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MOTHERING AND THE ECONOMY

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Introduction

Access to means of existence – which in most contemporary societies depends on access to money – is necessary for living and participating in society, yet it is so basic and trivial that it is often overlooked. The relations between mothering and the formal economy are particularly contentious. Economics as a discipline rests on the exclusion of motherwork. The father of market economy, Adam Smith, invented “economic man,” the self-interested model actor who is at the foundation of economic thinking and modeling, with this famous argument: “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we can expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest” (26–27). According to Smith, society is made up of self-interested individuals, and it is through markets that these individuals make collective life possible. In her book, *Who Cooked Adam Smith’s Dinner*, Katrine Marçal argues that Adam Smith’s own experience could have taught him otherwise, as dinner has to be prepared before it can be consumed, and every night Smith’s mother cooked his dinner – not out of self-interest but for free, perhaps even for love. In fact, his mother came to live with him, thus supporting with her unpaid labour the writing of his major work, *The Wealth of Nations*. Only by ignoring his mother’s unpaid work, Smith could arrive at the idea of self-interest as the main human characteristic and the “invisible hand of the market” as the main mechanism in the making of society. The exclusion of “mom’s invisible hand” is a fundamental error in economic ideology: Without this basic flaw in economic thinking, the story of mothering and the economy could have turned out differently. As it is, mothering, motherwork, and its inherent tension with the economic systems of valuation and accounting and with paid work is at the core of economic inequality.

This chapter will introduce some of the main issues, including the valuation or lack thereof of mothering and motherwork in the formal economy and mothers’ contribution to the economy, mothering and mothers’ participation in the formal economy, mothers’ access to economic resources, including earnings from paid work, mothers’ access to paid work, balancing paid work and family, the motherhood wage penalty, the gender divided labour market and the concentration of women in motherlike professions, the shifting valuation of mothering and motherwork in relation to paid work leading to shifts in the public support of mothers and mothering, changes in family law, taxation, and how these interact and change.

Background and context

Historical overview

In first-wave feminism, formal rights such as suffrage, rights to education, and paid work were the core issues. Mothering and the combination of motherhood and participation in society, including paid work, was not a main topic, although it was raised by women in the labour movement. For the affluent at that time, in a class society with domestic servants, and before the emergence of an ideology of intensive mothering, most aspects of mothering could be, and were indeed, delegated to servants or nannies. However, from the mid-nineteenth century, there was a concern about working-class mothers' inferior mothering and the separation of mothers and children due to long days in the factories (Reynolds). Yet the tension between mothering and the pursuit of professional and societal interests as an issue of general concern arose later, with the emergence of more egalitarian societies in which domestic servants were no longer self-evident in middle-class households, and mothers were increasingly expected to take on domestic work as well as mothering themselves. At the dawn of second-wave feminism, in the 1960s, Betty Friedan saw hiring domestic help as the solution that would liberate women from the family so that they could pursue careers. The influence of psychological studies of child development and attachment theory (Bowlby; Ainsworth) throughout the twentieth century contributed to strengthening the moral obligations for mothers to be involved in the daily upbringing of their children. In the 1970s, second-wave feminists found themselves caught between the rising expectations of women's participation in all parts of society (education, paid labour, and politics) and the norms of hands-on mothering (Hrdy). The combination of the moral imperative of increasingly intensified mother-child relations and the call for women's economic independency through paid work, as well as the persistent lack of adequate structures of institutional and economic support for working mothers, became one of the core issues in the second-wave feminist movement in the 1970s and still forms the basis of the current "mothering and the economy" problem.

Mothers' labour and paid labour

Even if mothers and mothering were not at the core of early feminist debates, the question of maternalism and women's liberation lurked behind arguments of equal treatment or differential treatment (the Wollstonecraft dilemma) as a strategy of gender equality. Equal treatment risks ignoring mothers' bodily work as female mammals – of pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding, and the time, effort, risks, and cost of it to women (Deleuran and Holm-Nielsen) – as well as the social practices of mothering and motherwork, which are still also disproportionately undertaken by women. On the other hand, history has also taught us the pitfalls of arguments of biological difference, using women's biology as an excuse for paternalism and exclusion. In the struggle for women's equal rights, feminists have always had to navigate this difficult terrain and have fought over worker protection laws, married women's right to work and equal pay, and individual taxation. They have fought against the idea of the "family wage" and the male breadwinner as arguments for women's lower wages, and against joint taxation of couples, which subsumes women's unpaid work under a male head of household and acts as a disincentive to women's labour market participation and thereby access to their own money. Paid maternity leave is another issue over which feminists have dissented, although today it's mainly in the United States that the argument against paid maternity leave is still being made from a feminist point of view. For example, the renowned feminist economist Barbara Bergmann has

argued against prolonged leave for mothers (and parents) on the ground that it would exclude women from the labour market. The provision of childcare services, on the other hand, has been widely embraced as a feminist issue also in the United States, although its framing and the discourses that tend to go with it, such as human capital and education arguments, are also opposed as they position institutional care as superior to mothers' (and fathers') care for their own children, thus devaluing mothering and motherwork. These struggles to a large extent follow class divisions, in particular, in the United States. Cobble argues that the continuing lack of basic public structures of support for working mothers is due to the lack of support for minorities and the poor, and the strength of liberal feminism relying on equal treatment in contrast to notions of substantive equality (2). Labour feminists in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, arguing for job security for pregnant women, parental leave, and childcare facilities, were thus unsuccessful in mobilizing social support for entitlements for working mothers. This contrasts with Europe, where such claims gradually received widespread support as part of expanding welfare states and led to the development of parental leave systems, childcare facilities, and other entitlements for working parents that have helped alleviate the conflict between mothering and paid work.

While mothers in the latter half of the twentieth century were torn between the conflicting ideological demands of paid work and caring for their children themselves, over the last two decades, there has been a general shift in ideologies. Orloff argues that maternalism and the expectation that mothers should care full-time for their children at home have been replaced by an ideology of full-time work for all. Policies that assume an "adult worker model" in which full-time employment over the life course forms the basis of policies and entitlements, despite many women still working part-time, have been criticized for a lack of recognition of care and for having negative financial consequences for women (Lewis, *The decline; The adult worker*). On the other hand, the expansion of family policies across the OECD countries may also be seen as a recognition of and support of care and motherwork (Daly).

Nevertheless, despite the expansion of family policies that facilitate the combination of paid work and childcare, a large literature on how families organize paid work and care still finds that the problem of combining paid work and care persists, even in countries with generous support systems for working parents (Gatrell). Further, the overall responsibility for managing families, including balancing paid work and care, remains gendered and tends to fall more on mothers (Hochschild, *Time bind*; Kan et al.), although in some countries, fathers increasingly feel the tension, too (Allard et al.).

Single mothers

The view on and support for single mothers can be seen as the litmus test for the valuation, inclusion, or exclusion of mothers in the economy and in society (Fineman, *Neutered Mother*). Following the neoliberal restructuring of welfare systems and the increasing moral obligation to engage in paid work, single mothers are increasingly targeted with welfare-to-work (workfare) programmes (Brady, *Governing*; Handler; Lewis, *Lone mothers*). At the same time, labour markets are changing towards low-paid, irregular, inflexible, and insecure jobs. For lone mothers, precarious employment creates special problems (Evans). Brady illustrates how there has been a shift in activation frameworks in Australia from framing single mothers as vulnerable but resourceful and in need of self-development and self-confidence towards positioning and managing single mothers in terms of risk categories (Brady, "Targeting"), a development she sees as a result of the emergence of contracted employment services and quasi-market governance technologies and their in-built performance measures.

Lack of valuation of motherwork

The lack of valuation of unpaid work in the household was institutionalized with the introduction of the international standard of national accounts (SNA) in the 1950s. Marilyn Waring critiqued the explicit exclusion of unpaid work and non-market production in the design of SNA, which is used by all countries as a measure of economic activity. Waring's critique revealed that the system of national accounts relied on the active and deliberate exclusion of unpaid household work (and subsistence production). Prior to the adoption of the international standard some countries, such as Norway, did include unpaid household production in their measures of economic activity (Aslaksen and Koren). In the 1970s, Norwegian sociologist Kari Wærness calculated the contribution of unpaid household work to the GDP in Norway based on the first Norwegian time use survey. The lack of recognition of unpaid work may to a large extent be seen as a lack of valuation of mothers' work, as a lot of the unpaid work in the household, such as cooking, cleaning, helping children with homework, etc., as well as subsistence production, is done as part of mothering. Waring also drew attention to a more direct maternal product, mothers' milk, as one of her examples of a valuable product, as well as breastfeeding as time-consuming work "counting for nothing" in the market economy, in contrast to inferior cow milk powder, which is sold in markets and is counted as contributing to a country's gross domestic product (GDP) (see also J. Smith). The importance, productivity, and value of the bodily work of mothers in terms of producing children – and mother's milk – has received relatively little attention and remains largely silenced even in feminist economics, compared to the social work of mothering, as noted by Galtry and Sturmfels.

Central theories/themes

Mothering and motherwork as productive

An important question in economic thinking is the distinction between what is productive and produces value, and what is not. Rather than being external to or marginal to the economy, mothering, both in its biological dimensions and its social dimensions, should be seen as productive. The production of children, through pregnancy, birth, and often breastfeeding, and the nurturing and raising them into fully contributing human beings, citizens, taxpayers, etc., is central, necessary, and indeed the aim of any economy. The idea of (social) mothering as productive is also to some extent reflected in theories of human capital, seeing parents' use of time and transfer of skills to their children as investment in human capital (Becker).

Counting unpaid household work

Marilyn Waring's groundbreaking critique of the SNA accounts led to changes, and in 1993, several of the injustices she had addressed were amended, such as counting unpaid subsistence production. Although the unpaid work in the household remained outside of what is seen as economic activity, the concept of satellite accounts was developed to be able to also account for economic activities outside of the market. The fourth UN conference on women in Beijing in 1995 demanded that women's economic contribution should be made visible in statistics, and in the 1990s, regional and national statistics offices developed methodologies for measuring and valuing unpaid work. However, the development has been slow and the impact on policies and in the general public has been moderate (Varjonen and Kirjavainen). Debates on unpaid household production have been reinvigorated with the renewed emphasis

on well-being and happiness as alternatives to the GDP as a measure of economics and performance (Stiglitz et al.).

From wages for housework to universal basic income

As early as in the 1920s, wages for housework was discussed in Parliament in Australia based on calculation of the monetary valuation of housewives' work in the home (Traikovski). In the early 1970s, Marxist feminists demanded wages for housework, arguing that the production of paid labour and the paid work of male breadwinners relied on housewives' unpaid work (Dalla Costa and James). Weeks discusses the legacy of the wages for housework movement, and she argues that this debate could inspire and inform new claims of radical reforms, such as a basic universal income and a reduction of the work day. Ailsa McKay and others (see also Cantillon and McLean) have argued that a universal, unconditional basic income for all would reduce the cost of unpaid care work and other important social activities and raise the bargaining power of those at the bottom of the labour market.

Mothers' access to money

The Norwegian feminist legal scholar Tove Stang Dahl argued that women had three main sources of access to money: marriage, paid work, and the state. In the early to mid-twentieth century, marriage was the main source of money and the housewife contract in many countries secured women compensation at divorce for the unpaid work in the family. During the 1970s and 1980s, women increasingly entered the labour market – a development that coincided with the introduction of gender-neutral family laws in most countries, both of which were largely supported by feminists (see Fineman, *Neutered Mother*). As a result, women were increasingly seen as autonomous and equal breadwinners of their own. As a result of mothers' inclusion in paid work, the shift towards gender-neutral legislation at divorce, and the retrenchment of state support for direct mothering (Orloff), mothers increasingly rely on paid work as their main source of income.

Male organizing assumptions

Mothers are discriminated against in the labour market by male organizing assumptions. The idea of the generalized employee takes for granted an autonomous individual, free of other obligations ("the unencumbered worker model") and holds expectations of unlimited dedication to work and a working culture of long hours. Measured against this standard, mothers and other carers are seen as abnormal. Managing the sometimes conflicting maternal body and the embodied worker may come at the cost of the former and the child, as pregnant women try to comply with the expectations of the dedicated worker (Gatrell). Changing such cultures is very difficult, as Arlie Hochschild's study of a "family-friendly" company revealed: despite generous family policies, the company culture of long hours and work dedication made it difficult for parents to use the available opportunities for fear of being stigmatized and having negative career effects.

The motherhood penalty

The motherhood penalty is the difference in earnings between mothers and women without children. The motherhood penalty varies across countries and between different groups of mothers. The penalty varies from 42% on average for developing countries to zero for Denmark, France, and Norway. For the United States, it is zero for married women (Grimshaw and

Rubery). Budig and Hodges found that in the United States, the motherhood penalty is much higher for mothers at the lower income levels, while for the highest income groups, the differences in wages between mothers and non-mothers are largely due to the time spent in childcare. The antipode to the motherhood penalty is the fatherhood premium: the relative advantage of men who are fathers, compared to non-fathers. If the fatherhood premium remains high or even increases, the difference between mothers and fathers may remain despite a decrease, or even in the absence, of a motherhood penalty. Finally, wage difference is not the only difference that matters: a recent Norwegian study found a substantial difference between fathers' and mothers' prospects of obtaining management positions (Hardoy et al.).

The gender division of paid work

One of the major changes in the last half of the twentieth century was the entry of women into the formal labour market and the shift from household production to market production of many goods and services as the housewife era gave way to the dual-earner model as the dominant model for heterosexual couples. The outsourcing of care to the formal labour market has been important in freeing women from private care work to pursue paid work. However, as employees in the formal labour force, a large share of women continue to do much of the same (mother-like) work, in pink-collar professions in health, care, education, and services. As a consequence of the neoliberal reorganization of the economy and retrenchment of public services, there is also a privatization and commercialization of care, and in this process, women's entrepreneurship is often used as an argument for privatization of care and welfare services (Ahl and Tillmar). However, rather than leading to numerous successful woman-led businesses, self-employment often offers precarious work. Further, the global corporations that dominate the care market offer less secure jobs and inferior pension schemes compared to the public providers they replace.

Violence, mothering, and the economy

The links between violence and economic and material circumstances are well established (Edwards and Hearn) and many victims of violence are mothers. Intimate partner violence has a negative impact on health and thus on capacity to work (Adams, Tolman, Bybee, Sullivan and Kennedy). Access to money and housing, as well as divorce laws and support services for victims of intimate partner violence (IPV), facilitate victims' leaving an abusive relationship and may be life-saving for the victim as well as the perpetrator. Some studies find that the increase in women's labour market participation rate was accompanied by a corresponding fall in IPV (see Blau and Winkler, 50–51). However, the relations between women's economic empowerment and domestic violence are complex and are mediated by culture. Bhattacharya, for instance, found that in India, married women exposed to violence were more likely to be employed. In the wake of austerity policies in the United Kingdom, with cutbacks on jobs in the public sector as well as of public services that are important for women to be able to take paid employment, and cuts to services for victims of violence, there was an increase in violence against women (Towers and Walby).

Central issues

Mothering and inequality

Mothering is at the core of economic inequality – between men and women, and between women with the outsourcing of mothering to institutions typically employing lower-paid

women who may also be mothers, or to transnational female migrants, who are often mothers themselves, and who in turn outsource their mothering to others who are also mothers and so forth (see Melinda Vandenbeld Giles, this volume). Very broadly, the cost of mothering, the time and effort it takes, as well as the value that is its outcome: people, families, and life worlds, in short: the production of society, is not fully reflected in the systems of what count in the economy and the social systems of compensation and remuneration in most countries, which leaves many mothers inadequately provided for.

Production of children, birth, and breastfeeding

Seeing motherwork as productive, including its biological aspects – childbearing and the production of mother’s milk, and the time and effort it takes – as work, leads us to the problem that arguments of differential treatment based on biology are difficult for feminists. Arguments of biological difference have long been used against women as arguments for exclusion, paternalism, and lack of recognition of women. Claiming valuation and recognition of the bodywork of producing and feeding children is thus more contested than arguments related to the social work of parenting. On the other hand, reproduction and biological motherhood has increasingly been drawn into the realm of commodities. Wombs can be rented, eggs and sperm and even children can be bought and sold through commercial surrogacy (Hewitson). There is also a growing market for mothers’ milk and even wet-nurses (J. Smith).

Recognition and valuation of the social work of mothering

The upbringing of children is productive work, turning them into useful members of society, and installing in them the values, the beliefs, knowledge, know-how, and capabilities that make up the specificities of each culture. In a response to Greg Mankiw, professor and chairman of the economics department at Harvard University, who likened having a child with choosing a new car, feminist legal scholar Martha Fineman (“Having a Child”) gave a crash course in children as common goods and the need for investing in them:

The state and the market are major consumers of the products of reproduction and caretaking labour. Parental reproduction also reproduces society, providing the taxpayers, consumers, workers, and employers who will populate our future. . . . It makes it mandatory that society, including the market, share the costs and burdens associated with not only bearing but also caring for the next generation.

Paid work and mothering

Despite the feminization of labour and the rise globally in women’s labour market participation, in countries with inadequate support structures for working parents, women still have to choose between paid work and having children. The birth rates in countries such as Poland, Japan, Italy, and Germany indicate that paid work is prioritized, although low birth rates also go with low levels of female labour market participation. However, a country such as the United States, which has the lowest level of support for working parents, still has a relatively high birth rate. And in Norway, a Nordic country with extensive public support for parents and children, and which used to be an example of how women could have it all, with high labour market participation and high birth levels, has seen a decline in fertility since 2009, back to 1980s levels. There is general agreement about the importance of support structures for working parents, parental

leave, affordable and good kindergartens, sick leaves, welfare states, etc. for work–life balance, and there has been an expansion of family policies globally, facilitating work–life balance, with the United States as the exception, with no paid parental leave.

Welfare state entitlements and pensions increasingly rely on lifelong, full-time paid work (adult worker model, Lewis, *The adult worker*). Mothers' working patterns, which typically include care breaks and part-time employment, lead to lower lifetime earnings, less access to welfare state entitlements (which rely on participation in paid work), and lower pensions. On the other hand, the expansion of family policies in most OECD countries may also be a recognition and valuation of unpaid work, which has greatly improved mothers' opportunities to combine paid work and care in many countries (Daly).

However, changes in legislation towards gender-equal/gender-neutral parenting have had negative economic effects at divorce on mothers who have taken a larger responsibility for the family at the cost of their own earnings and career (Fineman, *Neutered Mother*). Gender neutrality does not recognize the continued inequality in parental responsibility and the higher costs of mothering to career and wages for many women.

Controversies

Valuing mothering and motherwork without reinforcing gender stereotypes

One core controversy is the question of valuing mothering (care) without reinforcing the gender stereotypical division of labour. This question relates to the design of family policies. Should family policies be part of or subsumed under gender-equality policies and designed to predominantly facilitate mothers' paid work, or should family policies support different family models, including mothers (and fathers) caring for their children themselves? In "After the Family Wage," Nancy Fraser discusses different models for supporting carers and providing economic gender justice; either by making care costless for women within gendered arrangements of paid work and care, which would recognize and value care but also perpetuate the gender division of paid and unpaid work; or the universal breadwinner model, promoting paid work for mothers, at par with men, which would give mothers access to paid work and their own wages but disregarding care; or, finally, the universal caregiver model, within which care is shared between mothers, fathers, caring institutions, and the wider society. Many see the Nordic countries as having come very close to the realization of Fraser's universal caregiver model with generous welfare state entitlements for all children and for working parents. The Norwegian political scientist Helga Hernes famously formulated the concept of state feminism, arguing that the Nordic countries could realize a vision of woman-friendly welfare states. In the Nordic context, family policies today are designed to promote a dual-earner/dual-carer model, facilitated by generous entitlements for working parents and in some countries by reserved entitlements to care for fathers. Nevertheless, Nordic family policies have been criticized from a class perspective for being modelled on a middle-class ideal of parenting, ignoring and neglecting working-class parents' needs and family ideals (Stefansen and Farstad). Mulinari has similarly criticized from a postcolonial perspective the prevailing idea of "gender equality," for neglecting issues of racial discrimination and exclusion. Bjørnholt ("From Work-Sharing") has criticized the emphasis on family policies as gender-equality policies for diverting attention from economic gender equality and from issues of redistribution.

Paid work as the main/only strategy for access to resources for mothers

The question of how family policies should support mothers and mothering is related to how paid work is viewed. Is (all) paid work (always) liberating? While this was a contested issue in the past, today, as women have entered the labour force, there is relative consensus on the need for women to engage in paid work, and the critique of paid work from a feminist perspective has disappeared. However, the question remains: Is lifelong full-time paid work a viable strategy for securing mothers' access to means of existence and their autonomy? In the context of increasingly precarious work arrangements, intensification of paid work, stagnating or even falling wages, gender-neutral family laws, and the neoliberal restructuring of welfare states, mothers and motherwork remain insufficiently supported in many societies. Mothers are also increasingly primary breadwinners, both as single parents and in married couples (Wang et al.).

Family policies as social engineering

Many see the gender division of paid and unpaid work within families and mothers' larger parenting responsibilities as the cause of the economic inequality in the labour market. Many see the paternal quota of parental leave, a nontransferable share of paid parental leave reserved for fathers in some of the Nordic countries, as a reform which might lead to shifting parental responsibility from mothers to fathers.

Norway and Sweden were the first countries to introduce a paternal quota of parental leave in 1993 and 1995, respectively. Despite a cultural change towards involved fatherhood, widespread uptake by fathers of their reserved share of paid parental leave, and fathers increasingly also reporting work–family strain (Allard et al.), these changes in attitudes and practices have so far not had an observable effect on the gender pay gap. Individual fathers who take on the responsibility as primary carers may have similar experiences as mothers (Doucet), but gendered hierarchies of valuation may moderate or distort the effect on gender equality of more gender-equal parenting. In a longitudinal follow-up study (Bjørnholt, “Norwegian Work-Sharing”) of fathers who shared care and household work, Bjørnholt (“Part-Time Work”) found that their caring experience easily translated into managerial skills.

Another problem with relying on rearranging the interior of heterosexual families as a main strategy of gender equality is its heteronormative assumption. Many mothers do not live in heterosexual couple relationships and reallocating childcare to men is at best only a partial solution.

Directions for future research

How are we to better account for, value, and understand the various economic aspects of mothering in future research? In my view, it would be important to mainstream mothering into economics and to mainstream economic perspectives on care and mothering in other disciplines. This would include accounting for unpaid care work and household economics but also studying and theorizing how the formal economy and society – including its organizations and institutions – rely on mothering and motherwork. It requires recognizing mothering as productive, including its biological aspects. Further, there is a need for further research on the effects on mothers and mothering on economic developments, economic policies and decision-making, and regulations and institutions at local, regional, national, and international levels.

How to provide for and support mothers and mothering is a key issue of theoretical and political importance. Is it possible to make the labour market work for mothers? What is the role of employers and what should states do? What role should the transformation of heterosexual relationships have?

There is a need for exploring transformative approaches, reforms, and innovative solutions at systems level: Could a universal basic income be part of such a solution? How could such a radical transformation be achieved? Another transformative approach that needs further exploration, is working time reform: Would a six-hour day for all solve some of the tension between full-time work and mothering? How could it be achieved?

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Conclusion

Mothering is part of and interwoven with the economy at all levels from the bodily work of producing children and human milk to global flows of care and money. The formal economy continues to rely on the life-producing and social reproductive work in families and households, which largely goes unrecognized and uncounted. Mother(like) work makes up a large share of the formal economy in terms of pink-collar professions in the health, care, service, and education sectors, where it is often undervalued and underpaid. Mothering is excluded from economic thinking, accounting, and systems of valuation, and mothering often causes women's exclusion or marginalization in the formal economy and the workplace.

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