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**The Discovery of 'Unpaid Work':
the social consequences of the expansion of 'work'**

Susan Himmelweit

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Copies may be obtained from:
Economics Department
Faculty of Social Sciences
The Open University
Walton Hall Milton Keynes MK7 6AA
Telephone: 01908 654436
Email: economics@open.ac.uk
Fax: 01908 654488

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**The discovery of “unpaid work”:
the social consequences of the expansion of “work”**

Sue Himmelweit

Sue Himmelweit
Economics Discipline
The Faculty of Social Sciences
The Open University
Walton Hall
Milton Keynes MK7 6AA
Email: s.himmelweit@open.ac.uk

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ABSTRACT

This paper questions the dichotomy of work/non-work. It examines the way in which the category of work was expanded by feminists and economists to include much domestic activity, and considers some of the consequences of this. It argues that the discovery of unpaid “work” involved an uncritical application and validation of a concept of work abstracted from a model of commodity producing wage-labor in manufacturing. However, this concept excludes much of what is distinctive about domestic activities, such as their caring and self-fulfilling aspects. Inequality between households has become a conduit for the construction of needs in a form in which “work”, and in particular work for money, is needed to satisfy them. Some consequences of this tendency are examined together with the policy concerns which would need to be addressed in order to mitigate its deleterious effects. The development of a feminist economics which transcends the polarisation of life into “work” and “non-work” is argued to be vital in this process.

This type of argument is not an unfamiliar one to feminism. Feminist theory frequently operates by opening up new ways of thinking about familiar aspects of life. Typically, it does this by challenging existing categories, refusing to accept that everything has to fit into one side or another of a commonly accepted dichotomy. Within feminist economics, perhaps the clearest example of this is the challenge being mounted to the conventional neo-classical notion of rationality. Much of women’s lives do not at first sight appear to fit into this narrow model of the self-seeking, goal-oriented maximizer. One approach to instances of such apparently irrational behavior is to show how it can be understood as rational in reality, once the goals and constraints are properly specified. At least women then escape the negative connotation of irrationality. But feminists have not, in general, been satisfied with this, realising that in doing so the real character of such behavior is lost. Feminist economists have insisted that the problem is not so much women’s behavior, but a theory which attempts to model it in such narrow dichotomous terms. This recognition is seen as a necessary first step in developing economic categories which construct the experience of both women and men in more satisfactory ways. (See for example the collection edited by Marianne Ferber and Julie Nelson (1993) in which

papers from a variety of perspectives concur on the need to get "Beyond Economic Man" in order to develop a feminist economics).

In this paper, I want to take another economic category and subject it to a similar sort of questioning. I shall look at the category of "work" and question the dichotomy of work/non-work in which it is embedded. In particular, I shall examine the way the category of work was expanded by feminists and others to include much domestic activity, and consider some of the consequences of this. To do this the first section will look at what meanings were being given to the category "work" in making the claim that domestic activities were forms of unpaid work, and where those meanings came from. Second, I shall examine the particular circumstances that led to "unpaid work" being discovered at the time it was, focusing on what was thereby included and what excluded by calling it "work". The third section looks at the effects of these circumstances on the way needs have been perceived in developed capitalist economies, and how inequality between households has become a conduit for the construction of needs in a form in which work, and particularly work for money, is needed to satisfy them. The fourth section examines some consequences of this tendency and the policy concerns which would need to be addressed in order to mitigate its deleterious effects. A concluding section summarizes the arguments of the paper and suggests some implications for the construction of a feminist economics.¹

What is meant by "work"?

Today, it is not unusual for politicians of all persuasions to make reference to the unpaid work that goes on in the home. The United Nations has made attempts to measure it, and there is a statute being proposed in the US to incorporate unpaid domestic labor in GNP. This is a far cry from the situation in the 1960s when feminists perceived that a case needed to be made that much of what women spent their time doing in the home was a form of "work". (Some of the earliest feminist writings on domestic work include those by Margaret Benston (1969), Mariarosa Dalla Costa (1973) and Anne Oakley (1974)).

In doing so, particular notions of work were being called on. Although these were never made explicit, they can be inferred from the claims which were generated by the argument that women's domestic activities should be seen as forms of work.

In the first place, the implication of calling housework "work", was that it was not something just done for its own sake. It was purposeful activity done with an end in mind. Women cooked food, cleaned houses and wiped bottoms not because they loved doing so, or because those activities were aspects of femininity, or for any other reason to do with the processes themselves. Rather they carried out these activities in order to get their end results; cooked meals, clean houses and bottoms were desirable ends, and it was therefore work to create them. Further housework took time and energy, and therefore prevented women from doing other things. There was, to use the language of economics, an "opportunity cost" in doing housework. It shared with other forms of work the characteristic of using up time and energy for an extrinsic purpose; it was not therefore a leisure activity.

Secondly, housework was “work” in the sense that it formed part of a division of labor. There was a division of labor within the household between the earning of money to buy consumer goods and the direct production of goods and services in the home. On a macro-level too, housework was one pole of a gendered division of labor in modern society. Indeed for some writers, the division between wage work and housework constituted the gender division of labor in society. For others, the division of labor was seen more as a functional one between two types of labor equally necessary for the reproduction of capitalist society. Either way, the implication was that women (and anyone else) doing housework should not be seen as mere dependants or consumers. They too were workers and deserved the respect and rewards available to other workers.

Finally, housework was “work” in that it did not inherently matter who did it. Men could learn to use a vacuum cleaner and bath babies too. In other words, a separation could be made between housework and the person who did it. It was the results rather than the involvement of the person in the process that mattered. Housework was not inseparably women’s work, nor did it necessarily require a “woman’s touch”.

Thus, in claiming that such domestic activities constituted a form of work, three different aspects of it were being called upon, each with their own implication for the position of women’s work in the home. First, work took time and energy for a purpose and therefore had an opportunity cost in terms of what could otherwise be done; women who did housework were therefore disadvantaged by having their time and energy taken up in this way. Second, work formed part of a division of labor; women doing housework therefore contributed to the division of labor both at the household and at the societal level. Third, work is separable from the worker and could be done by others; there was no inherent reason why women had to do all the housework; men could and should do their share of it too. Although I have not been able to find any formal definitions of what was meant by “work” in the feminist literature of the time, the above characteristics add up to an implicit definition: that “work” is purposive activity that takes time and energy, forms part of a division of labor and is separable from the person who does it.

This implicit definition is one that encapsulates the salient characteristics of much wage work producing commodities for the market, except, of course, that the money dimension is missing. Housework, is neither paid nor does it produce products which are sold. However, in other respects the notion of work used was one that was uncritically lifted from a dominant characterisation of work in the paid economy. But this is not surprising; all notions develop alongside the leading forms of whatever they are supposed to characterize. In this instance, it is a notion of work that developed alongside its dominant (and largely male) form, that of capitalist wage labor in manufacturing.

It is under wage labor that the separation of work and non-work takes a particularly stark and clear form, where payment marks a strict distinction between work and leisure time. Second, the production of commodities for exchange has allowed the most complex and

detailed division of labor in history to be carried out. Finally, because manufactured commodities are produced for the market, rather than for any particular consumer, and bought from the market, rather than from any particular producer, their origin becomes intrinsically irrelevant; everything relevant to their consumption must be embodied in their characteristics as a product. In this way, the activity by which a commodity is produced is depersonalized, that is, made separable from the person who performs it, mirroring the depersonalized exchange that forms the wage-labor relation. It is thus under the relations of capitalist wage labor in manufacturing that these three characteristics of "work" take their quintessential form.

Therefore, the particular notion of work being drawn on in characterising domestic activity as "work" was an abstraction based upon the salient features of wage labor producing manufactured products for capital. But like all abstractions, it was one that did not apply universally, not even to all paid work, let alone when extended outside that domain. For example, it does not apply to many services, in particular to paid caring work where the work performed is inseparable from worker. And, in a variety of jobs, many employees put, and may be expected to put, more of themselves into their work than the notion of a complete separation between a worker and her work implies.

The development of capitalism can be seen as the continual encroachment of this notion of "work" over all others, even though at any point in time it only imperfectly captures the complexity of real work relations. Edward Thompson (1967) shows how the idea of a clearly differentiated working day had to be imposed by capital on a reluctant working class in the eighteenth century. And today, it can be argued that efficiency drives by employers are attempts to make work relations fit that particular notion of work to the detriment of workers, their clients or consumers, and possibly even in the long-run to the profits of their capitalist employers. Similarly when governments privatize or attempt to impose a quasi-market on the workings of their own service departments, the "efficiency" they seek from the market will come about only if that notion of work is imposed on service production too. In so far as these attempts are successful, paid work is itself becoming more "work"-like. But this is a theme to which this paper will return, for now the issue is unpaid "work" and the imposition on it of a definition of "work" abstracted from a dominant manufacturing model of commodity producing wage labor.

I have argued in this section that in characterising women's domestic labor as work, a particular notion of work was implicitly being used which drew upon the salient characteristics of manufacturing wage labor for capital. It is a notion of work which has three characteristics. First, it requires some conception of alternate uses of time in which a notion equivalent to opportunity cost figures. Second, it must potentially be able to enter into some form of division of labor. Third, it should not matter who performs the activity; there must be sufficient separation between the worker and her work that the outcome of the latter can be encapsulated in the characteristics of an end product.

This notion of work is an abstraction, and like all abstractions does not apply to all waged labor, not even to all manufacturing labor employed by capital. Nevertheless as an abstraction it has had considerable power, with work relations tending increasingly to conform to it. In the next section I shall examine the effects the dominance of this notion of work has had on the attempts by feminists and others to analyze women's domestic activities.

The Discovery of Unpaid Work

Although the definition of "work" discussed above is modelled on a particular type of wage labor relation, it also affects the meanings put on other activities. When claiming, in the late 1960s, that the time spent by women on domestic activities was work and not leisure, feminists were applying that conception of work to a non-monetized domain, where it had not been previously seen as appropriate. At roughly the same time, economists of all persuasions began to expand their notions of work to include household work, where previously they would have tended to recognize only paid work as "work" in developed capitalist economies. (Neo-classical economists, such as Jacob Mincer (1962) and Gary Becker (1965), seem to have taken this step first. Marxian economists, influenced more by feminist interest, started later and included Ira Gerstein (1973), Lise Vogel (1973), John Harrison (1974) and Jean Gardiner (1975) as early exponents.)

But why did this discovery of unpaid household work, by feminists and economists, have to wait until the 1960s? In other words, what had changed by then so that the recognition of women's domestic activity as work became a central tenet of the feminist politics of the time, unlike in previous periods of feminist activity? And, further, what had already changed so that even the notably conservative economics profession had begun to talk about household labor as well as wage labor? My argument is that the willingness to talk about such work, using tools designed for the analysis of a particular type of paid work, stems from tendencies within the economy itself, which have put paid and unpaid work into much closer and obvious comparison with each other.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, trends common to most developed economies have made the importation of the notion of work into the household seem more appropriate than it once was. In the early years of industrialisation, a shift in commodity production from the household to the factory combined with a relatively rigid sexual division of labor over domestic activities to cause great hardship and confusion over the appropriate roles of men and women. In the leading industrial economies, in the second half of the nineteenth century, economic and ideological struggle over these roles resulted in a norm by which only men took paid employment if their households could afford it. Women in such households operated in a separate sphere; although necessary to the running of the household, women's activities in the home provided no grounds by which they could be measured against the work that men (or other women) did in the paid economy. The notion of the "family wage" encapsulated that idea, that earning money was men's work, while women had their own domestic duties, described more frequently

in moral rather than instrumental terms³. In this period, the social relations under which men and women lived their lives were sufficiently distinct that no basis was laid for suggesting that the terms that applied to men's employment outside the home should apply to women's activities in the home. The idea of individual choice did not figure in the assignment to a woman of domestic duties appropriate to her station in life, so nor would anything approximating the notion of opportunity cost have been appropriate to measure alternative choices foregone.

Consider how different the relation between the household and the workplace is now. Substitutes can be purchased for the results of many of the activities that go on in the home, providing an immediate way in which they can be valued against the products of paid labor, and the two alternative methods of production compared. This must suggest that the activity of creating such results in the home is work too. It is true that in the nineteenth century, market provided alternatives were also available for most of these activities, through the employment of domestic servants. However, the social relations under which domestic servants were employed were not typical of employment conditions in the rest of the economy. Rather they were based on a relationship of paternalism more akin to the patriarchal family than a contractually based labor market. Domestic service was seen as more of an extension of family life, and did not therefore suggest that the domestic activities of wives could, by comparison, also be seen work.⁴

The second and related change is that women responsible for households have themselves been taking employment, not just in desperate circumstances, but as a recognized, permanent part of their lives. This immediately juxtaposes the two ways they use their time and suggests a way of measuring one against the other. Further, the possibility of employment raises that issue even for those who either do not take it or work for limited hours. For if domestic responsibilities prevent a person engaging in paid work, surely time taken to satisfy those responsibilities might also be said to be similarly spent on work? The connection between these two changes is obvious; by taking paid employment women have been earning the money to buy substitutes for what was previously domestically provided. The changes reinforce each other, and thus also the tendency to see what goes on the home as work too. When women's paid labor visibly enters into society's division of labor through the market, the fact that their unpaid labor in the home is part of a household based division of labor is also, if not so transparently, posed.

Thus, both in ways of providing for household needs and in activities pursued, the notion of alternative choices and consequent loss of other opportunities foregone has become a reality of women's lives today, in a way that would have had little meaning a hundred years ago. Further, through the growth of women's paid employment, the part their work plays in the overall division of labor has become more visible. These are two of the three characteristics of "work" outlined above, that it involves an opportunity cost, and that it potentially forms part of a division of labor, outlined in the previous section. For these reasons, it can be argued that women's domestic work, and thus domestic work whoever it is done by, has become more easily recognized as a form of such "work".

The third characteristic of “work” outlined in the last section was that it should not matter who performs the activity; there must be sufficient separation between the worker and her work that the outcome of the latter can be encapsulated in the characteristics of an end product. This characteristic, while true of some, does not apply to many domestic activities. While the activities of washing clothes and cooking food may be separable from the person who did the washing or the cooking, much of what counts as domestic work is not of this nature. “Caring” is an ambiguous notion stretching from physical care, which may be to some extent independent of the relation between the carer and the person cared for, to emotional caring, in which the person doing the caring is inseparable from the care given. One does not have to claim that any particular person has to be the primary carer of a child, or even that there must be such a primary carer, to recognize that the relationship between carer and child is not separable from the “work” being done by the former in caring for the latter.

This, of course, applies to paid “caring” work too. Kari Waerness (1987) shows how caring work has a different rationality from other work based on the developing personal relationship between carer and cared for, which is better learnt through experience than the application of abstract principles. Attempts have been made to characterize the specific social relations involved in what can be described as “caring work”. However, until recently, much of this analysis was handicapped by a tendency to assume that caring work necessarily is unpaid, because it is so frequently done by female relatives within the home. This assumption not only ignores the vast amount of paid caring work that goes on, but also collapses the whole relation between carer and cared for into the question of the former’s unpaid status, and perhaps unwittingly thereby reinforces the view that caring cannot be done properly when paid (Hilary Graham 1991). Instead I am arguing here that caring work is an activity in which is inseparable from the person doing it, in other words in which the relationship between a carer and her work is crucial. This can occur whether or not the carer is paid, but either way caring does not conform to my third characteristic of the dominant notion of “work”, that it be separable from the worker.

In surveys carried out of time use in domestic work, it is often noted how much easier it is to record and categorize activities such as cleaning and washing, than the more personal sorts of activities such as emotional care and support. In these latter activities, relationships are involved and who performs the activity becomes part of the activity itself. Indeed, I suspect that the amount of care needed for older children in these surveys goes down so markedly for older children, not so much because they do not need care, but because what that care consists of is harder to define when it cannot be reduced to clear-cut, separable activities such as feeding and bathing, or measured in terms of the hours of physical presence that are necessary to caring for small children and bed-ridden elderly parents (Michael Bittman 1991).

Hence, even though we can argue that, by the first two criteria, changes have been taking place which have made domestic activities more apparently a form of work, this is not

true with respect to the third criterion, that work should be impersonal. Here, changes have not been working in the same direction for all domestic activities. Indeed, it could be argued that people have been most reluctant to find marketed substitutes for precisely those activities in which relationships matter. While the less personal forms of domestic work are increasingly being replaced by bought commodities, care of the very young and the elderly remains the most important reason why women reduce their hours of paid labor (Jacqueline Goodnow 1989; Arlie Hochschild 1989; Bittman 1991). This means that the proportion of time spent on domestic activities that conform to that abstract notion of work is falling, and "work" is becoming more and more concentrated in the paid economy. Those activities remaining in the home are the more personal aspects of domestic life, which are least easily assumed under the dominant notion of "work" and therefore retain the characteristics of invisibility that used to characterize all unpaid work.

Of course, such a tendency operates slowly and very unevenly. Surveys show immense variation across households in the amounts of time spent on those activities that are quintessentially unpaid "work". And even if diminishing, the scale of this sector remains vast, rivalling and perhaps surpassing the hours spent in the paid economy (Bittman, 1991). It is an irony inherent in the argument of this paper, that the same tendencies that led to domestic "work" being discovered, that is women's employment and the production of substitutes for domestic activity, are leading to its apparent decline and the increased invisibility of those activities, still most frequently performed by women, that do not satisfy the criterion of being "work".

The construction of needs

The same tendencies that have affected the distribution of "work" between domestic and paid work have affected the perception of needs too. Needs are made visibly pressing and quantifiable in the economy by the amount of money needed to satisfy them. But not all needs have ever been quantifiable in this way. As marketed substitutes become available for more and more of those domestic activities that count as "work", the apparent importance of the needs they satisfy increase relative to those remaining needs which are not perceived to be so readily met by the market. These tend to be the needs whose satisfaction requires activities which are inseparable from the person performing them, including caring and self-fulfilling activities. These are the needs that remain invisible, of apparent marginal significance to the economy, and thus their importance to the actors within it easily ignored.

In the construction of needs and desires, the life-styles of those apparently more favoured in society have always provided a model to which others aspire. This happened with the initial creation of a family life centred around private household based activity for women; in the early nineteenth century it was a middle-class ideal adopted by those with sufficient income to be able to dispense with a wife's labor in the family business (Catherine Hall 1982). By the end of the nineteenth century it had become an accepted aspiration of the working class family too (Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall 1987).

In the Family Wage model, the husband earned all the money and the wife could devote all her time to the household; this entailed a totally unequal distribution within the household of time and money. However, in the majority of developed capitalist economies today we find more of an unequal distribution between households; for the earning power of husbands and wives is highly correlated and, although most women now have at least part-time jobs and the hours worked by those in employment are rising, it is the wives of unemployed men who are the most likely themselves to be unemployed (See, for example, Australian Bureau of Statistics (1994) and Jane Wheelock (1990) for the U.K.⁵). Today, except for some of the very richest, the households with highest incomes are those in which there are two earners. If their consumption patterns are taken as a model, the needs that will seem to matter most are those that can be met on the market. The needs that will not figure visibly are those that remain met privately, including those that do not fit into the "work/consumption" mould. Inequality between households promotes the view that these households, those with most money and consumer goods, are the ones to whose life-style we should all aspire, even if this means in practice also acquiring a life-style in which caring and self-fulfilling activities are squeezed out by the competing demands on time of work and consumption.

The problem with such "non-consumption" needs is their invisibility, that they are private and have no price put on them. This is what allows them easily to be squeezed out as trade-offs are made between work in the home and paid employment. Lacking any direct evidence, we can speculate that the non-employed wife of the man earning a Family Wage did not have this problem in such an acute form, although she too obviously had to allocate her time between competing claims and worked long hours. But the argument of this paper would suggest that for those women for whom paid employment was not an issue, there would not have been the same pressure to save time that the possibility of earning money for it imposes on women today. It is when time can turn into money that it becomes accounted for in a way that excludes the not so easily quantifiable aspects of life, such as emotional care and support, where the time spent on them cannot so clearly be counted as "work".

The tendency to elevate the consumption type of needs above others is reinforced by the growth in those needs themselves. The phenomenal increase over the last century in the productivity of paid work could have been used to reduce working hours and expand the time available to people for other activities. To some extent it was, but most of the increase went into producing more products whose sale had ultimately to rely on an ever expanding consumer market. Wages of course have increased to make this possible⁶.

What this adds up to is that more and more of the needs and desires of workers and their families are being constructed in a form that have to be met through the market by consumer goods, and may involve consumption time too. Although, until very recently, the hours an individual man must devote to his employment has been falling, this has not so much increased the scope for self-fulfilling and caring activities outside employment, as allowed more time for the purchase and consumption of consumer goods. As women

have joined the workforce, lessening the gap between the average hours spent in employment by men and women, this separation of life into employed and consumption time has intensified. Time at work is seen as a loss in itself, but necessary for providing the money which is essential to the consumption activities which increasingly make up leisure time.

Inequality between households feeds this process. Money and consumption, not a non-working wife, is the visible sign of success. Although everyone may feel themselves currently to be short of time as well as money, households up and down the ladder of aspiration, except perhaps the very richest, seek to better themselves by trading off time for money. This may explain why full-time housewives tend now to be found only in households with very low or very high incomes. In very low income households, women's potential earnings may not be sufficient to buy substitutes for the very real contribution their domestic work makes to the household, especially given the very high marginal rates of tax to which such earnings are subject if any welfare benefits are lost as a result (Wheelock 1990: Lydia Morris 1993). In very high income households, sufficient money may be available to buy commodity substitutes for domestic work without the woman having to take paid employment, and all her time can be given over to non-work activities.

Inequality is vital to this process because it is the conduit by which the tendency for richer households to substitute commodities for domestic activities is generalized. To sustain the process by which a range of domestic activities are becoming part of the paid economy, inequality is necessary not only in forming aspirations, but also in enabling those enterprises that provide commodities which replace household work to be profitable. With sufficient wage inequality, these industries may require little or no capital equipment and can be highly labor intensive, just effectively replacing one persons more valuable time with another's less valuable time. Similarly, with sufficient wage inequality some households are able to employ servants again. However, the majority of substitutes for domestic activities do not take this form of the direct purchase of labor or services. Frequently, domestic activities are transformed into different kinds of products rather than the direct replacement of one service for another. Thus domestic cooking is more frequently replaced by the purchase of convenience foods, take-away and restaurant meals rather than the employment of a cook. Nevertheless, the relevance of inequality remains. It is inequality that renders profitable the substitution of bought commodities for domestic activities in such circumstances, even where there is no saving in total amount of labor involved.

However, as those enterprises that produce such commodities become more productive (through increased capital intensity or other means) and cheapen their products, they put them within the reach of consumers whose rate of pay is comparable with that of their own workers. The form the replacement product takes may, of course, change in the process. To take the cooking example again, greater wealth is necessary to replace home cooking by a meal at a sit-down restaurant than at a fast-food outlet; while the former

frequently have a clientele of a higher income bracket than their workers, the latter tend to be characterized by higher levels of technology leading to higher productivity, and are patronized by clients whose incomes are not so different from those of their workers.

Productivity increases in the production of such substitutes for domestic activities may render the process of substitution irreversible. This has already happened for a large number of items that used to be regularly produced in the home, such as shoes, beer and shelled peas. New products are also created for which there are no domestic substitutes. As households needs are increasingly met by commodities, the opportunities for households to substitute domestic activity for bought commodities diminishes. This further increases inequality, as money becomes more and more the only means to any end, so that the decreased leisure of those who succeed in working long hours and being paid well for it can be compensated for by bought commodities, but the increased leisure of those who cannot find sufficient employment becomes useless, indeed a burden, to them.

In the previous section, I argued that the recognition of housework as work resulted from tendencies in the economy in which women substituted paid work for domestic work, and in the process caring and self-fulfilling activities in the home diminished in importance. In this section, I have made a similar argument about needs: that the process of the increasing commodification of needs has diminished the relative importance of those needs that do not take the form of consumption. Inequality between households, both in the construction of those needs and in the provision of a workforce to cater for them, has fuelled this process. But the relation is a symbiotic one: the commodification of consumption needs and the diminishing importance of all other needs has in turn reinforced inequality, as money becomes the unequally distributed single means to all ends.

Must work dominate?

The tendency to see money as the only means of meeting needs divides time into that for which one is paid and that in which the money so earned is consumed. This reinforces and is reinforced by the tendency for paid work to become more “work”-like: to conform increasingly to that abstract characterisation of work that makes a complete separation between workers and their work, squeezing out personal and relational aspects of jobs in the pursuit of efficiency. One result of these tendencies is an immiseration of paid work, in which all other reasons for having a job are sacrificed to gaining the highest wages. Time spent in employment is no longer regarded as having possible benefit in itself, except to earn money to spend elsewhere. Workers then need to be induced to work by the generation of increasing consumption needs, and the unemployed lose any ability to make use of their time (André Gorz, 1989).⁷

Another effect is that people are spending a large proportion of their lives on activities which are constructed as undesirable in the dichotomous classification of life, that is, doing “work”. And we are spending a decreasing amount of time on, and devaluing, those

caring and self-fulfilling activities that remain undivided into production and consumption. However, these are precisely the activities and pursuits that people have at various times seen as most worthwhile, and still frequently describe as desirable. In terms of the balance of people's lives, there seems a *prima facie* case that such changes are undesirable, and this may be what is meant when people talk of "stress" and "pressure" as an aspect of modern living.⁸

A further consequence is the undervaluation by society of those people who perform the activities that do not fit into the category of "work", seeing such people as consumers, or dependants. This is despite the fact that most such people also have jobs. But in so far as they themselves or others identify them with their "non-work" activities, they are accorded lower esteem than a "proper worker". This is precisely what the analysis of domestic work was supposed to avoid. Unfortunately, by insisting that domestic activities gain recognition by conforming to an unchallenged category of work, the significance of caring and self-fulfilling activities remains unrecognized, as does women's contribution in performing the majority of such "non-work"⁹.

If any change in this tendency to squeeze out and devalue these non-work activities is to take place, we need greater equality in the distribution of money and time, both within and between households. It would be no improvement to go back to a situation in which people were assigned by gender to either money earning or less apparently instrumental domestic activities. For, when women were not expected to go out to work, even though their domestic activities acquired an ideological valuation of their own, this did not rival the higher valuation put on the male activity of wage earning. That is why, as soon as they could loosen the bonds of gender, women went into paid work. But men have not made a corresponding shift into the domestic sphere (Paula England and George Farkas 1986; Bittman 1991; Thomas Juster and Frank Stafford 1991; Morris 1991; Jacqueline Goodnow and Jennifer Bowes 1994). If caring and self-fulfilling activities are to challenge the pre-eminence of work/consumption, we need more not less equality within households in the distribution of time and money. Policies under discussion that would encourage this include limiting the working day, and/or improving the conditions of employment for part-time work so that it could be treated as the norm rather than as appropriate only for a household's secondary earner.

Just as important is decreasing income inequality between households, which is the crucial mechanism for the transmission of the notion that needs can best be met by money. In the context of this paper, such policy must above all get rid of the assumption of dependence within households common to nearly all welfare regimes. Without that assumption a household's fortunes would not inevitably be determined by the fate of its largest wage earner, and the whole household would not be dragged into unemployment the moment the largest wage earner loses his job. This would of course also have the beneficial effect of decreasing the pressure on any one individual to be the bread winner for their family, and so may raise for everyone the possibility that there are other ways to spend their time, and other contributions they can make. Another advantage of such a

change is that it does not cut across the aim of increasing equality within the family, as do policies which use the traditional assumption that a typical household consists of a breadwinner and dependants, even when designed to promote greater fairness between households.

The difficulty with gaining support for such proposals is the strength of the dichotomy they are aimed at undermining. Present tendencies have served well the apparent, that is, as presently constituted, interests of both higher income households and men, or primary wage earners, within all households. And others, who are not served so well by current tendencies, are easily led to believe that their own problems would be solved by more successful engagement in the work/consumption economy. It is only when people recognize that such individual solutions will not solve the basic problem, that change might come about.

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that the discovery of unpaid work in the 1960s was a result of tendencies within the economy itself. However, these tendencies made visible the work that women were doing in the home only to the extent that it conformed to a notion of work derived from a model of commodity producing wage-labor in manufacturing. One unintended effect therefore was to reinforce a tendency within the economy to render invisible those domestic activities and needs which do not take a work/consumption form. This tendency has far reaching effects on the way people spend their time and the needs that are perceived as most pressing. Inequality between households was identified as one of the main conduits for the deleterious effects of these tendencies.

Some broad policy implications were drawn out in the previous section. But there is also a theoretical point to be made about the direction a feminist economics should take. If we want to recognize the contribution of caring and self-fulfilling activities to the well being of society, we need a different type of analysis which resists the tendency to polarize. Not everything needs to be seen as either work or non-work. Rather than reinforcing this dichotomy, by insisting that if women's contributions to society are to be recognized, they have to fit into a category designed around the ways in which men enter into a capitalist economy, we need to transcend it.

Both in our theoretical work and in practice we may be able to construct an alternative future by deliberately carving out a space for those activities which cannot be fitted into either pole of that dichotomy. For this to be possible, many changes would be necessary, including, above all, a weakening of the pressure of inequality which results in people holding contradictory aspirations, "valuing" self-fulfilling and caring activities, but "needing" more material possessions. Women currently are bearing the burden of this contradiction most acutely. It must be task of a feminist economics to help resolve it, by developing tools of analysis appropriate to a better understanding of those caring and self-fulfilling activities, largely carried out by women, that are neither "work" nor "non-work".

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