their oppression. Indeed, Zaretsky argues that under capitalism men are oppressed by having to do wage work, while women are oppressed by not being allowed to do wage work. Zaretsky does not define the term oppression explicitly but seems to use it to denote being dominated and subordinated. He sees capitalism as directly and primarily causing the exclusion of women from the labor force, since this system not only creates wage work outside the home but also requires the confinement of women in the home for the purpose of reproducing the labor force and providing psychological nurturing for the workers. Indeed, one could disagree with Zaretsky's starting point by mentioning that women have participated in wage work throughout the history of capitalism and that their labor force participation rates



have increased dramatically since 1890's. It is based on the dichotomy of housework and wage work that Zaretsky argues his main point, however, that women work for capital rather than for men per se. More specifically, the privatization of housework which has resulted from the separation of the home from the work place has created the appearance that women work for men privately in the home. This appearance, however, obscures the essence or the reality that women work for capital. Zaretsky sees the difference between the appearance (that women work for men) and the reality (that women work for capital) as having caused a misdirection of the energies of the women's movement. He argues that women should recognize that they too are part of the working class even though they work at home.

For Zaretsky, "the housewife emerged, alongside the proletariat [as] the two characteristic laborers of developed capitalist society." What is needed, therefore, is a complete reconceptualization of "production". According to Zaretsky, we need a notion of production which includes women's housework if we are to establish a socialist society in which the destructive separation between housework and wage work is overcome. On the more practical level, Zaretsky proposes that men and women struggle both together and separately to reunite these divided and alienated spheres of their lives. He sees this as the only route to a humane socialism capable of meeting the private and public needs of

its people. Thus, for Zaretsky, recognizing capitalism as the root of the problem of both men and women is essential, since this recognition will entice them to fight capital and not each other. Since capitalism is the cause of the separation between our private and public lives, the end of capitalism will end that separation, reunite our lives, and end the oppression of both men and women.

Zaretsky accepts the arguments that sexism predates capitalism and that housework is crucial to the reproduction of capital. Moreover, he not only does not belittle housework but considers it hard work. His own analysis rests strongly on his notion of separation and the concept of division between wage work and housework as the crux of the problem, a division that he ultimately attributes to capitalism. It is through his emphasis on the separate but equally important spheres of the home and the market, however, that Zaretsky ultimately denies the existence of inequality between men and women. More specifically, in his analysis of the family, the labor market, the economy, and the society he simply explains the sexual division of labor in capitalism, while in the final analysis failing to tell us why this division places men in a superior, and women in a subordinate position. In other words, even if we accept his theoretical position that capitalism is responsible for the creation of the private sphere as separate and divided from the public sphere, we are still left with the question of how it happened that women work in the private sphere and

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men in the public sphere.

Zaretsky sees the creation of the private sphere of the household as the capitalist system's contribution to women's oppression, just as Engels saw private property as the cause of this oppression. Zaretsky's humane socialism, like Engels', will ultimately reunite the family in the image of their romanticized version of the pre-industrial family in which men, women, and children work together. While Zaretsky sees women's work as only appearing to benefit men when in reality it is for capital, it has also been argued that women's work in the family really is for men -- though it clearly reproduces capitalism as well. Thus, the struggle between men and women will have to continue along with the struggle against capital.

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It is in light of these weaknesses in Zaretsky's version of contemporary Marxist analysis of women's situation that Marxist-feminists have attempted to locate the material base of male domination similar to the material base Marx found for working class exploitation.

One of the first attempts at such an ambitious project was by Juliet Mitchell. In her article, "Women: The Longest Revolution," Mitchell postulates the existence of two separate but interacting spheres of domination, the family versus the organization of production.<sup>8</sup> She makes an important contribution by dividing the private sphere of the family into three distinct structures: 1) Reproduction, 2) Sexuality, and 3) Socialization. Women's oppression is

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located for Mitchell in the organization of all three of these structures as well as in production. She writes:

The lesson of these reflections is that the liberation of women can only be achieved if all four structures in which they are integrated are transformed. A modification of any one of them can be offset by a reinforcement of another, so that mere permutation of the form of exploitation is achieved.<sup>9</sup>

For Mitchell, the material base of women's oppression is located within and between these three structures and production. She rejects the reduction of the women's problem to their inability to work, which stresses women's simple subordination to the institution of private property and class exploitation.

The importance of Mitchell's analysis is in her focus and emphasis on the powerlessness that women experience because they are reproductive beings, sexual beings, working individuals, and socializers of children - in all dimensions of their activities. Thus, power is seen by Mitchell as a  
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complex reality.

However, upon closer examination, we can see that Mitchell reverts back to the analysis of her socialist predecessors. One is still left with the need to clarify the relationship of the family and the political economy of capitalist society. The question arises: if the structures Mitchell postulates are the source of women's oppression, how do men fit in, i.e., what is the relationship of men and women in creating and maintaining these structures? Mitchell still maintains a form of women/domestic sphere and

men/public sphere dichotomy. The material connection of the four structures and relations are not presented. For Mitchell, it is production in the last instance which is important. The material base of the family ultimately turns out to be ideological.

To put the matter schematically . . . we are . . . dealing with two autonomous areas: the economic mode of capitalism and the ideological mode of patriarchy.<sup>11</sup>

Mitchell reaches this position because for her not all of women's work counts as production. Only market work is identified as production while the other spheres, which she loosely aggregates as the family, are identified as ideological. Thus, patriarchy which largely organizes reproduction, sexuality, and child-rearing, has no material base for Mitchell. Indeed, she clearly presents patriarchy as the fundamental ideological structure, just as capital is the fundamental economic structure. Thus, the structure of women's oppression becomes a reflection of cultural values and mores, rather than concrete social relations with inherent contradictions and tensions.

Credit must be given to Mitchell, however, for giving voice and direction to later Marxist-feminists by beginning the demystification of the family. Her dichotomy of the double spheres -- domestic versus public -- was seized upon and subsequently elaborated in many forms. Two of these further developments, were by Gayle Rubin<sup>12</sup> and Heidi Hartmann<sup>13</sup> and will be examined here. Both of these writers

present production as one sphere of domination; on the other side, Rubin postulates a "sex-gender system," and Hartmann, patriarchy. The choice of these two terms is a reflection of what elements each theorist intends to highlight. Rubin's definition of the sex-gender system" --the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity,"<sup>14</sup> -- focuses upon the organization of sexuality. She goes on to specify that ". . . at the most general level, the social organization of sex rests upon gender, obligatory heterosexuality, and the constraint of female sexuality."<sup>15</sup>

In contrast, patriarchy for Hartmann is ". . . a set of social relations between men, . . . which hierarchically establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women."<sup>16</sup> She argues that this focus captures the notion of hierarchy and male domination, which she considers central to the present system, since "Hierarchies work at least in part because they create vested interests in the status quo."<sup>17</sup>

As a result of these different starting points, each writer offers a different understanding of the material base of sexual inequality. For Rubin, emphasis is placed on sexual coercion; through the exchange of women by men, men ensure that the basic unit of society is one man and one woman with mutual interdependence. The material base for Hartmann, on the other hand, revolves around male hierarchies which enable men to both control women's labor



and to claim the valued characteristic of the dominant ideology. However, both of these attempts fall short in their endeavor to connect the dual spheres of production and male domination.

Although Hartmann begins her analysis with a thorough critique of past attempts by Marxists and Marxist-feminists, which basically centers around the inadequacies of Marxist categories to explain sexual inequality, and emphasizes the need to create new conceptualizations, her analysis comes full circle. Her analysis concludes with the traditional Marxist starting point of labor. There is no way within this framework to understand either how these male hierarchies came about, since it has been shown male control over female labor varies tremendously from culture to culture,<sup>18</sup> or why such hierarchies generate male aggression and violence against women.

More importantly, if, as Hartmann states, patriarchal social relations in contemporary capitalism are not confined to the family but also exist in the capitalist workshop and other institutions outside the family, it is hard to see by what principle these patriarchal relations can be separated from the social relations of capitalism. Hartmann concedes that "the same features, such as division of labor, often reinforce both patriarchy and capitalism, and in a thorough patriarchal capitalist society it is hard to isolate the mechanisms of patriarchy."<sup>19</sup> Yet she insists that patriarchy must be separate. It seems reasonable, however, to hold that



if patriarchy and capitalism are manifest in identical social and economic structures, they belong to one and not two spheres.

More generally, this is the ultimate objection to any dual systems theory.<sup>20</sup> However formulated, the dual systems theory allows traditional Marxism to maintain its theories of production relations and historical change and its analysis of the structure of capitalism in a basically unchanged form. That theory, as pointed out by Hartmann herself, works with gender-blind categories. The dual system theory thus accepts this gender-blind analysis of the relations of production, wishing only to add to it a separate conception of the relations of gender hierarchy. Thus, not unlike traditional Marxism, the dual systems theory tends to see the question of women's oppression as merely an addition to the main question of Marxism.

In the case of Rubin's analysis, it should be pointed out that her focus on sexual coercion as the material base of male domination offers a valuable starting point for understanding male violence and aggression against women. Rubin makes the important point that while we are born female and male, biological sexes, we are created woman and man, socially recognized genders. However, in Rubin's presentation there is no discussion of the relation or connection to production and the capitalist system of this social system of sexual coercion. In a sense, Rubin focuses on one side of the duality, Marx on the other, and Hartmann

on the point of their intersection.

The problem with these frameworks of analysis, however, is representative of a recurring dilemma that emerges in the works of Marxist-feminists, namely, how to find and develop an analysis of two separate motive forces and their points of intersection. Joan Kelly in her article, "The Double Vision of Feminist Theory," discusses this problem in a historical context.<sup>21</sup> She suggests that the ". . . bourgeois conception of a private and public domain" has radically affected feminist theory.<sup>22</sup> This, according to Kelly, has resulted in the many attempts to create two spheres or systems of domination. Kelly stresses that this opposition stems from and is a reflection of the existing social order. Feminist theories have been caught up in the reified reflection of this false dichotomy. She argues that ". . . woman's place is not a separate sphere or domain of existence but a position within social existence generally,"<sup>23</sup> and that any fruitful analysis must ". . . treat sexual and reproductive experience in terms of political economy: and treat productive relations of class in connection with sex hierarchy."<sup>24</sup> For Kelly it is the systemic connectedness that is important. Kelly's emphasis on a "doubled vision" and her view that a unified theory which "acknowledges the combined power of sexual-familial productive relations in our lives, and the fact that these relations serve male and socio-economic interests at the same time,"<sup>25</sup> appear on the surface to reduce the burden of

constructing a model of two dynamic and interactive systems, and squarely places at the center of the framework the legitimacy and, in fact, the necessity of studying sexual inequality.

But in her next step Kelly generates a different problem. By postulating that ". . . In any of the historical forms that patriarchal society (feudal, capitalist, socialist, etc.) a sex-gender system and a system of productive relations operate simultaneously,"<sup>26</sup> we again become entangled in the drudgery of separate spheres. Even if patriarchy is accepted as the generic term for all of human society (with all ensuing problems of universality, trans-historicism, and inevitability that this entails),<sup>27</sup> a framework must still be constructed for understanding the interaction of the patriarchy or sex-gender system with the system of production.

At the same time, then, when feminists who were also Marxists began to criticize the failure of Marxist theory in coming to terms with the specificity of women's situation, attempts to construct theoretical work in this area tended to draw on existing concepts and to apply them uncritically to the situation of women. More specifically, there is evident a tendency to appropriate existing Marxist theory, first by pointing to its weaknesses where women were concerned, and second by attempting to insert the specific question of women into existing analysis and hence to add to rather than transform Marxist theory. This problem together

with that of the apparently transhistorical character of women's oppression have strongly problematized the relationship between such oppression and the mode of production. Any attempt to deal with this fundamental issue has not only necessitated a strong reconsideration of the relationship between patriarchy (however formulated) and the economy; it has also made clear that an analysis of the subordination of women cannot be provided by Marxists unless Marxism itself is transformed.

This leads to the third form that contemporary Marxist analysis of the woman question has taken. More specifically, this group of Marxist economists has focused specifically on housework, or what has been termed in the literature "domestic labor", and has done so through exploring the economic consequences of patriarchy for production and distribution within the family.

The analysis of women's domestic labor has initiated a heated debate. Maria Dalla Costa<sup>28</sup> has claimed that women's domestic labor, since unpaid, has lowered the value of labor power and thereby has served the capitalists by lowering real wages. Christine Delphy, a radical feminist, has asserted, however, that women's unpaid domestic labor not only benefits the class of capitalists but it directly<sup>29</sup> benefits individual men. In order to tackle the issue of who actually benefits from women's unpaid house work, the debate has centered around the value of labor power and production of surplus value. Some analysts have suggested

that the separate sphere of production in which domestic labor operates contributes to the production of surplus value while not directly producing value.<sup>30</sup> Others have argued that since labor power is a commodity we can analyze its production and reproduction in value terms.<sup>31</sup> However, the latter deny that the reproduction of labor power involves in any way the production of surplus value. There are still other analyses that fall squarely in the realm of traditional Marxist theory by emphasizing that domestic labor not being subject to the law of value is analytically incompatible with wage labor.<sup>32</sup>

We will concentrate on the work of Nancy Folbre as representative of the third category of contemporary Marxist analysis on women, characterized by its concentration on domestic labor as the locus of women's oppression and its attempt to transform Marxist theory itself in order to make it compatible with a coherent analysis of the sexual division of labor in capitalist society.<sup>33</sup> With respect to the general debate over domestic labor and the value of labor power briefly summarized above, Folbre writes:

Some issues have been clarified along the way. Others have been obscured. The categories of age and gender have been subsumed into the undifferentiated term "domestic labor," and the domestic laborer/wage worker dichotomy has deflected attention from differences between the economic position of husbands and wives, parents and children, differences that often exist independently of the wage-worker status of one or more family member. The distinction between types of domestic labor has been glossed over. Intrahousehold exchange between

parents and children clearly have different implications than do exchanges between husbands and wives, but these have not been explored in any detail.<sup>34</sup>

According to Folbre this debate has failed to generate any attention to "the social organization of human reproduction."<sup>35</sup> Consequently, she claims that, the participants have reinforced the general tendency in Marxism of analyzing the issue of the reproduction of labor power strictly in terms of effects on the relationship between workers and capitalists.

Folbre explains that, in Marxian theory, exploitation is explicitly described as the expropriation of surplus value. Surplus value, as applied by Marxists to the capitalist mode of production, is equivalent to the difference between the value of the workers' labor power and the value which they transfer to the product of their labor. The value of labor power is by assumption set equal to the labor embodied in the wage bundle which contains the goods the worker consumes in order to reproduce his capacity to work.

In volume I of Capital, Marx briefly mentioned two other factors which might enter into the determination of the value of labor power, "the cost of developing that power" and the "difference between the labor power of men and women, children and adults". "Both these factors," he wrote, "are excluded in the following investigation." With this brief caveat, he dismissed the possibility that household labor might have a significant or even noticeable effect on the reproduction of labor power.<sup>36</sup>

Folbre goes on to argue that in fact wage workers not

only do not consume all their wage bundle, but they share it with the other members of the household. Indeed, other family members, especially women, provide goods and services for the family through their unpaid domestic labor.

. . . If the portion of wage goods transferred to the family were exactly equivalent in value to the portion of family-produced goods and services, the wage bundle would in fact be an accurate reflection of the actual amount of socially-necessary labor time devoted to the reproduction of labor power. But there is absolutely no reason to assume that the exchange between wage workers and family is equivalent in value terms. This assumption merely circumvents a serious problem. If the family labor can not be analyzed in value terms, the condition of equivalent exchange can not even be defined much less satisfied.<sup>37</sup>

Folbre seems to think that this implicit assumption in Marxism is the source of much of the confusion in the contemporary debate over the value of labor power and its relationship to domestic labor.

Folbre argues that though Marxists tend to deny that families pursue any economic goals (i.e., follow an objective function), there is in fact, an implicit objective function embedded in the Marxian notion of the working class, namely, that working class families are primarily concerned with survival and subsistence.<sup>38</sup> She goes on to assert that the notion that household behavior is dictated purely by the survival motive only works if wages are set at a subsistence level. She sees this as inconsistent with Marx's insistence that the value of labor power has a "moral

and historical" element. "It seems logical, then, that a 'moral and historical' element may also govern the amount of household labor that is devoted to the reproduction of labor power . . . The full cost of the reproduction of labor power, specific to a given cultural and class context, may be affected by traditions and social norms."<sup>39</sup>

Folbre thus intends to effect a fundamental theoretical reorientation of Marxism by insisting that households pursue some specific objective function that both varies across classes and changes over time. She claims that this theoretical reorientation makes it possible, first, to analyze transfers of goods and labor time between family members and, second, to redefine the value of labor power by suggesting that both surplus and value may be generated within the household.

Folbre builds an economic model based on the assumption that family members pool the product of their labor to reproduce the family and its members. Her intention is to show that the claim that family members cooperate when making decisions regarding production does not imply that the product of family labor is distributed equally. Indeed, according to Folbre, this claim provides "a framework for asking whether they are distributed equally."<sup>40</sup>

Having limited her model to the case where the family has at most one wage earner who is exploited as a wage worker, her model accommodates the role of the family non-wage laborer and lends itself to three distinct



possibilities. First, the exchange of labor products is on an equal basis among family members; thus the wage worker alone is exploited. Second, the wage worker recoups the loss of surplus value to the capitalist through unequal exchange within the family, in which case only the non-wage worker is exploited. And finally, the burden of exploitation is shared between wage and non-wage workers in the family. This is the case in which the total number of hours worked by family members is greater than the total hours embodied in their total consumption bundle. Therefore, in both the second and third case exploitation comes home in the sense that the woman domestic worker is exploited.

Which of these possibilities, or combination of possibilities, actually holds in reality cannot be determined unless hours worked in household labor are commensurable with wage work in terms of abstract labor. I have argued that this commensurability is made possible by the socially-necessary character of household production. Despite the fact that household workers do not produce for the market they choose the most efficient means to perform their task. Their work may differ in skill and intensity, their fixed capital may differ in cost and depreciation, and they may engage in joint production, but none of these factors significantly distinguishes their work from that of wage workers.<sup>41</sup>

Folbre next elaborates her notion of exploitation. She points out that a simple transfer of surplus value is not itself necessarily an expropriation of surplus value, and therefore, unequal exchange does not in and of itself imply exploitation. At the same time, one of the most important lessons of Marxism, according to Folbre, is that

exploitation is often disguised by appearing to be equal exchange. Thus, the question of exploitation can be resolved only by reference to the political dimension of Marxian distribution theory and by very close scrutiny of the notion<sup>42</sup> of free choice.

More specifically, the worker who receives a wage which is less than the value of the product of his labor may voluntarily exchange his labor for this wage and even benefit from this exchange, but if he has no independent access to the means of production the worker's choice to sell his product is essentially predetermined. Folbre criticizes the Marxists for not being fully aware of the differences in access to the means of production due to age and sex (and here it should be mentioned that she herself misses race).

. . . Yet a large body of scholarship describes peasant and petty commodity modes of production, both outside and within capitalist formations, in which legal and practical control over the family's land and capital resides in the hands of older males. Even where a part of the labor force has been proletarianized, control over home and hearth often rests with men. Furthermore, social sanctions and laws which prohibit contraception and abortion sometimes give men substantial control over women's own biological means of production.<sup>43</sup>

Folbre argues that women in fact rarely face an either-or situation. Since they often lack access to an independent means of survival, they voluntarily marry and thus continue to cooperate within a patriarchal family, despite its

inequalities. Therefore, in a society in which men qua men have relatively more access to the means of production; participate in forming and enforcing laws, institutions, and social norms and practices that weaken women's economic independence; enjoy a substantially greater bargaining power; and have lower rates of exploitation, Folbre believes that "one can make a strong case that they are indeed,<sup>44</sup> exploiters."

According to Folbre, the possibility of this type of exploitation has serious implications not only for the patriarchal family structure, but also for any understanding of capitalism. One important implication is that it is now possible for one to argue that women indeed compensate the male wage earner for his exploitation in the market. Moreover, exploitation of women by men suggests "that class lines between families are likely to be cross-cut and weakened by non-class forms of conflict."<sup>45</sup> While admitting that her analysis requires further elaboration, Folbre concludes that, in order to comprehend women's subordination, Marxists have to be more concerned with the economics of the family.

Folbre's conception of the family as a locus of conflict and struggle rather than an active agent with unified interests, plus her identification of the family as a location where production and distribution take place rather than a unit shaped by affect and kinship, goes a long way in identifying and exploring the material aspects of

gender relations within family units in particular and capitalist society in general. She also is at least partially successful in transforming Marxist theory and making it consistent with a more adequate analysis of the sexual division of labor.

Her work proceeds, however, within certain limits. She does not, for instance, address in her work the many real differences in the ways people of different periods, regions, or ethnic groups structure and experience family life. She focuses mainly on the capitalist mode of production. Second, she concentrates almost exclusively on domestic labor and women's oppression in the working class. Third, she restricts her analysis to the economic level. All these limit the scope of Folbre's analysis.

More specifically, her emphasis on domestic labor and the economics of the family sheds little light on the problem of whether housework is analytically the same in different classes within capitalism and even less on the theoretical status of domestic labor in noncapitalist societies. Also, by essentially identifying domestic labor with housework and child-care, and by leaving the status of child-bearing undefined, Folbre does not explain why domestic labor falls generally to women. Moreover, since women's oppression is not specific to capitalist societies, one is left to wonder how to reconcile its particular contemporary character with the fact that women have been subordinated for thousands of years. Similarly, one is left

wondering whether women are or will be liberated in socialist societies. Finally, the relationship between the material processes of domestic labor and the range of phenomena which make up women's oppression, especially those of an ideological and psychological nature, is a key issue with which she does not consider.

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### CHAPTER III

#### THE CHICAGO SCHOOL NEOCLASSICISTS

There is a split in the neoclassical school regarding the appropriate economic role of government. The conservative neoclassical tradition, or the Chicago school, defends a policy of laissez-faire. The liberal neoclassical tradition, on the other hand, advocates a substantial economic role for the government. These two camps, however, have three characteristics in common which are important enough to classify them both as neoclassicists.

Both camps adhere to the principle of methodological individualism, viewing socio-economic theories as being grounded in the attitudes and behavior of individual economic agents. Consequently, both camps utilize the concept of the economic man to postulate rationality, an assumption of self-interested and maximizing behavior under constraints. For both camps methodological key to correct economic analysis is to distinguish positive versus normative investigation. Both camps view the prediction of human behavior as giving theories of economic life their scientific character. The consequence of the emphasis on prediction and the separation of normative and positive analysis for neoclassical economists is that they can be



characterized as "methodological monists". More specifically, "methodological monism" is defined as the view that accepts a common methodology for both the natural and the social sciences, as opposed to "methodological dualism" which distinguishes between the correct methodological principles of the natural and social sciences.<sup>1</sup> In addition to their adherence to the same methodological principles, both camps defend the private property system of capitalism. Finally, they both defend some version of the three basic tenets characteristic of neoclassical economic theory. The first is the argument that a market economy harmonizes all interests and leads to an efficient allocation of resources. The second is the automaticity of market clearing leading to full-employment equilibrium. The third is the belief in the marginal productivity theory of income distribution which equates each individual's income and the value that he or she creates at the margin.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter investigates the Chicago School tradition. Chapter IV will be devoted to the liberal wing. It should be mentioned at the outset that the Chicago School has an extensive analysis of the sexual division of labor within the family; a similar discussion of the familial division of labor is lacking in the liberal tradition. Thus, the discussion of the Chicago tradition is by necessity more extensive. The liberal tradition does have analyses of women's labor supply and therefore the sexual division of labor in the economy as a whole.

Chicago Analysis of Women's Labor Supply

The rising labor force participation of women, especially married women, since the 1890's was the first issue that attracted economists to the questions concerning women in the economy. The orthodox theory of labor supply held that the rational worker would allocate time to the labor market so as to balance the benefits gained from income and leisure. According to the standard approach, the effect of a wage change could not be predicted a priori. The substitution effect of a wage increase makes leisure relatively more expensive and therefore tends to elicit more work. However, the extra income resulting from the higher wage also induces additional purchases of all normal goods, including leisure. Thus, the income effect predicts a decrease in the hours of week offered to the market. A backward-bending labor supply curve would result if, over a certain income range, the income effect outweighs the substitution effect.

As women's increasing entry into the paid labor force became impossible to ignore after World War II, economists set out to explain the female labor supply. Jacob Mincer opened the discussion in 1962 with an article in which he pointed out that cross-section data for women and time-series data for men were consistent with the backward-<sup>3</sup>bending supply curve hypothesis. However, the continuing secular increase in women's labor force participation meant that the time-series data for women were inconsistent with

the backward-bending supply curve for women. Cross-section studies concluded that there was an inverse relationship between wives' labor force participation and husbands' income. On the other hand, time-series studies showed a positive relation between these two variables. Mincer's main goal was to resolve the contradiction that had developed in these two sets of data for the labor force participation rates of married women.

Mincer, logically enough, introduced the wife's own wage rate as a relevant variable and explicitly designated the family as the decision-making unit. For the women the choice between market work and leisure was expanded into a more realistic one also involving work at home. Mincer's resolution concentrated on the double impact of income and prices on married women's behavior. He argued that a woman's choice depends not only on her husband's income but is also influenced by her own wage rate, i.e., the price of her labor.

According to Mincer, the opportunity cost of time spent consuming leisure and doing housework has risen because of the higher take-home pay of married women in the twentieth century. Therefore, at the same time that the husbands' income has pulled women out of the labor force and into the home, women's higher wages have pushed them into the labor force and out of the home. The observed increase in married women's labor force participation Mincer concluded, implies that the substitution effect has triumphed over the income

effect.

Beginning most visibly with the work of Kelvin Lancaster in 1966, the notion that households only consume<sup>4</sup> was dramatically challenged. In essence, the traditional view treats the household as a black box; market goods enter one side and somehow utility exit the other. The activities of household members by whom market goods are made to yield utility are totally neglected and real work is assumed to occur only in the market. In contrast, the new framework acknowledges the existence and legitimacy of household production in which time and market goods are combined to produce household commodities that in turn are the immediate sources of utility.

Mincer's work inspired a rapid expansion of the boundaries of neoclassical economic analysis. Since in neoclassical theory a problem qualifies as economic if scarcity is involved, the discovery of time as a scarce resource with competing uses has made analyses of nonmarket activities involving time quite respectable.

In Gary Becker's hands the theory has become more<sup>5</sup> general. Time is designated as an input along with market goods in the family's utility function. Moreover time is necessary to produce as well as consume household goods and both uses compete with time allocated to the labor market. According to Becker the household would allocate the time of all its members according to their relative efficiencies and also has the choice to switch to less time-intensive

commodities such as frozen dinners. As in the previous model, the effect on women's labor force participation of an increase in the market wage cannot be predicted.

The research that followed in the 1960's was directed toward empirical estimation of the model. Several variables hypothesized as influencing women's labor supply were tested which were expected to influence participation through either the income or the substitution effect. The two definitive works of this type were Glen Cain's Married Women<sup>6</sup> in the Labor Force and The Economics of Labor Force<sup>7</sup> Participation by William Bowen and T. Aldrich Finegan.

Bowen and Finegan include as major factors for increasing women's labor force participation the development and diffusion of labor saving devices and the<sup>8</sup> increasing wages of domestic servants. In fact, however, other studies have shown that domestic work in hours has not decreased with the proliferation of the so-called labor-saving devices.<sup>9</sup> Also, domestic servants' wages, at relevant rates, seem unlikely to affect the labor market decision of the average working women unless she is considering it for an occupation.

Economists have also invoked psychological explanations to analyze a woman's decision to work. For example, Glen Cain suggests that black women's high labor force participation rates relative to white women might be due to a fear of losing their husbands because of the greater<sup>10</sup> marital instability of the black community.

In the more recent literature on women's labor supply, the framework of analysis is relatively unchanged. Married women are the focus of both the theoretical and the empirical studies.<sup>11</sup> The wage rates of the woman and her husband, her level of education, and the number and ages of children are the primary determinants of labor supply of women. The most important theoretical development has been the extension to an explicit life-cycle model. This model bases all time allocation, human capital investment, fertility, and consumption decisions of the individual on a desired level of expected permanent income. This concept was developed by Milton Friedman in 1975.<sup>12</sup> With respect to labor supply decisions the life-cycle approach predicts that individuals, or family units plan a level of life-time commitment to the labor force but time their periods of participation according to fluctuations in economic conditions and corresponding fluctuations in wage rates.

#### Evaluation of Chicago School Labor Supply Literature:

Alice H. Amsden has remarked that by explaining a woman's behavior as the result of two opposing forces, the neoclassical model explains at the same time everything and nothing. Since either the income or the price effect must dominate any result is admissible and the theory is irrefutable. As to why one effect or another might dominate at any particular time, an historical analysis becomes relevant. This view does not rule out the influence of price





and income changes, but it argues that the relation between these changes must be explored for a more complete picture.<sup>13</sup>

The rebuttal to this objection might be that if the results of the orthodox analysis are useful and the predictions correct, then economists need not concern themselves with social variables. Therefore, the question is whether the results are indeed convincing. One example that suggests a negative answer, is that the behavior of black women has persistently not conformed to the hypothesis. It might be that an analysis which integrates theories of class, race, and sex would lead to a more realistic understanding of the differentials between white and minority women than explanations such as the greater marital instability in the black community.

Another example of the shortcomings of the Chicago analysis in the area of women's labor supply can be seen in a recent work by Heckman and Macurdy.<sup>14</sup> They exclude non-white women from their empirical work. In addition, they confine their study to middle-age women, though it is young women who show the most dramatic increase in labor force participation. Finally, they restrict their sample to families with a male head and stable family composition. It must be questioned if this is a valid test of "female labor supply" as the title of the article suggests.

It should be mentioned that besides the empirical anomalies, some of which were mentioned above,<sup>15</sup> the Chicago

theory of sexual division of labor in the economy, i.e., women's labor supply, suffers from the shortcoming of being highly selective. Becker's analysis selectively includes non-material commodities that he believes contribute to utility. However, he fails to include the utility of education for its own sake, or the utility of change and diversity.

### The Chicago Theory of the Family

Gary Becker's general theory of the allocation of time among alternative uses has laid the analytical ground-work for what Tullock and McKenzie have called the "new world of economics",<sup>16</sup> in which economic analyses of education, crime, dishonesty, death, suicide, politics, and bureaucracy, have become very common. Given the importance of the family outside the monetary sector, there was also born the "new home economics", the Chicago School's analyses of marriage, divorce, fertility, and even sexual<sup>17</sup> behavior.

The Chicago School's theory of marriage starts with two basic assumptions. The first is the rationality assumption, that people marry because in doing so they increase their utility. The second assumption is that there is a marriage market in which men and women compete in their search for mates. The marriage market is assumed to be in equilibrium when the men and women are each in a Pareto optimal

position. Each person is seen to be involved in increasing his/her utility and finding the best mate in the market for marriage, subject to the restrictions imposed by market conditions. According to Becker, these two principles explain why the institution of the family exists.

Becker finds that the gain from marriage compared to remaining single for a man and a woman is positively related to their income, the relative difference in their wage rates, and the traits that affect nonmarket productivity, such as beauty and intelligence. The gain from marriage is also greater the more complementary the inputs of the husband and wife in the household. The gain from marriage is also positively related to the importance of children. From all this Becker provides a justification for assuming that each family acts as if it maximizes a single utility function.

According to the "new home economics" the division of labor within the family derives from the nature of the marriage market equilibrium. The determinant of the division of labor in this market, as in every other market, is the marginal productivities of the husband and wife which in turn are determined by their human and physical capital.

Marriage in this framework is conceptualized as "a two person firm with either member being the 'entrepreneur' who hires the other at . . . (a) 'salary' . . . and receives residual 'profits'." <sup>18</sup> Women hire men as bread winners since men earn more than women in the market, women's market

earning powers having been diminished by their childrearing activities. Men hire women as nurse-maids since women bear children and are superior at rearing them, men's child-rearing powers having been diminished by their market earning activities. Thus, the division of labor within the family is concluded to be consistent with economic maximizing principles.

Becker's work consists essentially of extensions and application of the concept of maximizing production under constraints. Specifically, for the household production function, time and goods are inputs and time and income are constraints in the production of commodities including but not limited to "children, prestige and esteem, health,<sup>19</sup> altruism, envy, and pleasure." With respect to labor supply decisions, in accordance with earlier theories it is the relative efficiencies of household members that determines their allocation of time to the home or the market or both. This approach is patterned on the theory of comparative advantage which was developed to explain gains<sup>20</sup> from specialization and trade between countries. In this context, one's comparative advantage is the ratio of his or her productivity in the market to productivity in the home. Productivity in the market is measured by the wage that one can obtain. Productivity at home cannot be directly observed. Leaving aside for the moment the question of why these productivities vary systematically between men and women, the discussion turns to the implication of this

theory.

As might be expected, the theory shows that a household can profit from specialization when the relatively more market-efficient members allocate time there, and household-<sup>21</sup> efficient members allocate time to the domestic sphere.

Becker goes further to demonstrate that even if household members have identical productivities and training an efficient household would specialize: "Theorem 2.3: At most one member of an efficient household would invest in both market and household capital and would allocate time to both sectors." If a certain not implausible assumption is made, then "all members of efficient households would specialize<sup>22</sup> completely in the market or household sectors . . . ." The explanation for this conclusion, though presented in a rigorous mathematical manner, is quite simple and intuitive. The gains from specialization derive from the savings in training costs which Chicago School economists call the costs of human capital.

From the perspective of society as a whole, this analysis is quite clear and sensible. If there are to be plumbers and accountants, and if there are significant training costs of time and money to learn those trades, then it is certainly not reasonable to expect everyone to develop those skills extensively. On the other hand, as an explanation and justification for the sexual division of labor in all societies at all times, the specialization principle is inadequate by itself. If it is granted that

specialization makes sense, then the question remains as to why the split between market and home has developed along gender lines.

Realizing that he has to answer the question of why it is women who bake the bread and men who make the laws, Becker steps outside of his field to give biology its due. He asserts that "intrinsic differences between the sexes" are also responsible for the sexual division of labor thus combining economic and socio-biological analysis. For example, he finds that women care and nurture for children because "they want their heavy biological burden in reproduction to be worthwhile."<sup>23</sup> Further, according to Becker, biological differences explain not only the sexual division of labor but also heterosexuality and child rearing practices which support traditional roles.

If only a small fraction of girls are biologically oriented to the market rather than household activities, then in the face of no initial information to the contrary, the optimum strategy would be to invest mainly household capital in all girls and mainly market capital in all boys until any deviation from the norm is established.

In this manner investments in children with "normal" orientation reinforce their biology, and they become specialized to the sexual division of labor. Investment in "deviant" children, on the other hand conflict with their biology, and the net outcome for them is uncertain.<sup>24</sup>

Tullock and McKenzie by building on Becker's theory, elaborate on the division of labor within the family. Since it is more costly to make decisions when more than one

person is involved, the husband and wife often voluntarily agree to have different decisions made administratively by one or the other.<sup>25</sup>

In general, marriage is viewed as an elaborate contract between a man and a woman, with each party explicitly or implicitly agreeing to bear certain responsibilities and commitments and to abide by a set of rules that divide and assign decision making to each party.<sup>26</sup> This process is compared to the process of the development of the constitution and by-laws of a firm. It is also claimed that the "central purpose of dating and engagement is to set the provisions of the marriage contract."<sup>27</sup> It is in fact emphasized that without the development of a set of marriage provisions, the future of the marriage will be uncertain and filled with disagreements, eventually resulting in divorce.<sup>28</sup>

The long-range and more fundamental explanation for the division of labor, including the sexual division of labor, in the Chicago tradition is provided by the human capital theory.<sup>29</sup> Since individuals enjoy freedom of choice, it follows that what exists in the market is the result of the choices that individuals have made. Therefore, most Chicago theorists consider women's lower earnings to be the result of their voluntary investment in human capital smaller than men's. Women choose to make smaller investment in human capital and thus have lower earnings.

Human capital theorists give two reasons for women's



smaller investment in human capital and their consequent lower earnings. First, they argue that women's labor force participation is more uneven and unstable than men's due to the time spent bearing and rearing children. Secondly, when they are in the labor market, women choose jobs that offer fewer opportunities for increasing their productivity. Mincer and Polachek, for instance, argue that since acquiring experience and on-the-job training, and therefore skills, is costly in terms of foregone earnings, women usually choose jobs that do not require much skills. In other words, women maximize their earnings over their life cycle by avoiding jobs that requires skills and training.<sup>30</sup>

The same maximization principle leads the profit maximizing employer to fill the jobs that require high skills with men, since they too know that men's labor force participation is more stable. In this process, employers may inadvertently discriminate against women who do have a stable labor force attachment. But because of the high cost of obtaining accurate information about the traits of individual workers, such stereotypical judgment on the part of employers is rational.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to earning less than men, women on average also experience higher rates of unemployment. The higher tendency of women to move in and out of the labor force is also the explanation given for the difference in the rates of unemployment between men and women. The Chicagoans argue that the income maximizing process of search that precedes

reentry into the labor force necessarily involves a period of frictional unemployment for women. Thus, women's higher unemployment also is considered as voluntary by the Chicago School economists.<sup>32</sup>

#### Evaluation of the New Home Economics:

One may be impressed by the beauty of such a symmetrical modeling of market and nonmarket activities by Chicago theorists or one may be struck by its absurdity. The rest of this section, however, attempts a critical appraisal of the Chicago doctrine not on the basis of the beauty, symmetry, or absurdity of this theory. More specifically, the aim is to provide what Warren J. Samuels calls a "constructive critique": "the attempt to bring into focus the meaning of the nature, strengths, and limits of a body of ideas. . . to understand what is being said, what is not being said, and the bases and limits thereof."<sup>33</sup>

A general circularity has been pointed out by the opponents of the Chicago School in their theoretical treatment of the division of labor within the family.<sup>34</sup> More specifically, in order to explain the division of labor within the home, the female-male wage differential is taken as given. Thus, we are told that since women earn less than men because of their lower investment in human capital and lower productivity, the division of labor within the household in which the woman is the nursemaid and the man the bread-winner is logical.

At another stage in the analysis, however, in order to explain the female-male wage differential, the division of labor within the home is taken as given. We are told that this wage differential is the result of women choosing to invest less in human capital because of their commitment to the household. It logically follows then, that women have lower productivity and thus lower wages. In Isabel Sawhill's words, ". . . we have come full circle . . . and it is time to ask whether economists have done anything more than describe the status quo in a society where sex roles are given - defined by culture, biology, or other factors not specified in the economic model."<sup>35</sup>

Such theoretical circularity affects the explanation provided by the "new home economics" for the origins of the family. The gains from marriage are said to be greater, the greater the difference in wage rates between the wife and the husband. It follows logically then, that women marry because they earn less than men. But they earn less than men because they enter into marriages in which sex roles are given and in which it is simply assumed that they have a comparative advantage in doing housework rather than market work.

Thus, it can be argued that unless sexist social relations based on gender-differentiated values, roles, and functions, are introduced, Chicago style economics is unable to give an explanation for either the division of labor within the family or the existence and origins of the family

itself.

Let us examine the consequence of the circularity and the subsequent assumption of sexist social relations for the Chicago analysis, an analysis that is methodologically based on atomistic individualism.

Chicago's primary methodological and analytical category is the individual, who is seen not as an integral part of an integrated socio-economic whole, but as an isolated, independent, atomistic unit with essentially two characteristics. First, the individual derives utility from the consumption of different goods produced in the market or the home. Second, the individual is a rational, calculating maximizer. The individual maximizes utility, however, subject to constraints. The market variables of income and prices are the major constraints, and thus the major determinants of individual behavior. Since it is believed that the essence of individual behavior can be captured by a model that uses a limited number of universal economic variables, namely, income and prices, it is also believed that this model can be projected over time, across social strata, and across cultures. Therefore, Chicago analysis is ahistorical and asocial, and it abstracts economics from power. The human subject of the Chicago investigation is a timeless, classless, raceless creature, although male unless otherwise specified.

Changes in income and prices, however, do not necessarily give rise to structural changes. In other words,

quantitative changes do not give rise to qualitative changes. Rather, income and prices are conceptualized as changing in small imperceptible amounts. Thus, human behavior, which is responsive primarily to anonymous variations in income and prices, changes very slowly over time. The techniques of the calculus, therefore, are easily applied in research.

Behavioral influences which are social, cultural, or ideological are lumped together as tastes and are generally assumed to be stable. Recently it has been argued that even differences in tastes may be subsumed under income and prices a view which conveys the absolute centrality of market prices and income in the Chicago approach. In the words of two of the School's most prominent and influential proponents, George Stigler and Gary Becker,

. . . one does not argue over tastes for the same reason that one does not argue over the Rocky Mountains - both are there, and will be there next year, too, and are the same to all men.

On the traditional view, an explanation of economic phenomena that reaches a difference in tastes between peoples or times is the terminus of the argument: the problem is abandoned at this point to whoever studies and explains tastes (psychologists? anthropologists? phrenologists? sociologists). In our preferred interpretation, one never reaches this impasse: the economist continues to search for differences in prices or incomes to explain any differences or changes in behavior.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, individuals are free atoms, free from any influences other than the market variables of income and prices. The

society itself is simply the sum of these atomistic individuals, with voluntary market transactions being the only social interaction between them. In effect, the market is the society.

The independence of individuals from any social forces that might influence them and thereby, erode their freedom of choice, is of fundamental importance for neoclassical theory in general and Chicago School analysis, including the "new home economics" in particular. Voluntary decisions have significance in and of themselves if and only if they have not been influenced by social forces outside the market, forces over and above the individual's sphere of influence.

In summary, with atomistic individualism as the important feature of the methodology of the Chicago School, these theorists reduce everything to the sphere of the market and thereby to exchange relations. They abstract from any other social relation that destroys the unanimity that exists in the market. The consistency of their whole approach depends on this. By smuggling in unequal and thus sexist social relations through their circular explanation of the sexual division of labor, however, the Chicago theorists of the family do exactly what their methodology prohibits them from doing. They effectively assume sexist social relations involving power and predetermined results at the outset and then build their theory on this assumption. They thereby implicitly reject atomistic individualism and the notion that individuals are free from

forces that influence their actions and choices. Moreover, the assumption of sexual inequality which drives their model also points to the ideological and thus normative nature of their theory. The circularity in the Chicago argument and the consequent assumption of sexist social relations, implies that in a world in which men and women have unequal wealth and power, their abilities to exercise freedom of choice differ.

The ideological nature of the Chicago approach to the family and the sexual division of labor becomes apparent when one looks at human capital theory critically. The human capital metaphor reduces all economically relevant skills to a single measure. But economically relevant skills are not unidimensional and cannot simply be aggregated across individuals into a single formal measure of which some individuals have more or less. Moreover, families, schools, and training institutions teach different things to different individuals, and differing learning contexts are closely associated with the racial, sexual, and class characteristics of the student body.

37

The justification by human capital theorists for using the metaphor of human capital is that skills like other assets offer a claim on future income. While most Chicago theorists argue that normative, ethical, and ideological positions are completely foreign to their science of economics, other theorists claim that this definition and characterization of capital -- i.e., claim on future income

--stems directly from the normative and ideological position  
of the Chicago theorists.<sup>38</sup> In fact, for classical  
economists, the concept of capital encompassed two distinct  
but necessary notions. One was the claim on future income  
and the other was the ownership and control of the means of  
production. Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis argue that  
education and skill cannot be called capital in the  
classical sense, since except for rare exceptions, educated  
workers do not control, much less own, the means of  
production.

The problem of measuring and identifying capital notwithstanding, the ideological impact of the human capital metaphor becomes even more clear when it is realized that with this metaphor labor disappears as a fundamental category in economic analysis. In fact, Bowles and Gintis emphasize that human capital theory is the ultimate step in the elimination of classes as central economic concepts,  
<sup>39</sup>  
with every worker now having become a capitalist.

The ahistorical, highly general and highly abstract framework of the Chicago 'new home economics' has been purchased at the high price of obliterating most of the trees from the forest. Indeed, the black box of the family and household production through which the sexual division of labor emerges is ultimately retained. In Chicago theory, production in general and household production in particular is a kind of alchemy. The entrepreneur and the household have a complex mathematical recipe, called a production



function. Many of the variables found in the sociological and anthropological, etc. literature are included in the economist's household production function in a formal sense. The alchemy of the production function simply transfers the inputs into outputs. Just as the neoclassical production theory never mentions bosses and workers, strikes, lockouts, speed-ups, etc., the Chicago approach gives very little attention to the nature of conflict or the use of power within the family.



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38. Ibid.
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## CHAPTER IV

### THE LIBERAL NEOCLASSICISTS

When studying the liberal neoclassicists one cannot help but recognize that their literature has a relatively non-dogmatic and flexible style and that they would prefer to have capitalism be a more humane socio-economic system than it is. These liberal economists are frequently very open in granting some validity to the criticisms and objections to neoclassical theory. In fact, they rarely hesitate to admit many of the injustices and inequalities of the capitalist system. This is in stark contrast to the conservative tradition with its dogmatic and rigid style and its denial of reality where it does not fit theory.

Most importantly, the liberal neoclassicists, unlike their conservative counterparts, strongly advocate government intervention in the economy and have faith in gradual reform in the context of capitalist institutions. Unlike the conservative Chicago economists whose insistence on laissez-faire seems not to permit them either to accept many of the realities of capitalism or to acknowledge many of the critiques of neoclassical economic theory, the liberal neoclassicists do indeed understand the extensions of the role and power of the government in contemporary





capitalist economies. The main difference between these two camps within the general neoclassical paradigm is that the conservatives view the model of a perfectly competitive economy as a fairly close representation of the capitalist economy. When faced with a situation in which the institutions of the capitalist system, rather than functioning harmoniously and in a universally beneficial manner, as their theory would predict, in fact show signs of instability and conflict, the Chicagoan blames the government. Most liberal economists, however, view perfect competition as an ideal that has never been and likely will never be, an ideal that is only very roughly representative<sup>1</sup> of the capitalist economy.

Since the liberal neoclassicists do not believe that capitalism would function harmoniously if the government confines its role to the protection of private property and enforcement of contracts, they reject the conservatives' emphasis on blaming the government for every ill of the economic system. Indeed, for the liberal it is only through the intervention of the government in the economy that the actual economic situation can be made to more closely approximate the theoretical results of perfect competition. The liberal sees in the government a neutral and generally benevolent political power that should be relied on to<sup>2</sup> intervene and bring about economic harmony.

Liberal economists see a number of flaws in the model of perfect competition which makes it inadequate in and of

itself. First, they argue that laissez-faire, unrestrained competitive capitalism is unstable, which they consider to be wasteful. In their view, government can effectively mitigate this instability and perhaps bring about a considerable degree of stability to the capitalist system. Secondly, the liberals recognize the existence of large and economically powerful corporations which, if left unrestrained, will not behave in a manner consistent with the depictions of the competitive model. Finally, liberal neoclassical economists argue that it is the government that can equalize the social and private costs that are liable to diverge as a result of externalities. The government they argue can cure the problem of externalities with a system of taxes and government subsidies.

3

### Liberal Neoclassical Analysis of Labor Supply

From the brief comparison of the conservative and liberal neoclassicists given above, it is clear that it is possible to use the general neoclassical method and framework to arrive at conclusions that are considerably different from the conclusions reached by the Chicago school.

Indeed, with regard to women's labor supply literature, there are those inside the neoclassical camp who reject Becker's assumption that biological differences ultimately determine labor supply differences. For example, Cynthia Lloyd and Beth Niemi point to certain assumptions made by

the Chicagoans that limit their analysis.<sup>4</sup> For instance, women are considered to be secondary earners and their husbands are the "heads". Consequently, most economists assume the husband's income and the number and ages of children affect the wife's labor force participation. However, they neglect to examine the impact of these "family" variables on the husband's participation. Lloyd and Niemi advocate symmetrical analyses of participation on the grounds that "men and women are basically people with the same innate abilities and patterns of responses to incentives, whose different opportunities have led them to<sup>5</sup> different labor market outcomes."

Therefore, Lloyd and Niemi advocate treating men and women symmetrically, and conclude that varying labor supply behavior can be explained by demand factors that affect women and men differently. They point out that women's lower and more discontinuous labor force participation and lower rate of human capital accumulation can be seen as women's rational response to discrimination. Discrimination is manifest by women's relative restriction in occupational choice, higher unemployment, and lower earnings in comparison with men. Thus, the explanation for women's secondary economic status is a self-perpetuating cycle of<sup>6</sup> discrimination and differential labor supply behavior.

### Theories of Discrimination

Studies of the labor market have shown that wage differences between whites and non-whites and between men and women persist even after corrections are made for differences in productivity, occupation and hours of work.<sup>7</sup> Labor economists from both the conservative and liberal persuasions have tried, then, to explain the mechanism by which these wage gaps are perpetuated in the economy. These attempts have led to several different theories of wage discrimination.

The conservative theoreticians subscribe to a competitive theory of wage discrimination that sees discrimination as a phenomenon that interferes with the free nature of trade between different segments of the population: whites and blacks, men and women.<sup>8</sup> This theory in effect treats each one of these categories of population as societies that are involved in trade. Free trade among these societies would involve no discrimination and would lead to equalized marginal products of all factors in the societies involved. Analogous to theories of international trade, each society would export the factors in which it has a comparative advantage, and would import the factor of which it is relatively disadvantaged.

The existence of discrimination, however, would imply that whites, for instance, have a taste for not associating with blacks and are willing to pay a premium in order to fulfill this taste. This premium, which is referred to as a

"discrimination coefficient" is also analogous to the notion of a tariff in international trade. This discrimination implies that the white discriminators maximize a utility with respect to both income and physical distance that they desire to have from blacks. A white employer faced with a money wage,  $W$ , in a competitive labor market, acts as if  $W(1+d_i)$  were the real wage rate for blacks or women, where  $d_i$  is the employer's discrimination coefficient against employing blacks or women instead of whites or men whom he prefers.

A similar personal discrimination coefficient can be used for all types of economic interactions. For instance, with a monetary price of  $P$  for a certain good, a white buyer with a taste for discrimination against blacks, would act as if this price were in fact  $P(1+d_i)$  if this buyer were faced with a black seller of the product. Similarly, if a white male employee, facing a wage offer of  $W$ , has a taste for not working among blacks or female employees, he would act as if the real wage he is offered were  $W(1-d_i)$ , with  $d_i$  again representing his discrimination coefficient.

In these models the discrimination coefficients alter the supply and demand curves of the white males from what they would have been in the absence of discrimination. Just as in the competitive theory of international trade, in which the existence of tariffs causes the marginal products not to be equalized across countries, so too the existence of discrimination in labor markets results in un-equalized



marginal products across races and sexes. As a result, the total output of blacks, whites, and women falls short of its optimum levels when there is discrimination in the labor market.

The major problem with this theory of discrimination is the persistence of earnings gaps between whites and blacks and male and female workers.<sup>9</sup> According to the theoretical requirements of a competitive model of wage discrimination, the economic pressures of a competitive market in fact should have eliminated the earnings gaps between workers long time ago. Since the amount of discrimination in this model is determined by the marginal discrimination coefficient of each individual economic agent, rather than the average discrimination coefficient of whites and/or men, the employer with the smallest discrimination coefficient would have to pay lower wages than the highly discriminating employer. These lower wage rates and thus lower costs would make it possible for this employer to sell his product at a lower price than the firms facing high costs because of their discriminatory practices. Hence, the low cost non-discriminatory employer should succeed in eliminating both the high cost employer and ultimately discrimination itself through competition.

One explanation for the persistence of discrimination for decades, is given by Hamermesh and Rees:

Discrimination by employers based on their own tastes and prejudices thus implies that they do not maximize utility by their





willingness to sacrifice profits, paying higher wages than they need to or accepting workers less qualified than others whom they recruit at the same wage, in order to indulge their tastes about the composition of the work force. This is in direct contradiction to the traditional Marxist analysis of discrimination, which states that capitalists discriminate against or exploit minorities in order to increase their pecuniary profits. The present analysis does not deny that some whites, or even all whites taken together, make monetary gains as a result of discrimination in employment. Rather, it asserts that the big gainers are the white male workers who get the good jobs that, in the absence of discrimination, would have gone to women or minorities. To a lesser extent non-discriminating employers. . . also gain, for they can hire equally qualified labor at a lower wage. One leading economic consultant has acknowledged this by hiring mostly women for his company, arguing that they are better qualified than the male economists he can find and need be paid no more.<sup>10</sup>

The persistence of discrimination is the result of the tastes and actions of white male laborers and not the employers. In fact, the white employer's discrimination becomes irrelevant in this explanation and it is only necessary to have white male workers, with the necessary skills for a certain employment, refusing to teach these skills to blacks and women.<sup>11</sup> The employer in this explanation is simply forced to accept and even enforce the discrimination coefficient of his white male workers who possess the skills that the employer needs.

This explanation, being dependent upon labor's marginal rather than average discrimination coefficient, runs into the same problem that faces the general competitive theory

of discrimination. As long as there is one white male worker at every skill level with a zero or very low discrimination coefficient who is willing to teach the necessary skills to the black or women employees, one can argue that these skills can ultimately be taught to most blacks and women. With the elimination of skill differentials, therefore, the market itself should ultimately eliminate discrimination. Moreover, the competitive labor market theorists have to introduce an analysis of the development of a monopoly of skills by white male workers in order to explain discrimination in what starts out to be a competitive theory.

A second explanation of the persistence of discrimination given by the competitive labor market theorists revolves around the distinction between a local and a global optimum.<sup>12</sup> According to this explanation, the employer who could raise his profits by changing his practice of hiring an all-white labor force is incapable of perceiving this potential profit-maximizing opportunity because he is involved in making only marginal changes. In this explanation it is the discrimination coefficient of white laborers that plays the major role in the persistence of discrimination. The employer never perceives the potential of the global maximum because he is always involved with the lower profits and the effects on his local optimum. The local optimum can be lower through the intense hostility of white employees towards adding blacks

or women to the labor force. Thus, the short-sighted employer never shifts from a white labor force to an all-black or even an integrated labor force.

The problem that this explanation faces is its reliance on the ignorance of the employers in order to explain persisting discrimination. The employer is perceived to be unable to see what is good for him because he is only interested in marginal changes and ignores both any other kind of analysis that he himself is capable of conducting and the kind of analysis that already exists in the economic literature. The question arises: since the employers are not so ignorant in other areas, why are they ignorant here?<sup>13</sup>

The major problem faced by the competitive theory of discrimination -- a theory that predicts the elimination to discrimination -- is, therefore, the persistence of discrimination. There are other analytical problems. Although this theory might be able to explain certain types of job segregation, since it is a physical-distance theory of discrimination, it clearly does not explain the kind of discrimination practiced on the basis of social rather than physical distance.<sup>14</sup> In South Africa, for instance, the white discriminator is served by and even hires blacks, but he insists on maintaining a social distance between the whites and blacks by specifying the relationship under which the whites and blacks will live together. It is also not possible to explain sex discrimination on the basis of a physical distance theory of discrimination. It is not clear

that men try to achieve physical distance from women when discriminating against them.

More generally, wage and price discrimination covers only a limited range of all possible forms of discrimination.

Discrimination can exist even when equal wages can be paid for equal work if individuals are not allowed to perform (or acquire the characteristic necessary to perform) equal work. These other types of discrimination stand outside of the standard competitive model of wage or price discrimination.<sup>15</sup>

Recognizing the problems with the competitive theory of discrimination, discrimination is explained by the liberal economists through a monopoly rather than a competition<sup>16</sup> theory. More specifically, liberal economists argue that the segment of the population -- whites, men, etc. -- who can employ physical, social or economic pressures, act as discriminating monopolists. This is consistent with the general liberal conception of the economy itself as characterized by a high degree of monopoly rather than perfect competition. Thurow writes:

The minority group may have few options and certainly not the option of refusing to trade (with the monopolist). Subsistence, social or physical, may force them to. In the United States blacks live in a white supremacist society, not just a segregated society.<sup>17</sup>

Unlike the competitive model, in which the goal of the discriminator is to maximize the physical distance between himself and the person(s) he is discriminating against, the monopoly model, by emphasizing monopoly power and thus

social distance, sees the white males deliberately attempting to raise their income since they know that higher income will lead to more social distance. The monopoly model, therefore, avoids the major problem faced by the competitive theory of accounting for the persistence of discrimination. By emphasizing the existence of monopolies, "society's average desire for social distance can be put in place without being competed away by the man who does not<sup>18</sup> have a taste for social distance."

According to the monopoly theory, there are a variety of discriminatory practices that enable the monopolist to raise both social distance and his income. Employment discrimination causes the discriminated segment of the population to suffer a higher rate of unemployment than it would have in the absence of discrimination. Wage discrimination occurs when the monopolist pays the discriminated group less than the value of its marginal product. Occupational discrimination exists when women or minorities are not permitted in certain prestigious and high income jobs, and are consequently more than proportionally represented in less prestigious and thus lower-paying jobs. Human capital discrimination results from the lower investment of government and corporate funds in the human capital of women and minorities, giving them less than equal opportunity to acquire this type of investment. Capital market discrimination exists in cases where women and minorities are not given equal access to investment funds



needed to open profitable businesses. Finally, price discrimination occurs when the prices of certain goods are different for different segments of the population. It is on the basis of these various discriminatory practices that liberal economists explain the historical persistence of discrimination.<sup>19</sup>

The main enforcement mechanism, however, comes from the interlocking nature of different types of discrimination. If the various types of discrimination are viewed separately, there seem to be powerful economic pressures leading to their elimination. Suburban homeowners could gain by selling to blacks. White employers could increase profits by hiring blacks. But when the several types of discrimination are viewed together, the economic pressures are either not present or present in a much more attenuated form.<sup>20</sup>

This phenomenon of interlocking and mutually reinforcing monopolies leads to the implication that it might be a long time, if ever, before discrimination ends automatically. Hence, from the point of view of the monopolistic theory of discrimination there is a substantial role that the government could play through passing reform laws to end discrimination.<sup>21</sup>

Despite its greater ability to explain the phenomenon of persisting discrimination, the monopolistic model of discrimination like its competitive counterpart, is based on the standard microeconomic mechanism of market clearing. "Prices are used to clear markets in both models. The only difference is that in the one, prices are competitively

determined and in the other, they are monopolistically determined." <sup>22</sup> Therefore, while the conservative economists conclude that the employer who discriminates does so on irrational grounds and thus loses money because of the discriminatory practice; the liberal economists contend that it costs the employer only a little if anything to indulge his preference for discrimination. In fact, to the liberal neoclassicist, the employer rationally maximizes both income and social distance and quite often gains at least in the short-run.

Like the competitive physical distance theory of discrimination, the monopolistic social distance model has difficulty explaining discrimination against women. It is not clear that white men in fact raise the real standard of their living by discriminating against their wives. In other words, one could argue that the higher earnings of the white men is lost through the lower earnings of their wives. Thus, it is questionable that white men can unambiguously make economic gains from male-female discrimination because of the process of sharing income within the family. Moreover, since both the husband and the wife belong to the same social class, it is not at all clear that the social distance emphasis of the monopolistic model is satisfactory in explaining sex discrimination in terms of social distance. Finally, neither the monopolistic nor the competitive theory of discrimination can explain why and how sex discrimination is created.



We saw that liberal neoclassicists ground women's secondary economic status in a self-perpetuating cycle of discrimination. These theorists, therefore, demand an end to the discrimination against women.<sup>23</sup> Following the liberal assumption that policies in the general interest may emerge from the competing demands of different interest groups, the liberal neoclassicists propose to put pressure on government officials to change their perception of and attitude towards women. It is important to recognize here that the context of this liberal policy prescription, as with the laissez-faire prescription of the conservatives, is set within the institutional arrangements of the capitalist economy. The goal is to give women equal opportunity to participate in the existing system. The argument for the elimination of discrimination is rationalized on the basis of maximization of each individual's contribution to society and of increased efficiency.<sup>24</sup> Thus, discrimination is not economically rational from the point of view of society as a whole, and must be eliminated on efficiency grounds.

Besides these "perception" and "attitude" problems, liberal economists have posed the lack of data on women as one of the main causes of discrimination against women.<sup>25</sup> One of the vitally important solutions to discrimination is the inclusion of women's work in statistics so that government officials and policy makers may take them into account. This is like saying that if the poor were counted in the statistics, policies would be more likely to be

implemented to end their plight. Therefore, policy making is essentially accepted to be a positivist enterprise wherein technical experts make decisions about the feasibility of different projects. Hence, the assumption is that once the data is there, explanations and some solutions can be found.

It is clear that given the liberal neoclassicists' adherence to positivism and capitalism, their explanations of women's discrimination could not have been different because they are fundamentally embedded in a particular context and accept particular social and political relations as given. They do not recognize that giving equal opportunity to women is not the same as giving them power as long as there are certain discourses within which definitions and concepts of what women can and cannot do and are and are not, place women in a subordinate position.<sup>26</sup>

Liberal positivists further assume that social scientists and government policy makers are neutral observers of objects, in our case of women.<sup>27</sup> Moreover it is assumed that there is one correct answer to questions that can rationally and impartially be reached by pointing out the most efficient ways given resources. But one could ask: efficiency in terms of what?: monetary cost? human labor? suffering? time? In the context of the current system it could be argued that it is only the interests of certain segments of the population (such as capitalist or men or both) that counts in the definitions of efficiency. Furthermore, discussion of goals and ends is also

unnecessary for the positivist, because these questions involve value judgments on how things ought to be. Consideration of how things ought to be is irrational and thus not considered legitimate. Ironically, however, by taking the capitalist system as given, the liberal neoclassicists themselves make normative prescriptions.

In the context of the discussion on women and the sexual division of labor, what do these considerations mean? The elimination of discrimination becomes an issue of increased efficiency in the form of economic indicators and those who make political decisions become a group of technically trained experts who can provide the most rational and efficient answers. These economists do not question the underlying power relations.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Hunt, op. cit., p. 422.
2. Ibid., p. 423.
3. Ibid., p. 423.
4. Cynthia Lloyd and Beth Niemi, The Economics of Sex Differentials, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979).
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Albert Rees and George Schultz, Workers and Wages in an Urban Labor Market, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).
8. Daniel Hamermesh and Albert Rees, Third edition, The Economics of Work and Pay, (New York: Harper and Row, 1984).
9. Lester Thurow, Generating Inequality, (New York: Basic Books Inc. 1975).
10. Hamermesh and Rees, op. cit., p. 312.
11. Thurow, op. cit.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., p. 163.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., p. 164.
18. Ibid., p. 165.
19. Ibid., p. 166.
20. Ibid., p. 168.

21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., p. 170.
23. Lloyd and Niemi, op. cit.
24. Ibid.; Barbara Rogers, The Domestication of Women: Discrimination in Developing Societies, (London: Tavistoc Publishers, 1980).
25. Rogers, op. cit.
26. Discourses, according to Foucault, are rule governed frameworks that are determined by underlying power relations. Discourses can be analyzed by asking the following questions: 1) What is it possible to speak of? 2) What are the terms destined to disappear without any trace? Which are destined, on the other hand, to enter in the memory of people through ritualistic recitation, pedagogy and teaching, entertainment and publicity? 3) Which are the terms that everyone recognizes as valid and questionable or definitely invalid? 4) What individuals, groups, or classes have access to such a kind of discourse? See Michel Foucault, "History, Discourse and Discontinuity," Salamagundi, No. 20, (1972), p. 234.
27. Lloyd and Niemi, op. cit.; Rogers op. cit.

## CONCLUSION AND CRITIQUE

This concluding chapter summarizes the Marxist and neoclassical theories of the sexual division of labor. It critiques their respective contributions and limitations, and their similarities and differences.

### Brief Summary of Marx and Engels

Marx and Engels' writings on women and the sexual division of labor focused primarily on analyzing the position of women in the wage labor system. Women are considered a super-exploited segment of the working class; they are exploited as workers and as women workers. According to Marx and Engels, women experience this oppressive status under capitalism because their special family responsibility keeps them from being fully proletarianized and thus considered full-fledged workers with full pay. A necessary condition for the establishment of equality between men and women, according to Marx and Engels, would therefore be the full participation of women in social production. Moreover, Marx and Engels considered family needs, and thereby women's responsibilities, to be superstructural, and therefore ultimately explained by forces emanating from the economic base. Since the base of the capitalist economy is co-extensive with the sphere of

production, where capital extracts surplus value from wage labor, the full participation of women in social production (which is the necessary condition for their equality with men) would only be possible with the overthrow of capitalism and exploitation. Furthermore, in most of their writings on this topic Marx and Engels seem to imply that this necessary condition is also sufficient, that women's equality would be automatically achieved when capitalist exploitation is removed.

#### Contributions and Limitations

Though Marx and Engels' analysis of the position of women in capitalist society was relatively simple and at times fragmentary, even a casual survey of the contemporary literature on women and the sexual division of labor reveals that their work made a lasting contribution to the ongoing discussion on the topic. But what does Marxism have to offer to a coherent theory of the sexual division of labor?

Many people look to the work of Karl Marx as a starting point for any examination of power and domination (whether racial, class, or sexual). Marxist theorists of sexual domination, however, have also been particularly attracted by three aspects of Marx's work methodological tools. First, it is historical. Rather than present, as do many social scientists, a static and time-bound picture of social life, Marxism seeks an understanding of the present in terms of its connections to the past. Second, an important and





distinctive element of this historical approach is its focus upon contradictions or tensions inherent in specific social systems that are the dynamic sources of struggle and change. This is the dialectical nature of Marxian method. The third, and in some ways the most important, element of Marxism is its focus on social relations. Society is not examined in terms of values or ideology, but from the point of view of the material base that generates these reflections and ideologies, i. e., how people's actions and lives are shaped through their interactions and responses to social organizations. Thus, in the case of the sexual division of labor in society, the Marxian approach requires that we examine not only the jobs that men and women perform, but also the relations and the context surrounding and producing them.

Although the methodological and theoretical contributions of Marxist analysis of capitalism and change are important, also important is a recognition of what Marxism does not do. There are many kinds of interactions and social patterns that Marxism does not examine. Many of the shortcomings of Marxism, pointed to by theorists of women's issues, center upon the gender-blind categories of Marxist analysis. With either an incomplete or no discussion whatsoever of domestic or private life, gender is not recognized as a distinct social category but ultimately remains a given in the theory. As a result, because men and women are discussed only as workers, we are given little



understanding why women qua women and men qua men are assigned different roles within and outside the home.

Serious flaws stem from this public -- people as capitalist or workers -- focus. For example, how are we to understand patterns of male aggression and violence against women? Frustrated workers may seem to be an explanation of wife battering, but why is it that women are the victims of this frustration? Or, how do we understand the pervasiveness of rape, and thereby the systematic terrorization of all women by men? These examples indicate the failure of conventional Marxism to explain sexual domination; they bring into question the limitations of the Marxian theory of class domination. Some of the implications for class domination can be seen in the following speculation. It is highly probable that because working class men have other areas of domination (i.e., over women and children) available to them, this might mitigate the development of their class consciousness. Speculations such as this can only be substantiated or dismissed through an understanding of how all forms of domination -- class over class and men over women -- interact.

#### The Contemporary Reaction; Strengths and Weaknesses

In light of these shortcomings yet with an awareness of the valuable methodological tools mentioned above, many contemporary theorists of the sexual division of labor have turned to Marxism with a strong commitment not to repeat the

mistakes of the past. Considerable effort has been made not to focus on one single aspect of domination and therefore obscure its other forms. This emerges from a critique of Marxism though not a rejection of its basic orientation, namely, Marxism's humanistic concern and its commitment to the possibility of universal human development.

Marx and Engels saw the full participation of women in social production as a necessary and sufficient condition for their equality with men. This argument is obviously reductionist in the sense that it reduces everything that happens under capitalism (in this case, the oppression of women) to capitalism and capitalism alone. In fact, however, neither Marx and Engels nor any of the subsequent Marxist theorists have satisfactorily established a theoretical link between women's subordination and class relations. Also, empirically this theory has become less and less acceptable since the post World War II economic expansion that has brought more and more women into the labor force. Neither the unequal conditions women have faced in paid labor nor the oppression they have experienced in the home have dissipated, however, as Marxism suggests should be the case. The Third World countries suggest another empirical disproof of this theory. In these countries women have long constituted an important and often even the principal agrarian producers, though they are still manifestly subordinate to men. Further, though the socialist countries provide examples of women's full integration into social

production, the sexual division of labor in the home and the society as a whole persists in these societies.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, in most societies the prediction of sexual equality consequent to women's participation in the market has been undermined by the reality of women having to work the double shift of paid market and unpaid domestic work. The recognition of this reality by Marxist theorists of women's position has given rise to a number of attempts to deal theoretically with the social relations of the family as part of the material base of society. But in most cases, the family has qualified for membership in the material base only as long as it has been considered as site of production. It would then be a straight-forward step to apply Marxist methods of analysis to the particular form of family production. These analyses of family production have yet to provide the intended material explanation of women's<sup>2</sup> oppression.

It is important to recognize that the materialist method is useful specifically because it requires not only an historically specific treatment of societies, but also a recognition that the categories of analysis are themselves historically bound. Thus, materialist analysis should treat the categories and tools of analysis as specific to the particular societies and circumstances examined, while allowing that these categories and tools may change as society changes. By simply applying the categories of Marxism to the case of family production without adapting

these categories specifically to an analysis of relations within the family, theorists are able to analyze only the impact of outside forces upon the family; Marxist categories are incapable of shedding light on the tensions and contradictions originating within the family. Since all the categories drawn from Marxist theory are gender-blind, the analyses that employ these categories are at best able to develop an incomplete understanding of the subordination of domestic laborers and fail to uncover the relation between domestic labor and the sex of the laborer.

The recognition of this weakness in what has been labeled the "domestic labor" literature has lead to attempts to explain a system of male power over women on a theoretical basis that does not derive from the Marxist theory of capitalism. The use of the non-Marxist category patriarchy has become common. Theorists have primarily attempted to provide a framework for the analysis of patriarchy by connecting it to either the construction of gender identity in psychoanalytic terms or notions of male control of female labor power.<sup>3</sup> On more general grounds, these theorists argue that since women's subordinate position has extended across different cultures and modes of production, it cannot be explained solely through the internal logic of any mode of production in particular. Therefore, in order to explain the sexual division of labor and the subordinate position of women under capitalism, these theorists propose to examine the intersection between

two sets of relatively autonomous social forces -- capitalism and patriarchy.

This dichotomy of capitalism and patriarchy, has left unexplained the relation between patriarchy and the capitalist economic process. The search for the links between patriarchy and capitalist relations has led some theorists to focus upon a particular dimension of the sexual division of labor, namely, that domain of work which has continually been the exclusive preserve of women -- child care and the provision of a range of domestic services for adults (referred to in the literature as "reproductive" work). The reason for using the term "reproductive" is that this work has seemed to be especially closely related to the reproduction of human life, which is crucial to an understanding of patriarchy. Thus, a clearer understanding of these "reproductive" tasks and the social relations under which they are performed in different societies at different times has seemed to provide a link between economic and noneconomic factors in the maintenance of women's subordinate position.

More particularly, the treatment of reproductive relations permits the theorists to introduce the biological distinction of sex in the specific sense that under capitalism the production of labor power involves not only the rearing of future generations of workers but also the bearing of future generations of workers. Therefore, although in capitalist production gender roles are





differentiated, capitalist production relations, because they are gender-blind, cannot provide the link between gender roles in production and the sex of those who perform work. One could attempt to link the biological distinction of sex and the social distinction of gender by arguing that current reproduction relations are socially specific constructs, much as production relations have been believed to be by some social scientists (including Marxists). Accordingly, some theorists argue that sexuality has been shaped, formed and even created by categories and definitions which control and characterize sexual practices. Sexuality, therefore, has no essential nature prior to its social construction.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, recognizing the existence of social constructs other than those of production does not indicate anything about the relation between these different social constructs. It is possible that there exists a hierarchy of determinants of these social forms and that some are derived from others. In short, the theoretical problem of the dichotomy that these theorists begin with remains unsolved.

Marxist theorists of women have attempted to tackle<sup>5</sup> this problem from many different angles. In Chapter III some of these attempts were examined with the result that most of them either ultimately leave this fundamental duality intact or, more commonly, subordinate sexual oppression to class exploitation, thereby, eliminating the problem in the manner of Marx and Engels.

The most successful theoretical handling of the problem of duality has been that of Susan Himmelweit.<sup>6</sup> Himmelweit argues, first, that the development of capitalist production has meant the continual development of the production of use-value, since surplus value can only be extracted when a use-value is produced. Thus, capitalist production activities, which are only one particular socially-specific way of meeting needs, have come to dominate other kinds of activity. "Needs, potentially satisfiable by production, have taken precedence over all other needs, and the production of use-value over other activities which satisfy<sup>7</sup> needs."

While everything else is produced as use-value, people themselves are not,<sup>8</sup> specifically because capitalist production relations require that people be free to sell their own labor-power. In a capitalist society human reproduction is not a production activity. There is a separation of human reproduction from production per se that is specific to capitalism and not trans-historical. For instance, in slave societies, these two activities were one and the same in that women slaves approaching child-bearing age were sold at prices comparable to prices for men, even though their potential to produce non-human products was diminished.<sup>9</sup> Under capitalism, however, reproductive activities are excluded from the socially defined activity of production, because as Himmelweit puts it, "at some point the reproductive process must cross outside the boundary of

capitalist production relations in order that resultant<sup>10</sup> people may re-enter as free wage-labor."

Thus Himmelweit has provided one reason (if not a solution) for the existence of theoretical duality in the theory of women's subordinate position. In effect, she concludes that the duality that generates the theoretical problem is in fact the problem of capitalism. Unless it is recognized that production does not have a trans-historical character, capitalist society will continue to impose its own solution to this dualism by requiring that production dominate all other activities. The political implications of this analysis are that the social predominance of production per se in capitalist society must itself be challenged in order to challenge women's relegation to the sphere of reproduction. Thus, although Himmelweit emphasizes the historical (as opposed to trans-historical) reality of the domination of productive over reproductive relations under capitalism, she nonetheless solves the problem of duality in the contemporary Marxist analyses of the sexual division of labor by postulating the hierarchy of first production and then reproduction, thereby still subsuming the category of gender to class.

#### Brief Summary of the Chicago School of Neoclassicism

Neoclassical economists' interest in and investigation of a wide range of what had traditionally been considered non-market phenomena, including the "new home economics",

derives from their definition of the nature of the discipline of economics. Specifically, an issue becomes economic for the neoclassical economist whenever scarcity is involved. Scarcity requires choice which in turn requires an analysis of the costs and benefits of alternative allocations of scarce resources. Since the early or mid-sixties, neoclassicists have recognized that if they define "resources" and "costs and benefits" broadly enough they can apply their economic theory to almost all aspects of human behavior. Thus their conception of "resources" has been expanded to include not only the physical environment, but also human resources and time. Rational maximizing individuals, who have the information needed to evaluate and ultimately choose between competing courses of action regarding these resources, base their decisions on the balance between costs (which are now measured in terms of both time and money) and benefits (which may be monetary and/or nonmonetary).

With regard to the "new home economics" in particular, individuals participate in a marriage market in which, through cost/benefit analysis, they decide when to marry, whether to marry at all, and who to choose among all the alternative partners available. Once they do marry and form a family, they are involved in a number of additional decisions, such as the amount of market and non-market work that needs to be done, who should do each, and what combination of market versus home produced goods (including

children) to consume. Sexual division of labor is a function of rational allocative decision making by the individuals within the family.

### Contributions and Limitations

The question that needs to be asked at this point is: what insights and findings has neoclassicism generated in these traditionally noneconomic areas, specifically, the "new home economics"? Most of the literature in the "new home economics" can be divided into analyses of three issues: (a) marriage and divorce, (b) fertility, and (c) the sexual division of labor within the home and its consequent implications for the division of labor in the market, especially in terms of differential earnings of men and women and their respective labor force participation rates.

#### (a) Marriage and Divorce

According to the economic theory of marriage developed by Gary Becker, there are basically three motivations for marriage among adults. First, it is more efficient for people who have frequent contact with one another to ultimately live together on a more permanent basis. The consequent specialization and division of labor within marriage is itself a source of efficiency, and therefore a second motivation for marriage. Finally, a fundamental<sup>11</sup> motivation for marriage is the desire to have children.

According to Becker each marriage is in reality a two-

person firm in which both husband and wife are entrepreneurs who hire each other in order to make a profit. Both the man and the woman gain by marriage. However, if there is also love between the two, the potential gains from marriage can be increased, when each partner also takes pleasure in the consumption and well-being of the other. Of course, for each individual the gains from marriage have to be weighed against the associated costs, ranging from monetary costs (such as the wedding ceremony and fees) to nonmonetary costs (such as the opportunity cost of settling down rather than searching more, or the cost of losing the independence of being single). According to this theory, the net gain to marriage is positively related to the relative differences wage rates and in the house-hold productivity of the man and woman. This gain is also positively related to each spouse's unearned income, to the degree of desire for children, and to the degree of caring. Moreover, except in the case of wage rates, men and women's activities are generally seen to be complementary rather than substitutes for one another.

From the point of view of neoclassical economists, and according to their standards of theory evaluation, contributions of the theory are to be identified by asking, "What kinds of empirically testable implications emerge from this analysis, and where does the evidence support the theory?"<sup>12</sup>

Since observations on love and caring and the desire for children are generally not available, the theory can be

neither tested nor supported on the basis of claims regarding these phenomena. It is quite possible, however, to test the effects of income on marriage. Prior to the development of Becker's theory of marriage, studies of marriage and women's labor force participation did not distinguish between wife's and husband's earnings or their earned and unearned income.<sup>13</sup> A not insignificant theoretical contribution of the new developments in this area has been the making of these distinctions. On the empirical level, as a result of these developments and the availability of data, evidence has emerged which suggests that marriage and marital stability are much less influenced by the level of earned income than by differences in the earnings of husband and wife and differences in their unearned income or wealth.<sup>14</sup> These results are consistent with the implications and predictions of the theory. Moreover, studies have also shown that men and women who marry tend to be fairly similar with respect to various traits such as age, race, education and IQ, and that marriages in which partners have these similar characteristics tend to be more stable.<sup>15</sup> Again these results are consistent with the predictions of the theory. Finally, empirical studies have consistently shown that marriages are more frequent, and also more stable, when women's wages and labor force participation are lower than men's.<sup>16</sup>

## (b) Fertility

Prior to the development of the 'new home economics', economic theory made little attempt to explain why people have children or why some have more and some less than others. Though at that time the size of the population was considered either the cause or the effect of economic phenomena such as the rate of economic growth, children's arrival was either viewed as exogenous or random within the theory. In the new literature, children are considered either consumer durables or producer durables. They are consumer durables if they create a stream of future utility and satisfaction for their parents in the same way that other more commonly recognized consumer durables such as cars and houses do. Children are producer durables if they produce a stream of future income for their parents such as retirement income.<sup>17</sup>

The "new home economics" theorists argue that in less developed countries and in rural areas of developed countries children are more appropriately categorized as producer durables since their value as workers is high, i.e., they can produce a stream of income for their parents. These theorists use this analysis to explain the high fertility rates in rural and less developed areas; parents receive a higher stream of future income the more children they have. Conversely, in the urban, industrial areas of the world, where systems of social insurance are well developed, children are better treated as consumer durables. Parents



have less need for the potential stream of income from their children and therefore have less children though spending more time and money the ones they do have in order to increase the stream of satisfaction they receive from each.

The parents' decision and the supply and demand for children possess qualitative as well as quantitative dimensions. Parents not only decide about how many children to have, but also about how much time, energy, and money to invest on each child.

Since the rearing of children from the perspective of consumer or producer durables involves considerable expenditure of time, it is easy to see why in rich industrialized societies, in which the opportunity cost of time is quite high, the fertility rate is relatively low. On the other hand, in poor, rural societies, people lack a variety of alternative uses for their time. In these societies, children obviously do not interfere with evenings at theatre, trips abroad, and high paying jobs. The "new home economics" argues that the time costs of children in these latter societies are relatively low compared to the benefits of children as producer durables.

The "new home economics," then, does provide an explanation of the declines in fertility that have followed periods of economic growth. This explanation is a matter of the economics of time: as time becomes a more expensive resource, the demand for time-intensive goods such as children decreases.



On empirical grounds, economic studies of fertility have established that fertility is negatively related to the value of the mother's time.<sup>18</sup> Although the evidence on the effects of income on fertility are not unequivocal, it has been argued that at higher income levels parents substitute quality for quantity. Specifically, more affluent families spend more time and money on each child and thus acquire children of presumably higher quality, in much the same way that they buy expensive and presumably higher quality automobiles, food and clothing.<sup>19</sup>

(c) Sexual Division of Labor

In contrast to the insights contained in the "new home economics" analyses of marriage and fertility, the associated analysis of the sexual division of labor in the home and the market makes less of a contribution to understanding why women's wages and labor force participation rates are lower than men's. Moreover, as presented in Chapter III, the neoclassical analysis of the sexual division of labor involves a circularity of reasoning which limits its conclusions.

In the neoclassical theory of marriage, one of the sources of gains from marriage is a difference in the wages of men and women. In the analysis of fertility, the price of time (which is primarily represented by the mother's wage) is also one of the important determinants of fertility. In both the theory of marriage and the theory of fertility



women's wage rates are a key explanatory variable. It is important to recognize, however, that in both cases this variable is essentially treated as a given. In other words, in order to explain why people marry, have children and why women have lower labor force participation rates than men, the "new home economics" uses the lower wages of women as a key explanatory variable. However, why do women earn less than men? The theory's answer, which is derived from human capital theory, is that since women marry, bear and rear children, their labor force participation is lower than men's, and this lower labor force participation diminishes their labor market experience and thus productivity, leading to lower earnings. In its explanation of women's lower wage rates, the neoclassical theory has to treat marriage, fertility, and the division of labor within the home as givens. The reasoning is circular. This circularity, and thus the inability to explain the sexual division of labor, ultimately forces Becker to claim that this division of labor comes about as a result of inherent biological differences between the sexes.

Empirical work on these topics seems to reflect the inadequacies of the theory. The general practice in empirical work in this area has been to estimate the proportion of the wage differential between men and women that is attributable to differences in productivity-related characteristics of men and women, such as age, length of schooling, and the level of experience. In these studies,

the unexplained portion of this wage differential has been  
<sup>21</sup>  
 shown to be substantial.

Moreover, if it is empirically true, as some have argued, that the amount of on-the-job training required for non-professional workers is minimal and that their peak productivity and efficiency is reached after only a few days or weeks, then the foundation of the theory of human capital is itself of questionable value.  
<sup>22</sup>  
 Human capital theory predicts that women's lower wages are due to less experience and less on-the-job training. Yet years of experience and training may in fact have little to do with the development of skills. Experience may simply reflect seniority arrangements established by trade unions. In this case, women's lower earnings might be ascribed to an absence of union power, rather than to a lack of productivity and skills.

#### The Liberal Neoclassical Reaction; Strengths and Weaknesses

As was argued in Chapter III, Becker's attempt to explain the split between market and home along gender lines reveals his fundamentally naturalistic and biological understanding of social and economic phenomena. Ultimately for Becker, it is the biological differences between men and women that give rise to the sexual division of labor. The liberal neoclassicists, however, reject Becker's assumption that the essential determinants of the sexual division of labor are the natural, biological differences between men

and women. These economists advocate a symmetrical treatment of men and women as essentially equal rather than inherently unequal individuals. It is accordingly argued that if in fact we begin by assuming that women and men are essentially equal, then we must recognize that the character of women's specific labor supply (i.e., their lower and more discontinuous labor force participation) represents a rational response to a market that is discriminatory. These economists thus see a self-perpetuating pattern of discrimination that restricts women's occupational choice, offers them lower earnings relative to men, and forces them<sup>23</sup> into conditions of higher unemployment.

The fundamental assumptions of these economists are that discrimination and inequities exist and that they can be corrected through active state intervention. The reformist orientation of these economists has yielded many practical insights into the problem of gender inequities in a world in which the needs for change and reform are perceived by many to be overwhelming.

As we saw in the previous Chapter, however, this approach does not attempt to study systematically how capitalism has either produced or perpetuated these problems. Rather, the approach is essentially directed towards demonstrating the extent of these problems so as to permit reforms of the circumstances from which they arise. Moreover, this approach is carried on in the context of capitalist institutions, thus taking the existence of its

power structure for granted, and assuming that the reformers themselves are neutral and objective observers of society.

### Differences between Marxism and Neoclassicism

The most fundamental difference between the Marxist and the neoclassical approach is that each has defined the problem at hand quite differently and has thus gone about tackling it differently. For the neoclassicists, women are yet another group explainable in terms of rational maximizing behavior and about whom the usual economic models can be formulated. Marxists, on the other hand, have set out to understand and explain the position of women in the capitalist system, in general assuming that the subordinate status of women reflects the basic exploitive character of the system.

While neoclassicists emphasize the operation of the market, Marxists are more interested in production. On the whole, Marxists attempt to take a broader historical view of economic processes, thus viewing prices determined by supply and demand and market incomes as short run manifestations of more fundamental social forces involving capital accumulation and class struggle. Therefore, while neoclassicists focus on change via an examination of the consequences of price and income variation, Marxists believe that such quantitative analysis ultimately conceals more fundamental qualitative changes and transformations in society. For instance, while for neoclassicists changes in



income generally lack any distinctively qualitative dimension, such that individuals respond in a stable and predictable manner to changes in income over time, Marxists, by viewing changes in subsistence income against a qualitative backdrop of varying stages in history, argue for fundamentally different responses from individuals according to the historical period at hand.

In neoclassical economic theory the primary unit of analysis is the individual, while in Marxist theory economic class is fundamental. Moreover, the neoclassical approach is ahistorical in the sense that the behavioral motives that it ascribes to individuals are timeless and can be applied to any agent in any society at any time. Marxists, however, contend that the behavior of economic agents must be understood historically in terms of class struggle and not simply in terms of the logical requirements of the theory of individuals. Marxists accordingly treat behavior as neither exogenous nor unchanging over time and while Marxist theory presupposes class struggle throughout different historical periods, this struggle nonetheless takes on distinct forms in each period. Further, not only do class relations differ in each mode of production, but individual behavior also varies according to class membership. Thus, while all individuals in capitalist society do respond to changes in market prices, there are nonetheless distinct differences in the ways in which workers and capitalists respond. The contemporary Marxist, Jane Humphries, for example, shows

that in the analysis of family, prices and income are as relevant to a Marxist account of the family, as they are indeed to the "new home economics".<sup>24</sup> But while neoclassical economists consider variations in prices and income in order to examine the impact of these variables on individual choices concerning marriage, fertility, etc., and thus deduce the rationality of a division of labor by gender, Humphries in contrast asks how working class individuals use the family as an instrument to alter income and prices,<sup>25</sup> and argues that discrimination against women is in fact intensified in the process of class struggle.

Finally, since individuals in neoclassical theory enjoy freedom of choice and therefore bear responsibility for their choices, women's lower earnings, greater unemployment and occupational segregation cannot be regarded as unjust. In contrast, both early and contemporary Marxists believe that women's position in capitalist societies is a subordinate and oppressive one and therefore unjust. Indeed, the explicit goal of the Marxists is to do more than explain the subordinate position of women; they hope their work will contribute to the elimination of what they regard as injustice.<sup>26</sup>

One might conclude, then, that the neoclassical approach is essentially positive, while the Marxist approach is essentially prescriptive and thus normative. The two theories, however, differ less in this respect than it might seem. Indeed both theories have normative and positive

aspects. The difference between the two is that Marxism is explicitly and self-consciously normative, while neoclassicism is only implicitly so, in the sense that neoclassical theorists typically deny that normative positions are present in their explanations. Thus, one could well argue that by accepting the status of women in capitalist society neoclassicists advocate normative views no less than do Marxists.

#### Similarities between the Marxists and the Neoclassicists

From what has been said above, it is fair to conclude that both the neoclassical and Marxist theories of the sexual division of labor make substantive contributions to our understanding of this issue, though on entirely different grounds. The two approaches share few of the characteristics that give each its respective strengths. There are, on the other hand, certain weaknesses that are common to the two theories. This section identifies the characteristics shared by the theories that serves as their limitations as explanations of the sexual division of labor in contemporary society.

In terms of logical consistency, that each theory suffers from essentially two specific problems: reductionism and circularity.

The Marxist analysis of the sexual division of labor is reductionist because it treats this issue, and indeed any other in capitalist society, solely in terms of capitalist

economic forms. This mode of reasoning weakens Marxist analysis theoretically, since in fact no theoretical link has been demonstrated to obtain between women's subordination and capitalist class relations. Indeed, empirical work seems to support the conclusion that reductionist assumptions are inappropriate to an analysis of both developed and underdeveloped capitalist and socialist countries.

Neoclassical theory is also reductionist since it reduces the full range of individual behavior to responses to but two variables: changes in income and prices. This conceptualization of human behavior is clearly evident in the Stigler and Becker argument presented in Chapter III, in which they point to the centrality of market prices and incomes in the neoclassical theory, and argue that even apparent differences in tastes can ultimately be explained by these two variables alone.

Chapter III examined the problem of circularity in the neoclassical theory. This circularity essentially renders the neoclassical theory incapable of providing any explanation of the sexual division of labor and all the subsequent topics that stem from this division (marriage, fertility, etc.).

The circularity of reasoning in the Marxian analysis of the sexual division of labor is not as easily detectable but is nonetheless present. Marx and Engels both believed that the first division of labor and the first class antagonism

arose with the appearance of private property and the relationship between man and woman in the monogamous family. Thus they labelled the husband as the bourgeois and the wife as the proletarian. The implication of their argument is that the division of labor in society emanates from the division of labor in the family. The family is "a miniature picture of the contrasts and contradictions of society at large."<sup>27</sup> When attention is turned to Marx and Engels' analysis of women's subordinate position within the family, however, it is seen that all their categories of analysis that account for the oppression of women in the family in fact derive from relations of production in the society at large. Although they began by claiming that the family initiated class society, ultimately the relations in the family came to be completely determined by class relations in general. In the end, family relations are not constitutive of class relations in society and are no longer spoken of as a fundamental source of the division of labor in broader economic relations. This circularity of reasoning in Marxism, not only limits the analysis of the sexual division of labor but it also affects the Marxist account of class and the economy. If there is in fact a reciprocal relationship between the family and society, then the family, rather than being merely a reflection of the relations of production, should itself contribute to the structure of these relations and therefore society itself.

Establishment of the problems of reductionism and

circularity common to Marxism and neoclassicism enables the identification of limitations of these theories considered as specifically social theories. The first is the problem of economic functionalism, the second is the problem of naturalism.

Economic functionalism involves explaining and interpreting society as the result of what is needed or required by the economy. In Marxism, the family exists because it serves capitalism and the interests of the capitalist class. Consequently, women's subordination in the family can be eliminated if and only if there is an abandonment of the capitalist economy. In neoclassicism, economic functionalism shows itself somewhat differently. In this theory the primary agents in society, the rational maximizing essence of individual behavior is defined strictly in terms of the functional requirements of the neoclassical economic model and its ideal formulation of the capitalist system.

The second and possibly most significant point of intersection between these two theories is their common problem of naturalism. Naturalism is the view that at some fundamental level social phenomena can be explain by natural phenomena.

Identifying the root of naturalism in neoclassical theory is not difficult, since in fact the economic agent of neoclassical investigation is coextensive with the biological individual. Indeed, as such this individual lacks

an intrinsically social aspect and is without historical, class, racial, or cultural affiliations. With an essentially biological conception of the agent, it is not surprising that "intrinsic biological differences between the sexes" are ultimately the explanation Becker gives for the sexual division of labor in neoclassicism.<sup>28</sup> As an economic theory this naturalistic explanation weakens the neoclassical theory considerably.

In Marxian analysis and method, naturalistic bias is much more difficult to explain. Indeed, Marx and most Marxists have always claimed that their's is a fundamentally social and historical approach. Historical materialism is at least in principle radically opposed to the naturalistic and biological accounts of society, since it attributes women's subordination or any other social phenomenon to social and economic rather than biological causes. Yet there are passages in the works of Marx and Engels that refer to the "natural" division of labor.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, at times they take as the appropriate model of the sexual division of labor that in which women "naturally" remain in the domestic sphere while men leave the home. The result is an apparent contradiction in the notions found in Engels' Origins of the Family concerning the "appropriateness" of women's qualities for the domestic sphere.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, Marx and Engels believed that with the socialization of housework, the entry of women into production, and free choice in marriage, a new family, free

from oppressive relationships, would automatically be created. This view not only overestimates the ease with which housework can be socialized (as is evident from the experience of socialist countries) and underplays the non-economic elements of women's oppression (for example, that even the socialized aspects of housework are often done by women), but it also ignores the problem of equalizing responsibility within the home (since it is only "appropriate" for women to do housework).

In conclusion, it is pertinent to ask what is known about the sexual division of labor after decades (if not centuries) of intellectual work bearing this issue and after having critically traced the development of economic theory in this area of two opposing schools of economic thought. The question may first be turned around: What is not known about the sexual division of labor? This question is not simply a play on words but is in fact crucial for at least two reasons.

First, since this work has largely been a critique, it has led to the elaboration of the problems and blind-spots in economic theories of the sexual division of labor. In the development of economic thought, critical analysis has often been significant in the development of economic theory. For example, Piero Sraffa's work can in large part be classified as critique, with one of its most significant contributions being the clarification of what is now known about the limitations of neoclassical economic categories, for



example, the conditions appropriate for use of an aggregate production function. Second, an answer to the question of what is not known provides the necessary hints and direction to be search for more appropriate and more complete analysis.

The most important result of the critique of both the Marxian and the neoclassical theories of the sexual division of labor is the recognition that the sexual division of labor cannot be explained in strictly economic terms. Neither the market-oriented category of the rational maximizing individual of neoclassical theory nor the economic category of class of Marxism were alone able to provide a complete account of the sexual division of labor. Their common problems of circularity, reductionism, and naturalism ultimately led each theory to take for granted the underlying power structure involved in sexual relations and thereby to build a theory of sexual division of labor which is essentially one-dimensional and incomplete.

As for the question of what is known, it is clear that both theories acknowledge the existence and legitimacy of household production and housework. This acknowledgment has correctly led both schools to develop analyses of the family in order to explain the sexual division of labor. In the context of a general understanding of an economic theory of the family, and in spite of the distinct differences between conflict-oriented Marxism and equilibrium-oriented neoclassicism, the family is seen to be not only the locus

of an affectionate bond between a man, a woman, and their children, but as representing a convenient and efficient mean of surviving in capitalist society. Families in general and individual men and women in particular do the best they can within their respective opportunity sets. Indeed, both Marxists and neoclassicists agree that families respond to the market variables of income and prices (though they give different reasons for this response).

It is also known that microeconomic analysis of the family needs to be complemented with a more macroeconomic orientation that views factors such as class as at least partial determinants of the differential behavior of human beings as individual men and women and as members of particular socio-economic groups. It is also known that this analysis has to be historical, since the sexual division of labor has varied over time as well as across different social strata. It has also been learned that there is a difference between the labor force participation of men and women, since women are constrained by their home responsibilities and discrimination in the labor market. Liberal neoclassicists have shown the need for reform in the labor market, while the history of the development of Marxism has shown that the labor force participation of women alone does not guarantee sexual equality (as can be seen by the reality of women having the double shift of paid market and unpaid domestic work). This clearly indicates the need for substantive reform, a reform that not only brings

women into traditional "men jobs" by reforming the labor market, but one which also integrates men into traditional "women jobs," including housework.

Recognition of the limitations of a strictly economic analysis in each theory indicates the need to look beyond traditionally economic categories to develop a satisfactory explanation of the sexual division of labor. Specifically, there are two matters that appear particularly relevant for an understanding of gender and sexual division of labor: first, the process of constitution of gender, and second the question of noneconomic as opposed to economic power. The discussion that follows will briefly consider each of these in order to see how they are each relevant to an understanding of sexual division of labor.

Even if discussion is limited to the types of positions occupied by women in the workplace, i.e., the jobs that society customarily assigns to them in the economy, as a location for gender construction, while it is hard to disagree that there is a real differentiation between the characteristics of women and men as potential workers, it can be argued that this differentiation is far from being naturally determined. For instance, women are often thought manually dexterous. Yet the "natural nimble fingers" of young women may not be inherited from their mothers in the same way as the color of their skin or eyes. They may rather be the result of training received from their mothers and other female kin from early childhood in tasks that are

considered "naturally" (but really "socially") appropriate for women. Since industrial sewing of clothing closely resembles domestic sewing, women who have learned such sewing at home already, "naturally" have the manual dexterity required.

It is in part because this training, as with so many other activities performed by women that customarily fall under the label of domestic labor, is socially invisible and privatized that the skills it produces are attributed to nature. Not accidentally, the jobs that require this type of training are often classified as unskilled or semi-skilled. At the same time, given the high level of manual dexterity required in many of the jobs performed by women,<sup>31</sup> it is clear that the categorization of these jobs as "unskilled" does not derive from the purely natural character of the job. For many of these jobs little on-the-job training is required, specifically because women are already trained in the home. But of course, skill categories are not determined in an unbiased and purely objective manner.<sup>32</sup> Jobs which are identified as "women's work" tend to be identified as "unskilled" or "semi-skilled," whereas technically similar jobs identified as "men's work" tend to be classified as "skilled." To a large extent, then, women perform "unskilled" labor because they perform women's labor, rather than perform unskilled labor because they are truly unskilled.

The social invisibility of domestic training that

produces skills of manual dexterity and the lack of social recognition that these skills receive is not accidental. It is intrinsic to the process of gender construction. For the process of gender differentiation no more produces two "separate but equal" genders than does apartheid produce two separate but equal roles for blacks and whites in South Africa. Rather, the process is itself a process of the social construction of women as a human category. This process of subordination can be partly understood in terms of the exclusion of women from certain activities and their confinement to others. Moreover, the activities from which women per se are excluded are often those which are constituted as public, explicitly social activities, and the activities to which women per se are confined are typically constituted as intrinsically private and essentially individual.

This raises a second relevant matter, namely, power. The constitution of activities as public and private, social and individual, of course differs over time and across different types of society. The importance of activities in which the social aspect is dominant is that they confer social power and prestige. This is not to say, of course, that no power whatsoever is conferred by those activities in which the private aspect is dominant. It is a mistake, however, to see private power and social power as equal. Social power is collective, reproducible through social processes, and relatively autonomous from the

characteristics of particular individuals. Private power, as essentially individual, is contingent on the specific characteristics of particular individuals and is generally reproducible only by chance, while influenced by social power structure.

Therefore, what should be stressed, in contrast to the naturalistic bias of both the Marxists and the neoclassicists, is that women's status is socially determined to be specifically subordinate. What must be explained is why it is that woman's job is to do the work which nurtures children, men and older generations -- work which appears to be purely private and personal -- while it is the man's job to represent women and children in the society at large in which public power dominates private power.

If it is the case that the most important thing learned about the sexual division of labor is that it cannot be explained in strictly economic terms, and that therefore a more appropriate framework of analysis is needed, one that incorporates categories of gender and power, then it is fair to say that Marxism shows more promise in developing a more adequate theory and overcoming its weaknesses than does neoclassicism. This is because Marxist economic theory is more responsive to considerations of power. At any rate, there is currently considerable debate surrounding the appropriate terms of explanation for questions of gender, race, etc., in Marxism. Indeed the direction of development

in the contemporary Marxian theory of the sexual division of labor seems to be away from economic categories and toward conceptualization of noneconomic frameworks of analysis. This direction can be seen in the development of concepts such as "patriarchy" and "reproduction." On the other hand, considerations of power are generally excluded from the neoclassical analysis of sexual division of labor. Moreover, all categories of analysis in the "new home economics" are bound up with strict economic interpretations, and there does not seem to be much revisionist ferment in this area.

## FOOTNOTES

1. Maxine Molyneux, "Women in Socialist Societies: Problems of Theory and Practice", Feminist Review, n.8, (1981).
2. Himmelweit and Mohun, op. cit.
3. Mitchell, "Longest Revolution", op. cit. ; Delphy, op. cit.
4. Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, (New York: Vintage, 1980).
5. Young, op. cit. ; Kelley, op. cit.
6. Susan Himmelweit, "The real Dualism of Sex and Class", Review of Radical Political Economics, vol. 16, n. 1, (1984), pp 167-83.
7. Ibid., p. 179.
8. This is of course different from the neoclassical theory which considers children as durable commodities. Himmelweit, op. cit., p. 180.
9. Ibid., p. 180.
10. Ibid., p. 180. For a recent formal analysis of the relationship between human reproduction, women's subordination, and capitalist labor exploitation, see J. B. Davis, "A Theory of Labor Exploitation Through Gender and Ethnicity Division; Part I, Gender," presented at American Economic Association Annual Meetings, December, 1984.
11. Becker, "A Theory of Marriage", op. cit.
12. Sawhill, op. cit., p. 131
13. Isabel Sawhill, Gerald Peabody, Carol Jones, and Steven Caldwell, Income Transfers and Family Structure, (Washington, D.C., 1975).
14. Larry Bumpass and James Sweet, "Differentials in Marital Instability: 1970." , American Sociological Review, n.37, (1972), p. 754.
15. Sex, Discrimination, and the Division of Labor, edited by Cynthia Lloyd (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975).
16. Ibid.



17. Ibid.
18. Robert T. Michael, "Education and Derived Demand for Children," in Economics of the Family: Marriage, Children, and Human Capital, edited by Theodore W. Schultz (Chicago, 1974).
19. Economics of the Family: Marriage, Children, and Human Capital, edited by Theodore W. Schultz (Chicago, 1974).
20. Becker, A Treatise, op.cit., p. 24.
21. Economics of the Family, op.cit.
22. Harry Braverman, Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974).
23. Lloyd and Niemi, op.cit.
24. Jane Humphries, "Class Struggle and the Persistence of the Working Class Family," Cambridge Journal of Economics, vol.7, (1977).
25. This analysis can of course be extended to the class of capitalists also. Humphries emphasizes the family in the case of the working class because she thinks that the institution of the family is one of the important instruments of struggle available to the working class.
26. In this instance the liberal neoclassicist could be considered closer to the Marxist than to the conservative neoclassicist. The fundamental difference between the liberals and the Marxists, however, is that the Marxists in general believe that the overthrow of capitalism is at least a necessary condition for the complete elimination of this injustice, while liberals believe that government intervention in the capitalist economy is the solution.  
Another apparent point of intersection between the liberal neoclassicist and the Marxists, an intersection that distinguishes them both from the conservative neoclassicists, is the lack of any criticism of government bureaucracy in either tradition.
27. Engels, The Origins, op. cit., p. 57.
28. Becker, A Treatise, op. cit., p. 24.
29. Marx and Engels, German Ideology, op. cit., p.9.

30. In The Origins, Engels tended to naturalise the division of labor especially when referring to early forms, but he was clearly more interested in the economic and social determinants of social inequality.

31. For example, in the clothing or electronic industries.

32. Braverman, op. cit.

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