

Econ 105: Introduction to Political Economy

Lecture Twenty-One: Political Economy of Gender

Topics covered:

1. What is the Care Economy?
2. Empirical Evidence of Gender Disparities And Discrimination
3. Accumulation and Patriarchy (Circuit of Capital)

The Invisible Care Economy (Folbre: Supporting Care)

The field of economics until recently has not focused on activities that occur outside of the market. However many of these non-market activities, such as caring labor, are necessary for the reproduction of society. Historically caring labor has taken place outside of the market place and has been performed mainly by women.

What makes it “an economy?”

1. Work is performed in provisioning of vital services.
 2. The “product” is creation and maintenance of health, well-functioning humans, who are today’s and tomorrow’s workers in the market economy.
- While elected officials and official economists worry about the growth of our market economy and the Gross Domestic Product, Americans devote as much time to unpaid family and community work as they do to the paid employment that is counted in that statistic.
 - Our most important efforts are devoted to work not directly valued by the market—building human capabilities by caring for children, the elderly, the sick and disabled.
 - Through the unpaid, non-market work of friends and family members and the paid work of professional care workers, we care for each other in times of disability and trouble, and we produce the next generation of citizens and workers.

What makes it different from the rest of the economy?

- The care economy is distinguished from the rest of the market economy because it includes services, whether provided in the home, market, community, or state, that have strong personal and emotional dimensions.

- Often, these are activities provided on a face-to-face or first-name basis by care workers motivated by a sense of obligation, service, commitment and love.
- These motives are important because market economies provide limited financial incentives to provide care. Whether young, disabled, or dependent elderly, individuals who need care rarely have the income to pay for it themselves. The care economy, therefore, depends on voluntary gifts, from parents, other family members, and community members and friends, or on third-party payments, from insurance companies or governments.

Why is it invisible?

- Because it is not part of the market economy. It is not 'commoditised' (produced for sale).
- Because it is unpaid - it is not monetised.
- Because it is women's work.
- Because it is not highly valued (partly because of 1, 2 and 3).
- Because it is part of what is defined as the 'private' sphere.

-What would happen to the market and state spheres without the care economy?

Problems:

Over time, as women's labor force participation rates have increased, this has severely impacted sectors of the economy, such as caring labor, where the burden of responsibility has fallen on women to provide these activities.

With increasing numbers of women engaged in paid labor there has been a shift to provide caring labor through the market. This movement of provision of care to market has led to the UNDERPRODUCTION of caring labor.

- The care economy's problems begin with our common assumption that care will be provided by family members, friends, and neighbors.
- This "caring norm" especially hurts women who pay a high price in lost earnings and economic vulnerability for the time they devote to caring for children, the sick and disabled, and the elderly.

- But men are also harmed by competitive pressures and inflexible rules that make it difficult to combine paid work with family work.
- Recently, budget cuts at public institutions have put more pressure on the care economy. Families have been presented with new dilemmas, forced to choose between market work and providing adequate care for family members. For example:
 - Hospitals save money by discharging surgical patients more quickly, only to send patients home in urgent need for round-the-clock monitoring and treatment by family members.
 - Medicare, and other health insurance agencies, reduce their own costs by relying on the free care provided by family members. After paying for retirees' medical care and pharmaceuticals, for example, Medicare provides no care for disabled seniors too infirm to tend to their own daily needs; it leaves it to family members to fill the care gap.
 - Facing ever tighter budgets, public schools also shift costs to parents by charging for books, buses, participation in school sports.

Support Family Work

- In business terms, by investing in the production and maintenance of healthy and productive people, our society's human capital, unpaid care improves our living standards.
- The U.S. lags far behind other countries in working conditions supportive of family responsibilities.

Family Policies Around the World (from the Field Guide)

The parental leave and child care benefits offered in Northwest Europe, Canada, and Australia are far more generous than those in the United States.

- The U.S. is one of only five countries worldwide that does not offer paid parental leave. Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden offer particularly generous maternity leave: 30-42 weeks at close to full-wage replacement. In the U.S. the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 provides only 12 weeks of unpaid leave for those employed by firms with 50 or more employees.

- Many countries also offer paternal leave, which encourages fathers to play a more active role. In Sweden, parental leaves can be shared or used by one parent, but one non-transferable month is reserved for the father and one for the mother, to encourage sharing. During their child's first year, more than one half of fathers use some leave. Fathers use nearly one third of all paid temporary leave to stay home and care for sick children under twelve.
- Many Northwest European countries make it easier for families to balance paid work and family work. They set shorter work weeks, provide a minimum of twenty days paid vacation, and promote high-quality part-time employment. In Sweden, parents have the right to work six hours a day (at pro-rated pay) until their children turn eight.
- Most Northwest European countries provide high-quality early childhood education and care programs either free or for a very low cost.

-What difference would it make if women's invisible labor became visible?

A common argument is that women earn less than men because the occupations they are in require lower levels of education, less human capital etc.

-A substantial proportion of school districts in the U.S. pay secretaries and teaching assistants considerably less than the cleaners.

-In Denver, nurses were found to make less than gardeners.

-In New York State, school nurses in the West Islip school district start at \$27,000, groundsman at \$29,000.

-In 1996 the median hourly wage for a preschool teacher was \$7.80 whereas for a bus driver it was \$11.56 (FG)

Empirical Evidence of Gender Disparities And Discrimination

From the Field Guide Chapter.

Accumulation and Patriarchy (Circuit of Capital)

Patriarchy like racism is more than just personal prejudices and stereotyping by one group (men, White folk) of another (women, blacks or Asians). Rather it describes a systemic and institutionalized set of mechanisms by which one group of humans is systematically subjugated, oppressed, disempowered and make to serve the interests of another group.

Patriarchy is literally “father-rule.”

The witch-hunt which raged through Europe from the 12th to the 17th century was one of the mechanisms to control and subordinate women, the peasant and artisan, women who in their economic and sexual independence constituted a threat to the emerging bourgeois order.

Just as racist doctrine was useful in justifying seizure by white Europeans of black and Native American land and property (another form of primitive accumulation), so also the rise of Capitalism in Europe is linked to confiscation of property of “witches and sorcerers” in order to fund wars etc.