

Part II

THE FAMILY

Until quite recently, most Americans have taken the family for granted. We have assumed the nuclear family of man-woman-child to be a biological unit found universally in all cultures. We are born into the family and associate so many of our personal and intimate experiences with it, that it appears natural and unalterable. Even while divorce rates rise, domestic violence continues to increase,¹ and the number of runaway children reaches alarming proportions, many of us, including many social scientists, continue to view these problems as individual matters, failures in the personalities involved to achieve an ideal family life. Instead of questioning the institutions of marriage and the family, we question the psyches of their individual members, often increasing their suffering by promoting a sense of personal failure and guilt.

In the 1960's, the New Left and counter-culture criticized the nuclear family as a narrow and authoritarian institution that does not necessarily promote the well-being of its members. Experimenting with alternative relationships and communal households, these critics promoted the idea of different but equally valid "lifestyles"; the more serious among them tried to shape a new morality of shared work and cooperation among adults and children who may not be biologically related but choose voluntarily to live together.

In the 1970's and into the '80's, the Women's Movement criticized the exploitation and oppression of women within the family. Both the New Left and feminists recognized the family as a social institution that could be changed rather than an immutable biological unit. The Women's Movement, especially, debunked the idea of the traditional family as natural. By questioning the roles of women in the family, feminists have argued that fathers can take care of babies just as well as mothers, that women can just as competently work outside the home as men. In this challenge to traditional gender roles, feminists subvert an association we tend to make that links women with the "natural" activities of childcare, cooking, cleaning—all the labor that cares for other people's biological needs. Since that labor takes place within the family home, we assume that the family itself is natural and that the roles we enact are natural too—that women are by nature passive, nurturing, submissive, emotional; that men are by nature aggressive, rational, and strong.

Even though more and more women must work outside the home to supplement or even provide family income, we still see them in jobs that seem naturally suited to women—nursing, teaching, waiting tables, typing—because they serve other person's needs. And women still receive

much lower wages than men even in jobs requiring the same abilities. In this way, women remain associated with nature and subordinate to men within and outside the family. Perhaps because they have glimpsed a broader life, yet still not achieved equality, women's resistance to discrimination keeps growing.

From these past two and a half decades of changes in family life and growing criticism of traditional sex roles, have emerged new critical theories of the family that help us to analyze its historical and social development and create visions of future alternatives.

From Marxist theory, a historical approach traces changes in the family related to changes in the class system of economic life. Finding male domination in most, if not all, periods of history, feminists have asked about the origins of patriarchy, disagreeing with the Marxists or revising their ideas to include a structural as well as historical approach. Critical social scientists have examined the contemporary family to understand the connections between work and love relations in the home and social relations outside the home. Some have explored the connection between Marxism and psychoanalysis from a feminist perspective, attempting to analyze the way we are socialized, from infancy onwards, to accept and enact rigid gender roles. And finally, critics have investigated alternatives to the family to locate major problems and possibilities in current changes towards more humane and equal relations among women, men, and children.

Both Marxists and feminists use the term *patriarchy* to refer to a whole system of social relations in which men hold positions of power that begin with their roles as father and husband and extend to their political and economic roles. Men enact these roles as individuals, but also as a group, socialized to maintain their power in the family and elsewhere. As a patriarchal institution, the family exhibits internal dynamics that relate to the social and economic system as a whole. However, feminists and Marxists often disagree about the early development of class and sex relations. Marxists assert that private property and the subordination of women developed simultaneously as part of the same system from the beginning, while feminists tend to view patriarchy as a system separate from a particular kind of economy. We will discuss both theories and efforts to combine or revise them. In our analysis of the contemporary family, however, we will refer to the present social system as *capitalist patriarchy* because the modern form of capitalist social relations has interpenetrated historically and culturally with patriarchal

forms of sexual and kinship organization.² We do not see patriarchy and capitalism as separate systems any longer because both have become mutually interdependent in the functioning of society. Both systems merge in the family to become the fundamental force conditioning the development of the individual as a social being.

CHAPTER FOUR

Patriarchy and Capitalism

The efforts of critical social scientists and social activists to understand and change inequities in present sexual and family relations has led theorists to search for explanations of the sources of class and sexual domination. The idea has been to ask how it all started; if we could only understand how and why patriarchy first became the dominant social form we could analyze our present social system, especially the family, and change it. Two major theoretical models have emerged to explain the origins of patriarchy—the evolutionary model and the structural model. Theorists who uphold the evolutionary model follow the work of Frederick Engels in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, first published in 1884, and of August Bebel in *Woman Under Socialism*, published in 1883. Though Engels and Bebel wrote just before the twentieth century, their Marxist perspective, based on a historical-materialist method, has greatly influenced contemporary analyses of the family and kinship. Beginning with Simone de Beauvoir, writing in the 1950's, feminists have questioned the evolutionary model, revising or rejecting it altogether for a more structural approach. Based on the theories of Claude Lévi-Strauss in *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, the structuralist model views patriarchy as a universal system that is not tied to any particular economy.

I. Early Forms of Class and Sexual Organization—The Evolutionary Model

The Marxist historical-materialist method examines the connections between changes in sex relationships and the family, and transformations in the mode of production. This perspective questions how human beings have come together to provide themselves with necessary food, clothing, shelter, and social interaction, and to reproduce themselves as a species. It asks how the development of these relations of production has involved various divisions of labor and levels of technology. The historical-materialist perspective suggests that as the means by which goods are produced have changed, so have the means of reproduction of the human labor necessary to produce those goods. Family organization and sexual relationships change to accommodate and perpetuate new modes of production.

Engels and Bebel proposed an evolutionary model of family and sexual relations in which one form of society developed from another in three major stages: 1) communal societies, 2) societies in which women passed on their name and property and possibly held positions of political and social power (matrilineal and matriarchal societies), and 3) societies in which the male line and patriarchal power prevailed. These changes from one kind of society to another coincided with changes in technology, in kinds of economic production, and in social relations of economic production.³

The Marxist view first elaborated by Engels and Bebel describes the earliest tribal societies as communal ones in which the low level of technology made everyone's work essential to survival, mostly through hunting, gathering, and the beginnings of agricultural production. People held whatever property existed in common and imposed few sexual restrictions on themselves. The biological limitations that childbirth imposed upon women resulted in only a slight division of labor. Later, as the growing of crops lent geographical stability to the community, women withdrew from hunting and herding to further develop agricultural technology while supervising the children and household affairs. This change resulted in labor divided, but retaining somewhat equal social value since hunting and herding and agriculture were equally important to survival. Perhaps the inability to establish paternity defined childbirth as the realm of women and as mysterious and sacred, a link to the mysteries of nature and life cycles. Thus women often became

priestesses in early religions and the people worshipped female goddesses. Women were held in high esteem and took on leadership of tribal affairs. It is likely that physical differences between men and women in height, weight and skill were very small, and some historians argue for the existence of fierce and successful Amazon tribes. Inability to determine the father of a child meant that tribal groups traced descent through the mother. Both property (which would have only amounted to household tools, not land) and name followed matrilineal lines. Evidence of matrilineal descent, combined with the evidence that women held positions of power, has led some historians to believe that some ancient communities and tribes were matriarchies; that is, ruled by women.⁴

Historians speculate that men took over hunting and herding because they could move more quickly than women so often and regularly encumbered by childbirth. But this division of labor may have ultimately reinforced aggressive and dominating characteristics in men that may have contributed to later practices of warfare. War involved capturing other peoples' land and animals, establishing a surplus that required extra labor. Bebel believes that tribal groups acquired extra labor first through rape and then through slavery.⁵ Extra resources and labor allowed the men to reproduce a surplus which they could own by right of capture, establishing the basis for the development of private property. The old equalitarian division of labor and system of communal property was upset, and men began to accumulate greater resources and great force enabling them to take over the new technology and dominate the realm of production.

Thus, the first division of labor between men and women resulted in the eventual subordination of one sex as the mode of production changed, and women became the first beings to enter servitude. Perhaps for a while this servitude corresponded sexually to the old patterns of promiscuity, this time giving women little choice in the matter. But the desire to establish paternity in order to pass property through the male line required the evolution of monogamy (for women only), and so women, too, became private property as wives and concubines; their daughters were disinherited. According to the Marxist theory, this insured the fall of the matriarchy and entrenched patriarchal rule (rule of the father) economically and sexually.⁶

Probably the most influential feminist scholar of the twentieth century, Simone de Beauvoir, objects to Engels' historical materialist approach for a philosophical reason. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir

accuses Engels and Bebel of reducing human beings to mere economic units. She argues that something more than economic necessity allows men to dominate women; otherwise, they might have all shared resources and property. What gave men the interest in private property, expansion, ownership and domination that coincided with their subjugation of women? Beauvoir agrees with the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss that, in spite of evidence indicating a possible matriarchate in ancient times, men have always exercised power over women. She attempts to explain the domination of women through the philosophical concept of the Other.⁷

As an existentialist, Beauvoir affirms the notion of human beings as conscious of themselves beyond the necessity for survival. She sees human beings as creatures who give meaning to their own lives and to the world. Human consciousness, she says, attempts to define itself by projecting itself onto the Other—nature, other people—to thrust itself forward into the world in hopes of finding its own reflection and product. Thus human consciousness develops through alienation: “the existent succeeds in finding himself only in estrangement, in alienation; he seeks through the world to find himself in some shape, other than himself, which he makes his own.”⁸ Tribes and clans found their identity through the totem or chief. The identity became individualized in crops, land, tools, the goods that each individual invested with his or her labor. Again, because of their childbearing function, men view women as part of nature and therefore *other* than man, something that *is* rather than someone who *does*. According to Beauvoir, men find their identities through active projection, thrusting themselves upon the world to make it theirs. Women, defined as Other, become objects for their projection and appropriation. “Woman’s incapacity [the weakness caused by childbirth] brought about her ruin because man regarded her in the perspective of his project for enrichment and expansion.”⁹

The projection of human consciousness into the world requires that man dominate the Other, but it also requires that he find union with the Other. The male’s desire for expansion and projection of self demands that he seek union with something that he is not. In marriage, then, the male of one clan must not marry within the clan or a mere repetition of life would occur; rather, he must break away, secure someone other than that which is already his, in order to grow and to project his being further into the world. Beauvoir argues that the violence that has often accompanied man’s marriage to woman—either real, as in the case of abduction

and rape, or symbolic, as in the case of honeymoon rites—indicates man's need to prove his possession and union with something other than himself. He would not, she says, impose such violent acts upon those associated with himself.

Beauvoir states that men may have worshipped female or asexual goddesses in the past, but this evidence does not necessarily indicate a matriarchy. Rather, she argues that men's inability to control nature made them fear and, therefore, worship both nature and women. Men defined nature and women as other than themselves. Nevertheless, men always dominated politically. Not until men settled down to till the soil, taking possession of the land, did they begin to feel their ability to possess nature and thus the Other. This possession lessened the mystical power of nature and of women. Beauvoir dates the end of matrilineal descent from this event—an important *ideological* rather than material revolution that legally institutionalized the power men already held. With more highly developed division of labor, tools, and the ownership of land and property, men were able to project their beings onto nature and onto women in their attempts to transcend their original condition. A more complex social organization established its own institutions and legal codes, perpetuating, on the ideological level, those social relationships of power and economic dependence between men and women.

Here Beauvoir does not differ with the evolutionary historical perspective of the family and the oppression of women. She is concerned, however, with the original impetus that allowed men to dominate women, making them possessions rather than considering them fellow human beings worthy of sharing equal conditions of human life. Defined as Other by male dominated society, woman is brought up to think of herself as Other, an object rather than subject of her own experience. Feminist writers have brought a great deal of attention to the sexual objectification of women, the ways it permeates the symbols of our culture in advertising, the media, and job relations, and the ways it shapes women's ideas of themselves.¹⁰ Beauvoir's existentialist perspective proposes a philosophical explanation of the origins of these economic and psychological aspects of male dominance. Her theory, however, groups all women together and ultimately reduces them to their biological condition, the capacity to bear children, as an explanation for their subordination.

Many feminist thinkers from Engels on have relied on this biological explanation for women's original vulnerability and continue to speak, as

Beauvoir does, of a universal, undifferentiated "woman." Recently, the feminist anthropologist Karen Sacks has revised Engels' theories to differentiate among women socially. She proposes three forms of precapitalist social organization: 1) the communal form that we have discussed; 2) a kin corporation in which kin groups hold the means of production, but some of their members become owners while others remain non-owners; and 3) class societies governed by a ruling class that has broken up kin groups to become owners, as a class, of productive property. In the kin corporation, Sacks finds two possibilities for economic and political power among women depending upon their kinship ties to property. *Sisters* can own property and carry responsibility just as men do, but *wives* must depend on their husbands for access to property and therefore remain subordinate to them.¹¹

This distinction among women, based on kinship ties, does away with the tendency to lump all women into one group whose relationships are defined by their childbearing capacity. Through this analysis, we gain further insight to social science's tendency to repeat ideological associations that link all women to natural functions, rather than looking at social differences among women. And we see that women's lives gain meaning through social interpretations of their biological status. In a culture that owns property through kinship ties, *sister*, a biological relationship, means something quite different from what it means in a society governed by a ruling class in which all women may be disinherited.

II. Questioning the Origins of Sexual Domination—The Structural Model

The evolutionary model presupposes that one form of society (patriarchy) grows historically out of another (matriarchy) because of evolutionary changes in economic and technological life. Engels and his contemporary followers study currently existing societies that live according to "pre-capitalist" modes of production, assuming that these forms of social organization inevitably precede the development of modern capitalism. The method is motivated by a desire to discover the origins of our own contemporary social forms, so that we can explain them and possibly change them. The search risks, however, ignoring the possibly uneven or contradictory forces of history and the influences of overlapping cultures by conflating contemporary cultural groups with those that existed in centuries past.

While historical logic as well as some current evidence disputes these evolutionary theories, many historians and social scientists believe the questions they raise are still important to understanding contemporary family and sexual organization. These questions concern the roles of technology, modes of economic production, and physical power in establishing sexual and kinship relations, how much of social life these forces determine, how they have interpenetrated with each other historically, and whether and to what extent biological factors such as the childbearing capacity of women determine sexual and class divisions. Nevertheless, though we can discover through this method questions important to our own society, like the relationship between the subordination of women and the power of the state, we cannot assume any universal or inevitable laws of evolutionary development.

Feminist theories of women and the family have sought to uncover the origins of women's oppression apart from the origins of class society. Some have rejected Engels' idea that patriarchy began with private property. They view patriarchy as a separate social system with its own material base, a system to which capitalism eventually adapted and "grew on top of," so to speak.¹² These critics see patriarchy as a social system that takes many different forms socially and historically, but in which men are always dominant. They have found in the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, a structural analysis that helps explain the universality of patriarchy. Lévi-Strauss argues that men exchange women in marriage in order to connect families and create society.¹³ This exchange is necessary then for the beginnings of civilization. It requires an incest taboo of some sort that prohibits marriage between men and women of the same biological family and solidifies the interdependence between families. Women, who are the exchanged, are controlled by and subordinated to the men who exchange them—fathers, husbands, brothers, uncles.

A tension immediately forms between the need to maintain the biological family as a unit and the demands of expanding society.¹⁴ A split between domestic family life and public life results from this tension. Developing from the exchange of women that subordinates women, the split between domestic and public life also re-creates that subordination. Michelle Rosaldo has argued that, although women may exercise certain kinds of indirect or influential power through the domestic world of the family, they do not hold positions of recognized authority that adheres to the roles of *social* power exercised by men.¹⁵

This theory of male domination in family and social life is a structural one that claims a universal reason for patriarchy that is then shaped through historical changes. However, like the historical materialist theories of Engels and Bebel, it still relies on the biological condition of women to explain why women are exchanged in the first place. Women's capacity to bear children leads to an association with nature that makes women both valuable objects of exchange *and* socially inferior beings since societies devalue nature in the interests of culture. We can summarize this perspective in the proposition that woman's role as childbearer gives her a special value in the exchange between men and among families, a role that allows this exchange to take place in order to reproduce society, but then is associated with nature, confined to domesticity, and denigrated as apart from the public life of society. It is ironic that the very childbearing capacity of women which is necessary for the expansion of civilization becomes the link in her association with "natural" processes and the reason for her segregation and subordination.

In an essay central to current feminist thought, Sherry Ortner has argued that although societies universally associate women with nature and men with culture, women actually mediate nature and culture.¹⁶ Through activities like cooking, which transforms raw materials into cooked, or childrearing, which transforms natural instincts into socially approved behavior, women mediate nature and culture. Simply in the act of marriage, women also mediate the natural (biological) family and the broader cultural world of families, bound to one another socially.

Though our society and many others consider both childbirth and mothering women's tasks, only the first is a biological function, while the other is socially instituted. The mother-child relation is a social relation and forms the focus of domestic family organization. Through it and the corresponding domestic/public split in social life, women's work outside the family also corresponds to a sexual division of labor. In this division of labor, women become occupationally segregated in jobs that appear somehow "natural" to women.

Lévi-Strauss has shown that the sexual division of labor, like the incest taboo, is not biologically necessary, but socially necessary, to insure the mutual dependence of men and women and maintain the family nexus of man-woman-child. He argues that any sexual division of labor, beyond childbearing, is culturally instituted, since the tasks ascribed to men and women differ in every society:

The very fact that it (the sexual division of labor) varies endlessly according to the society selected for consideration shows that . . . it is the mere fact of its existence which is mysteriously required, the form under which it comes to exist being utterly irrelevant, at least from the point of view of any natural necessity . . . the sexual division of labor is nothing else than a device to institute a reciprocal state of dependency between the sexes.¹⁷

The sexual division of labor enforces a hidden taboo against the sameness of men and women. We exaggerate gender, the cultural characteristics of masculinity and femininity, way beyond the fact of sexual difference. Men and women learn separate skills, roles, and personality traits. In this way society insures the formation of families containing at least one man and one woman so that all the qualities necessary for living are present. However, these gender, rather than sexual, differences also insure the continuation of patriarchy. Heidi Hartmann argues that the sexual division of labor in the family allows men to control the labor of women and instills in men hierarchical and authoritarian ways of relating to each other.¹⁸ As a result of these competitive personality traits, men accumulate private property rather than sharing their resources. In Hartmann's theory, private property develops from patriarchy and the claims upon women's labor made by men.

Gayle Rubin explains how the taboo against the sameness of men and women, enforced through the sexual division of labor, also prohibits homosexuality.¹⁹ From this perspective, we can see heterosexual marriage as socially instituted rather than a natural occurrence. If heterosexuality were a natural drive, we would not need the sexual division of labor and exaggerated gender differences to guarantee the mutual association of men and women. Since women are the sex which is exchanged in heterosexual marriage, the sexual division of labor and gender differentiation guarantee the difference between those who exchange, the dominant male sex, and those who are exchanged, the subordinate female sex. This exchange requires the constraint of female sexuality to insure exogamous heterosexual marriage through patriarchal domination of women.

In summary then, feminist social scientists locate the primary determinants of patriarchal social organization in the mother-child relation which defines women in association with nature,²⁰ limits them to a domestic realm where their labor is controlled by men, and allows their

exchange by men between families to insure the expansion of society. Within that larger society, their subordination continues through the sexual division of labor and occupational segregation. Both realms of male supremacy are created and reinforced by the domestic/public split, a tension that reproduces both patriarchy and civilization. Hence, we see patriarchy as a social system in some respects independent of the advent of capitalism or even private property, one correlated to civilization in general. In the last chapter of this section, we will examine contemporary alternatives to the traditional family under capitalist patriarchy and find that, indeed, the two structures that remain to insure male supremacy even in communally organized societies are the mother-child relation and the sexual division of labor.

We should recognize that all of these attempts to find the source of male domination involve the desire to establish either universal laws of social development or structures of social organization. The quest for universal patterns of historical development can be a reassuring affirmation of humanism and an inspiration to social critics: if communal societies thrived long ago, if women in the past were strong in resistance to patriarchy, then we can change ourselves and our society toward more equalitarian relations in the future. From the structuralist perspective, it seems as if the very foundations of civilization are based on the patriarchal exchange of women in marriage; the prospects for change seem bleaker. Yet, both approaches demystify the association between women and nature that makes sexual subordination, the sexual division of labor, and gender differences appear to be natural. Both approaches reveal these aspects of social organization to be just that, social, rather than natural.

On the other hand, as Michelle Rosaldo points out, we may neglect in the search for universality, the important differences that give each society, and families and women within it, specific and unique meanings.²¹ Especially if our analysis lumps all women together according to their biological capacity to bear children, our theory simply repeats the ideology of a prejudiced and discriminating society. Though she still follows an evolutionary model, Karen Sacks' revision of Engels' ideas distinguishes, for instance, among women as sisters and wives according to their social, rather than biological, status. This analysis demonstrates the importance of finding the diverse and particular meaning sexual difference acquires. Current anthropological and social research is tending now to explore these differences rather than search for universal patterns.

Once we have addressed the question of origins, we can consider the development of the modern family and analyze its contemporary forms. Many feminists have argued, like Shulamith Firestone, that it doesn't really matter what things were like in the past or how much of sexual difference is natural; we live now in a highly civilized, technological society that is no longer determined by the forces of nature.²² We no longer rely on brute physical strength; childcare and even childbirth can be socialized processes. We have the means to become completely social beings and therefore socially equal. Only the institutions and ideology of patriarchal capitalism stand in the way. Perhaps from this point of view, we can recognize that all people, male and female, are both natural and social beings; the split between domestic and public lives that reinforces patriarchy can dissolve.

The domestic/public division in social life may or may not be a universal characteristic of all cultures; it is always difficult to prove such universality. However, we do find such a split in our own society and can trace its development. The advent of industrialization in Western culture reinforced this division economically so that the separation between domestic and public life became an extreme one, especially during the nineteenth century. However, the separation was only apparent; family relations and labor within the home were tied inextricably to commodity production outside the home.

During industrialization, new technology and machines allowed the factory system to replace the system of cottage or household manufacture.²³ Industrialized factories seemingly separated production from the family. Since labor outside the home was exchanged for wages and produced profit, this form of production came to represent the whole of economic concerns. The labor that women still carried on in the home appeared separate from economic activity and was subsequently devalued. In a capitalist society, work for which the individual is not paid in wages does not seem to be "real work." Early industrial capitalism, with its great need for labor, utilized the members of the whole family, and men, women, and children were forced to work long hours under appalling conditions for wages barely sufficient for survival. This exploitation created an intolerably oppressive situation for women who still performed domestic labor and child care in addition to tortuous factory work. It is not surprising that women led some of the earliest strikes and union organizing activities.

The separation of commodity production from the home left middle class women, who did not work in factories or elsewhere, isolated from production and social activity in general. The work involved in maintaining a home and raising children was certainly arduous and demanding; however, as unpaid labor, it was devalued in the new monied economy. Perhaps to insure the performance of this labor and to justify the continued existence of an institution no longer having a productive base, a new ideal emerged of the home as sacred, as the realm of natural and private concerns, a retreat from the work-a-day world for the man and the "natural" sphere of the woman. To the Victorian bourgeoisie, the home offered "the place of peace, shelter not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt and division."²⁴ It was a man's castle, the place where he could express himself apart from what was becoming a more competitive, routinized, cold world of market relationships. Within the family, sexuality was severely repressed, and women were idealized as mothers or mere ornaments, lovely adornments to the man's home. Among women, especially, developed various methods of defense such as neuroses and hysteria. Psychoanalysis emerged in the late nineteenth century as a method of discovering and understanding the jealousy, fear, and guilt that seethed beneath the comforting surface of family life.²⁵

We have inherited from the Victorians an ideology that still views domestic life as women's natural sphere. Sharp gender distinctions and economic constraints still isolate men from women and children in the home and prevent women from participating fully in public life. Though a great deal of labor takes place in the home, we still idealize it as a separate retreat from the work world. This domestic life remains separate, often conflicting with a woman's "real work" for wages. For even though many women of all classes work outside the home, society and women themselves consider their primary responsibilities to lie within the home and family life. In the next chapter, we analyze contemporary domestic life, particularly the labor performed in the home. We argue that though the family appears separate from public life and though we experience family relations as private, they are, in fact, closely tied to the economic and political world outside the home.

NOTES

1. Del Martin, *Battered Wives* (San Francisco: Volcano Press, 1981). The second cause of children's deaths under the age of three is battery ("Parental Stress" hotline, Palo Alto, CA), and in 1971, 32.8 percent of female homicides were committed by the women's husbands. In journals dealing with social problems and the family, the nature of the literature has changed such that after 1970, the family in conflict is considered "normal," and violence in the home is considered characteristic of the American family. See especially the December, 1977 issue of *Victimology* and the 1976, 1977, and 1978 issues of the *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. I am grateful to Colleen McGrath and our conversations at Stanford University for these references and information.
 2. See Heidi Hartmann, "Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation by Sex," *Women and the Workplace: The Implications of Occupational Segregation*, ed. by Martha Blaxall and Barbara Reagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976) and Zillah R. Eisenstein, ed., *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979) for further discussion of the term *capitalist patriarchy*.
 3. Bebel and especially Engels based much of their work on the anthropological theories and data of Lewis Morgan who spent years studying many different cultures, most notably the Iroquois of New York, the Australians, and the Greeks and Romans. Contemporary anthropologists often refute his work on the basis that there was not enough evidence available at the time to draw the conclusions that he did. But the most important criticism is directed against his theoretical position. Morgan derived his evolutionary theory from the influence of Charles Darwin. Morgan was greatly concerned with transitional phases of human social organization, such as the transition to patriarchy, and viewed his empirical findings from within a broad historical context. Anthropologists such as Franz Boas and his followers argued that we cannot derive conclusions about how societies changed in the past by studying different cultures now and developing a cause and effect relationship between them that we then project into the past. Another related criticism is that *a priori* thinking about a culture will bias or distort studies of that culture and therefore render the conclusions somewhat invalid.
- These anthropologists prefer a holistic approach in which a society is studied within its own terms and not with the intention of fitting it into a particular schema. The problem with the holistic approach and its rejection of evolutionary theories is that its findings may lack a historical perspective and may view a particular culture as static, thus partially distorting its observations, methods, and conclusions. For a discussion of Morgan and Engels, see Eleanor Leacock's introduction to Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (New York: International Publishers, 1972). For a Marxist critique of Morgan, as well as an analysis of Morgan's contributions to the method of historical materialism, see Emmanuelle Terray, *Marxism and "Primitive" Societies* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972). Terray concludes that the general thrust of Morgan's work is not only politically progressive, but points to a far more comprehensive and rigorous method from both a structuralist and Marxist perspective that only awaits further development by contemporary anthropologists.
4. See Evelyn Reed, *Woman's Evolution: From Matriarchal Clan to Patriarchal Family* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1975) and "The Myth of Woman's Inferiority," *The Fourth International* (Spring, 1954) (now called *International Socialist Review*).
 5. August Bebel, *Woman Under Socialism*, trans. by Daniel de Leon (New York: Source Book Press, 1970).
 6. Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family*.
 7. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952).
 8. *Ibid*, p. 63.
 9. *Ibid*, p. 64.
 10. See, for instance, the essays in *Sisterhood Is Powerful* (New York: Random House, 1970) and Meredith Tax, *Woman and Her Mind: The Story of Daily Life* (Boston: New England Free Press, 1970).
 11. Karen Sacks, "Engels Revisited: Women, the Organization of Production, and Private Property," *Woman, Culture, and*

Society, ed. by Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 207-222.

12. Heidi Hartmann, "Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation by Sex," in Blaxall and Reagan, pp. 137-170.
13. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, trans. by James Harle Bell and John Richard von Sturmer and Rodney Needham (editor) (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).
14. Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women," *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. by Rayna Reiter (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 157-210.
15. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, "Woman, Culture and Society: A Theoretical Overview," *Woman, Culture and Society*, ed. by Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 17-42.
16. Sherry Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" *Woman, Culture and Society*, pp. 67-88.
17. Quoted by Rubin, "The Traffic in Women," p. 178.
18. Hartmann, p. 138.
19. Rubin, pp. 178-180.
20. See especially Nancy Chodorow, "Family Structure and Feminine Personality," *Woman, Culture and Society*, pp. 43-66.
21. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, "The Use and Abuse of Anthropology: Reflections on Feminism and Cross-Cultural Understanding," *Signs*, Spring 1980, Volume 5, Number 3, pp. 389-417. I am indebted to this article and to discussions with Michelle Rosaldo for many of the ideas that helped me organize this chapter.
22. Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex* (New York: Morrow, 1970).
23. Eli Zaretsky, *Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life* (New York: Harper and Row, Colophon Books, 1976).
24. John Ruskin, "Of Queen's Gardens," quoted in Zaretsky, *ibid.*, p. 34.
25. Juliet Mitchell, *Woman's Estate* (New York: Pantheon, 1971).

CHAPTER FIVE

The Contemporary Family: Gender and Work

In our urban industrialized society, people no longer work in their homes; they *go* to work, and the world of commodity production appears an entirely separate world from that of the family. The idea of the family and the home as a retreat, a sanctuary from the cold competitive world of the marketplace, reinforces this apparent separation. In the home we can allow the natural affections, emotions, and personal needs of human beings expression and satisfaction. Social-historians have recently reinvented this Victorian ideal of the family as a defense against contemporary mass society with its alienation, isolation, and corporate domination of everyday life.¹ Although this ideal may accurately describe family life or our hopes for family life to a certain extent, it also masks another aspect of the family: that work occurs in the home, and production that takes place through family relations is socially necessary labor; in fact, it is essential to the profits gained in market production, to the expansion of that economy, and the functioning of society as a whole.² In this fundamental way, the family and home are inextricably tied to the society and institutions from which it appears so separate.

In previous centuries, especially in societies based on agriculture or in the early stages of capitalism, the home provided the place of work for everyone in the family. The family itself was clearly an economic unit and necessary for the survival of each member. In industrial and postindustrial society, however, the home has become primarily a place of work for women, who cannot exchange their labor in the home for wages. Lack of pay reinforces the notion that women in the home do not really work (since real labor in capitalism is wage labor) or that the work they do is not important (since we judge the importance of work in capitalism by the wages received for it), that the work is inferior and, hence, the women who perform it are inferior. To understand the functions of the family, we must understand the nature of the work done in the home and its relationship to the rest of production.

I. HOUSEWORK AND THE REPRODUCTION OF LABOR POWER

Traditionally viewed, the family presents a configuration of roles – husband, wife, mother, father, daughter, son, sister, brother. The woman, who is a wife, must care for the man-husband's personal needs and for his property: she is not only a wife, but a *housewife* responsible for the organization and cleaning of a house, cooking, laundry, sewing, and shopping. In caring for the husband's personal needs, her duties may extend to those of nurse and psychologist; if they are a middle class couple, she may also serve as secretary, taking messages, making appointments, or planning and organizing their social activities. As a mother, she bears and raises children who, according to custom and law, bear the man's name and inherit his property. All of these activities involve labor; yet as part of a role within the family, they appear to be natural extensions of the woman's personality. "A woman does not go to her job as housewife; she wakes up to it."³ It is part of her existence in total, and even if she works outside the home as well, she learns to regard her family responsibilities, namely housework and child care, as primary.⁴

The old saying, "A woman's work is never done," expresses the peculiar nature of housework. Not only is it never done, but it never produces a completed product that the woman can see as the direct result of her labor. Among British housewives interviewed by Ann Oakley, almost all spontaneously mentioned monotony as the most unpleasant aspect of their work.⁵ This monotony results from the unending repetition of tasks that never results in a finished product. The tasks a housewife performs during any given day may not be at all connected to one another and do not require her full concentration; yet they prevent her concentrating on anything else. The monotony and fragmentation of the labor experience resembles that of the factory worker, especially one who works on an assembly line. Many housewives feel that they never have enough time for the work they must do so that time pressure exacerbates the unpleasantness of their labor.⁶

Unlike factory workers, however, housewives may value their autonomy, the fact that they are "their own boss." But, as Oakley points out, this quality is somewhat limited, since failure to perform housework can have serious external consequences in the displeasure of a husband or

the ill health of a child. The psychological pressure and emotional involvement in housework can be very high even while it remains unsatisfactory.⁷

As maintenance work, the accomplishments of housework are often invisible.⁸ Only the housewife notices the results of this repetitive, dull labor. The husband, who has been away all day, notices only the work not done, the cluttered living room or unprepared dinner. Most housewives in Oakley's study stated that their husbands never appreciated their work but that they did make negative comments.

Husbands and even the housewives themselves do not value housework because it cannot be exchanged for wages. The housewife produces for immediate consumption; she produces for use value rather than exchange value. On the other hand, the work performed by a housewife reproduces her husband's and perhaps her own ability to work outside the home, work that *is* exchanged for wages. She reproduces their labor power through food and clean clothes, by providing a place to rest and replace lost energies.⁹

This labor power, according to the Marxist analysis of production, actually comprises a commodity, something the worker possesses that he or she exchanges for wages. If labor is a commodity, then a worker produces it. The place of work is the home and family, and the worker is, in most cases, a woman-wife-mother. In this light, housework becomes commodity reproduction because it reproduces a commodity that is exchanged for wages, while the labor of housework itself is not exchanged for wages. Because it reproduces the commodity of labor power, domestic labor is essential to the production of surplus value and the accumulation of capital.

Feminists have argued that domestic labor performed by women also contributes to the male privilege of husbands in the family and of all men in society as a whole. Women work in the home to maintain both the system of capitalism and the system of patriarchy. Otherwise, when industrialization separated housework from work for market exchange, men might have stayed home. Rather, women's confinement to unpaid labor in the home increased men's claims over women's labor in a personal way.¹⁰

The domination of society by the marketplace obscures the enormous value of women's work in the home. Beside the skills required to cook nourishing meals everyday for a group of people, keep their house and belongings clean and in order, tend to emotional and physical needs, "homemaking" may extend to otherwise professional and paid skills

such as interior decorating, sewing, furniture refinishing, upholstery, and other decorative arts. Entertaining, educating, and caring for children requires skills that in other contexts become professionally paid occupations. While the value of this work goes unrecognized, the time involved is also rarely acknowledged. Housewives work longer hours than almost any other group of workers – the Chase Manhattan Bank has estimated that women who have small children work an average 99.6 hour week.¹¹

Housework, including child care, is organized in a very inefficient manner compared to the way other kinds of work are organized in industrial capitalism. Unlike housework, production for exchange takes place communally, with many workers together, each performing his or her own task on the assembly line to produce a commodity. The high degree of specialization and the highly complex division of labor, along with advances in technology and automation, increase production to the point that corporations are able to realize super profits. But a housewife works in isolation, each woman with her own home, kitchen, and children.¹² Each task is distinct from the other and accomplished totally by her. In fact, she is often called upon to be the opposite of the specialized worker – maid, psychologist, laundress, plumber, nurse, cook, all rolled into one.

The alienation of the housewife thus differs from the alienation of the assembly worker. It stems from her solitude and from the drain on her energies that results from reproducing things that have no market value, things that are not even tangible. It stems also from the inseparability of her work from the rest of her existence, the nature of which compels her to serve the needs of others in dull, repetitive, noncreative drudgery. She begins to see herself only as reflected in the needs of others, to feel a hollowness and emptiness inside. The worker experiences alienation, or separation from self, in his/her inability to control the process and products of his/her labor.¹³ The housewife loses that sense of self in the sacrificial nature of her role which even finds ideological justification in the ideal of the true woman and mother who completely “gives of herself.” Meredith Tax portrays the feelings of a woman confined to her house and her role as housewife and mother:

When I am by myself, I am nothing. I only know that I exist because I am needed by someone who is real, my husband, and by my children. My husband goes out into the real world. Other people recognize him as real, and take him into account. He affects other people and events. He does things and changes

things which are different afterwards. I stay in my imaginary world in this house, doing jobs that I largely invent, and that no one cares about but myself. I do not change things. The work I do changes nothing . . . The only time that I think I might be real is when I hear myself screaming or having hysterics.¹⁴

Women respond to this feeling of emptiness in many ways – ironically, ways that society typically looks upon as part of the weakness or silliness of women. Chronic fatigue and nervousness, illness and hysteria, severe depression, intense irritability may all stem from this basic alienation and feeling of nothingness. Women may resort to tranquilizers, alcohol, excessive smoking to relieve the symptoms.¹⁵ They may become compulsive consumers. “Houseproud” women attempt to find a sense of dignity and self-worth in excessive cleanliness and tidying, a compulsive activity that some psychiatrists evaluate as pathological.¹⁶

The peculiar isolation and alienation of the housewife could have become more like the alienation of the assembly worker. Housework, like industry, could be organized through company kitchens, laundries, and child care centers. The home, however, is one place that has not been subject to time-motion studies and efficiency experts, and there are several reasons for this. The first is that the family does provide a realm of privacy for the worker, a place where the individual may express personal emotions and develop intimate relations that are not possible in the world of commodity production where one must at least appear strong, competent, and obedient as well, or risk losing the job. Survival on the job depends upon pleasing one’s co-workers and especially one’s employer. But families are a given; we are born into them and this lends a certain security to our relationships which allows us to develop more fully as individuals. In these relationships we feel most “at home” and can express our anxieties, fears, anger, and hostilities as well as affection and understanding – the family becomes a release valve. But there develops another side to isolating the family as the “safe” place. When emotions are so narrowly confined, they can become intensified and distorted, and the loving family transforms into a tinderbox of neuroses and often violence. This is the seedy side of the sacred home where sons murder fathers, mothers brutalize children, and husbands beat wives.¹⁷

Nevertheless, in spite of its failures and tragedies, many people look to the family and the home for security, warmth, and companionship. The family becomes a kind of “in group,” and other people are

outsiders, not to be trusted. Especially in urban areas, where they know few others outside of their families or jobs, people become more and more isolated from any kind of community or identity with anyone other than the members of their immediate nuclear family. Loneliness and alienation go along with this kind of social isolation as well as a sense of powerlessness that reinforces the belief that “you can’t change the system.” When everyone remains within their own atomized and individuated unit, viewing all others as outsiders, feelings of public responsibility and social commitment decline. It becomes difficult to conceive of oneself as belonging to a larger group with common interests and collective power. This tendency appears in the activities of labor especially among women workers, who often think of their jobs as secondary in importance to their families and will be conservative, afraid of organizing in unions or going on strike.¹⁸

Another reason the family has changed so little organizationally in comparison to industry is that within the family, the role of wife-mother provides a source of unpaid labor. An employer hiring a man with a wife really receives two for the price of one. The man would find it difficult to wash, sew, clean, care for his children and then go to work for eight hours a day with energy and enthusiasm. Unmarried men often hire housekeepers whom they must pay out of their own salaries, or they send the laundry out and eat in restaurants. In addition to the wife’s unpaid labor in the house, she usually takes care of the children, again for free, until they are old enough to go to school.

II. CHILD CARE IN THE NUCLEAR FAMILY

Although compulsory schooling laws provide for a child’s education, the burden of caring for its physical and emotional needs still falls upon the parents and especially the mother. During the first five or six years of a child’s life, it depends entirely upon the mother for care. The effects upon both mother and child from such an intense relationship often differ radically from the charming images presented on baby food commercials and diaper ads. Nearly everyone has heard of the “Tired Mother Syndrome.” Beverly Jones describes it as resembling a psychosis:

Women with this syndrome complain of being utterly exhausted, irritable, unable to concentrate. They may wander about somewhat aimlessly, they may have physical pains. They are depressed, anxious, sometimes paranoid and they cry a lot.⁹

As she points out, this often happens to women confined to household tasks even without children to take care of. But child care, unlike housework, can never be ignored or pushed aside until later. Children have to be fed, cleaned, clothed, played with, napped, comforted – a continuous job that must be performed with patience, understanding, and sympathy. A woman faced with such continual demands must constantly suppress her own needs and desires, must always be thinking of the child’s safety and comfort. If she has several children, the tasks multiply, and the resulting lack of sleep, combined with the inability to take a day off or even an afternoon nap, would leave any human being in a fog of tiredness and sluggishness. The stupefying inability to concentrate and the anxiety or guilt brought on by feeling unable to cope with what her husband may feel is an “easy job” probably contributes to the sense of worthlessness that many housewives and mothers feel. The number of women who visit therapists or are confined to mental wards in hospitals testifies to the psychologically debilitating effects of the housewife/mother role.²⁰ When poverty or the need to work to support the family combines with such strains, the results may be physical and mental disorder.

Why don’t fathers participate in child care, experiencing its pleasures and rewards and, at the same time, relieving women of the stress of total responsibility? The sexual division of labor encourages women to enact what Talcott Parsons calls an “expressive” role and men an “instrumental” role.²¹ The instrumental father concerns himself with getting things done and making money, not with cuddling babies or comforting young children. Nancy Chodorow confronts the question from its other end arguing that the relegation of women to the role of mothering, a job fathers could do as well, reproduces the division of labor within the home in a psychological way. Not only do little girls follow the role pattern of their mothers, but they develop, in their relationship with her, deep psychological needs for intimacy. When they marry, they may look to their husbands for this intimacy. However, husbands, socialized to be like their instrumental fathers, do not satisfy these needs. Hence, girls grow up, marry, and desire to have babies to reestablish that close emotional bond. Men, on the other hand, can more successfully look to their wives and girlfriends for the emotional nurturance they received from their mothers.²²

Not only the mother suffers from the nuclear family child care arrangements. Social psychologists have suggested that, contrary to

popular belief, ours is not a truly child-oriented society. Parents today have other pressures which decrease the amount of time they may spend with their children. Television replaces human interaction. Children become more peer-oriented and are highly segregated from adults and even from each other by age and sex in school and play activities.²³

Furthermore, parents sometimes view children as their commodities that they produced and that therefore belong to them. Women, who are not socialized to take jobs outside the home, are thwarted in their attempts to do so and may see their children as extensions of themselves, ways to live vicariously. Fathers conditioned to property relations in the rest of society continue the patriarchal notion that children (and wives) belong to them, owe them allegiance, loyalty, and obedience.

Women and children who depend upon the father for economic support and approval are thrust upon each other in codependent ways that often result in distorted relationships.²⁴ When a child begins to struggle for its independence, it fights the mother who cared for it and loved it. And when the mother is left alone with no one to need her, she feels the ungrateful child is at fault. Unable to strike out against the situation, they may strike at each other. Guilt and anxiety may intensify into hostility, perhaps physical or psychological violence. R.D. Laing speaks of the parental violence that masquerades as love:

From the moment of birth . . . the baby is subjected to these forces of violence called love, as its mother and father have been and their parents before them. These forces are mainly concerned with destroying most of its potentialities. This enterprise is on the whole successful. By the time the new human being is fifteen or so we are left with a being like ourselves. A half-crazed creature more or less adjusted to a mad world . . . Love lets the other be, but with affection and concern. Violence attempts to constrain the other's freedom, to force him to act in the way we desire, but with ultimate lack of concern, with indifference to the other's destiny. We are effectively destroying ourselves with violence masquerading as love.²⁵

This process socializes children for obedience rather than creative or independent participation in social and political institutions.

III. CONSUMPTION WORK

Another lesson children learn in the home is materialistic consumption. The family as a separate unit from the rest of society provides a market for consumer goods. While each household owning its own car or cars, its own kitchen equipped with appliances, stove, washing machine and dryer, vacuum cleaner, and so on, may be inefficient for getting the work done, it provides a profitable target for the sales of manufacturers.²⁶ In a society where production has become so efficient that we, in fact, overproduce, it is necessary to find a mode of consumption for the commodities produced in order to prevent depressions and unemployment. Advertising attempts to convince us that we really need bigger and more luxurious cars, newer models of everything from deodorant to television sets. Advertisements create artificial needs for objects that may not even give us further comfort or pleasure. The advertisers play upon our fears and our senses of inadequacy to persuade us that to be a virile man, a sexy woman, a concerned mother, or the neatest kid on the block, we must *buy*.

Nevertheless, since households no longer produce even necessary food or clothing, someone must perform "consumption work," shopping and purchasing all the items necessary for the care of family members. The housewife typically performs this role and, in doing so, performs much of the labor for which employers in past years have paid employees. More and more, housewives must drive long distances to shopping centers, locate items within stores themselves, and be already familiar with differences among various products and brands. Women must collect, organize and transform products into a home environment that satisfies its members' needs. This expectation contrasts with the actual irritation of shoddy consumer goods, inadequate services, and high prices to make consumption work a frustrating and alienating activity.²⁷ Consumers who recognize the pitfalls of shopping may still become involved in essentially meaningless and materialistic activities, researching, exploring, testing, and comparing products. Consumerism can become a way of life, a continual quest for the "best value."

Because the family is such an isolated unit, we rarely share any of the things we buy with anyone outside the family, so that everyone has his or her own commodity even if it is rarely used. This kind of waste would never occur in industry where employers have forced workers to adjust to shift work to keep expensive machinery running all of the time in order to maximize profits.

The difference between the two kinds of property is that commodities purchased by families or individuals in families have no productive capacity. While we may feel that we have our own private property, our own home, car, sailboat even, these objects do not constitute private property in the original sense of the term. When the revolutionaries in France and the United States in the late eighteenth century fought for the right to private property, they were fighting for the right to own the means of production. In the present stage of corporate capitalism, the craftsperson with his/her own tools, the farmer on his/her own land, the merchant in his/her own store have almost all been replaced with factories, tenant farming, and franchises. Private property rests in the hands of a few large corporations who control production and eventually cause even the few remaining petit bourgeois to work for wages when they can no longer compete with monopolies. At most the "private property" of the home and family produces in an inefficient manner for the maintenance and reproduction of labor power.

IV. "WOMEN'S WORK" AT HOME AND ON THE JOB

The interrelation of patriarchy and capitalism characterizes the contemporary family and its relation to society. In the system of capitalist patriarchy, traditional roles within the family reinforce male supremacy outside the family.²⁸ The woman who works within the home, receiving no wages, depends upon her husband's paycheck for her and her children's livelihood. This places her in a powerless position in relation to him as well as the rest of society. As a dependent person, she poses no threat economically, in competing for jobs, or psychologically, in relations of dominance.

The woman's subordinate position in the home extends to the world of commodity production when she attempts to go out to work. Employers can get away with hiring women for jobs with little responsibility and low pay. When questioned, many men and even women admit to feeling uncomfortable working under the supervision of a woman. They are so accustomed to submitting to male authority figures that their very sexual identity is threatened when a woman occupies that position. Inferior and discriminatory educations channel women into home economics programs and typing, underpinning existing prejudice against them. In any supermarket or department store, for instance, one finds women working as clerks, cashiers, and checkers, and men as managers. The telephone company remains a traditional example of a policy of hiring

hundreds of lower paid women operators, a few women supervisors, and filling the upper levels of the hierarchy with male supervisors, managers, and technicians. The personality characteristics into which women are socialized, in preparation for their roles as wives and mothers, make them more malleable in the hands of employers who can capitalize on their passivity and patience. The tremendous numbers of women employed in the service sector of production reflects the effect of this socialization process. Women work away from home in the same ways they work at home, servicing the needs of others as clerks, waitresses, typists, nurses, secretaries, tellers, receptionists. As Parsons and Bales suggest, ". . . within the occupational organization (these roles) are analogous to the wife-mother role in the family."²⁹

From the other direction in this line of argument, feminists maintain that the hierarchical division of labor between the sexes allows male supremacy to continue in a capitalist society:

Job segregation by sex, I will argue, is the primary mechanism in capitalist society that maintains the superiority of men over women, because it enforces lower wages for women in the labor market. Low wages keep women dependent on men because they encourage women to marry. Married women must perform domestic chores for their husbands. Men benefit then, from both higher wages and the domestic division of labor. This domestic division of labor, in turn, acts to weaken women's position in the labor market. Thus the hierarchical division of labor is perpetuated by the labor market and vice versa.³⁰

However, historical exceptions to this circular order have occurred – times when women have been called upon to do "men's work" when it was necessary to maintain the economy. During World War II when the military recruited or drafted most of the male labor force, women went to work in the factories to keep up the intense production of arms and munitions. Then women were encouraged to go out to work, and neither they nor their employers considered them unfeminine as welders or machinists since their jobs served the war effort (and the efforts of those companies making great profits from the production of war goods). But when the war ended and the men came home, women lost their jobs and returned to their roles as wives and mothers. One estimate states that ". . . four million women lost their jobs in the eight months after V-J Day."³¹ Child care centers provided during the war closed down, and men took over the jobs. Suddenly it became unfeminine for women to

work outside their homes, and the cult of motherhood began to replace patriotism. From ministers' sermons to the lessons of Dr. Spock, women received encouragement to stay at home caring for their children. These voices stressed the harm that she would bring her children, making them delinquent adolescents and neurotic adults, if a mother were to stray from her "natural" duty.

Earlier in the century, when the country was just becoming industrialized, a similar need on the part of factory owners generated a similar twist in ideology. Women and even children were encouraged to go to work in the factories. Companies led women to believe that they could gain independence and comfort through their own efforts in what turned out to be jobs involving up to sixteen hours a day of fatiguing labor in unsafe conditions for miserably low wages. Physical strength was not the quality needed for running the new machines; instead employers sought patience, dexterity, and passivity and found that women were most suited for that type of work.³² The sanctity of motherhood and the family was far from these employers' minds. Even then, however, women's participation in industry remained largely confined to textile and garment manufacturing – extensions of women's traditional work in the home.

Now when increasing numbers of women are entering the job market, they most often enter as nonunionized low paid workers or in part-time jobs that exempt their employers from any obligations concerning minimum salary or benefits such as insurance and retirement plans.

While women comprise forty percent of the work force, the jobs women hold still merely extend their domestic roles and duties.³³ They care for children as teachers, assist men as secretaries, care for human needs as nurses and social workers. The sexual division of labor within production keeps women from competing with men in traditional male jobs while allowing employers to continue hiring many women in jobs usually far below their level of education or skill. This segregation appears especially in the rapidly growing service sector of the economy in which almost twice as many women as men find employment. Those males who do occupy these jobs are typically black men faced with racial discrimination. Women almost always fill positions for clerical work and retail sales work. Only about fifteen percent of all women workers are professionals, and eighty-five percent of these work as teachers or nurses; women make up seventy-two percent of all teachers below college level. Seventy-eight percent of all clerical workers, including four million typists and secretaries, are women.³⁴ All of these areas of work, except perhaps teaching and nursing which occupy only a tiny percentage of all

women workers, involve low paid, nonunionized, routine, and boring labor. Few women receive any pensions or fringe benefits, and these are typically lower than men's.

When the educational level of male and female workers in the same occupation is equal, the percentage of men to women employed depends upon the occupational category, and within the same category, women always receive lower incomes. For instance, while only seven percent of all male workers fill jobs for clerical workers and thirty-five percent of all women workers are hired in that category, in 1974 males made \$3,066 more than females in these same jobs. In other traditional women's fields such as service work, we find similar data. The median income for male service workers was \$6,955, for women, \$3,953. In 1974 women in all occupations earned an annual median income of \$6,772, less than 3/5 that of male workers.* Minority women face further discrimination – they earn even less than white women and are more highly segregated in occupation.³⁵ In addition to occupational segregation and lower wages, women face additional economic burdens in that their income does not stretch as far as a man's since they are often denied credit on the basis of sex.³⁶

Due to inflation and growing unemployment among all members of the work force, women are working out of necessity now in order to maintain their family's standard of living, not to increase it or work for unneeded extras, as many employers claim. Many women are their families' sole providers. Two-thirds of all women workers are single, divorced, widowed, separated, or have husbands who earn less than \$7,000 a year.³⁷ The numbers of female-headed households have increased to one out of every eight, and one out of ten women workers heads a family.³⁸ Contrary to popular belief, fifty percent of divorced women receive no alimony or child support while fifty percent receive a median annual payment of \$1,300. The exclusion of women from male dominated sectors of the economy, such as industry and the professions, meant that, with the end of the Viet Nam war, instead of women being forced out of their jobs (jobs defined as women's work), the returning young men experienced a high rate of unemployment, especially young black men. Unemployment for women then rose too, as more women were forced to seek jobs and were overcrowded into those sex-segregated sectors of the labor force. The ratio of female to male unemployment has risen.³⁹

* As this chapter goes to press in 1984, more recent statistics show that women workers still make less than 2/3 the wage of male workers.

The maintenance of a reserve labor force of women for those jobs deemed unsuitable for male workers does not mean that the jobs are peripheral to the economy. Indeed, they are essential to its functioning and its expansion, but the types of work, the working conditions, and low wages make it a flexible and fluctuating arena for the super-exploitation of women who must also contribute indirectly through their labor in the home to the expansion of production. And due to their relative inexperience in the labor force, companies can sometimes turn to women for scab labor when other workers strike for higher wages and/or better conditions. This occurs not necessarily because women make worse workers than men or are less apt to stand up for their rights but, as we discussed earlier, they learn to regard their families as their primary responsibilities. If they provide the sole support for a family, their more desperate situation demands that they submit to less than desirable conditions and lower wages. As unemployment increases, employers can take advantage of women and other minority groups knowing they will have no other alternatives than to accept such demeaning employment. The ideology of the family as the "woman's world" obscures the fact of her subservience in production.

Another way in which the family affects production in the society from which it is apparently separate is in the amount of time women spend in their reproductive roles. Bearing and raising children limits and defines the amount of time that women may be employed in wage work, as well as the ways that they may be employed. Thus the family serves as a limit on the expansion of capital. As Sheila Rowbotham points out:

The family is the place where women work. It also determines the amount of labor which can be released for commodity production, and plays a crucial part in forming consciousness. The family is both essential for capital's reproduction, and a brake on its use of human labor power.⁴⁰

The work that people do outside the family, as individuals within the economy and society as a whole, invades family life, structuring home activities as well as the consciousness and roles of its members. Factory workers, with little chance for creativity or responsibility, or shift workers, whose eating and sleeping schedules are constantly changing, or even the corporate servant, who must reside in the proper neighborhood, whose wife must dutifully play hostess, and who must himself seek to please higher-ups in an atmosphere of pressure and anxiety, all experience the invasion of their homes and personal lives by the demands of the

marketplace.⁴¹ On the other hand, the family, by withholding labor power from the labor force for the purposes of procreation, socialization, and consumption, limits the mode of production at the same time it contributes to its maintenance in the form of unpaid labor and child care and as a market for consumer goods.

Though we like to believe that our homes and personal lives are distinct from the work world with its competitive relations and alienating production processes, fundamental political and economic structures connect the two worlds. Our public and private lives are not so distinct; in fact, the family and home are the central point at which the individual and social experience meet. A place of nurturance for the individual, the family paradoxically trains and socializes each of its member to leave its small community, break its bonds and enter mass society. Women perform most of the labor and enact most of the roles that facilitate this process; however, the denigration of that labor, the lack of wages for domestic work, and low wages and occupational segregation in the job market obscure the value and importance of women's work to the economy and overall functioning of society. This discrimination, reinforced by prejudice concerning women's education and personal qualities, perpetuates the inferior status and super-exploitation of women in both the family and the work world. Investigation of actual conditions in the family – the growing divorce rate and increasing domestic violence – indicates that the traditional nuclear family may no longer even provide a safe place for its members to which they can retreat from the pressures of an "outside" world.

In the 1960's, the New Left and counter-culture recognized some of these problems and inadequacies, and in the 1970's, the Women's Movement developed a critique of the exploitation and oppression of women in the family and at work. During both decades, various groups and individuals experimented with new lifestyles, agitated for child care centers and homes for battered women, and campaigned for the ERA. Now during the 1980's we witness a backlash to these attempts at social change in the policies of the Reagan administration and the histrionics of the "Moral Majority" who claim that all human values will disintegrate with the liberation of women from confinement in the home. These forces gain strength for good reasons and, not surprisingly, find supporters and even leaders in women who fear the loss of the small status they now claim as wives and mothers. They fear too, perhaps, the dehumanization of an

increasingly individualistic and, at the same time, mass society in which communities and families break up, and commercial values supersede the concern for people.

We can find ways to integrate our public and private lives so that the values we say we cherish, more than the reified ideologies we cling to, can find new forms of social expression. Rather than fearful attempts to defend a family system whose humanistic influences are constrained and, in many ways, distorted into their opposites, we can discover what aspects of those social relations we can preserve by transforming them to promote equality and love among women, men, and children.

NOTES

1. See, for instance, Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World* (New York: Basic Books 1977).
2. Juliet Mitchell, *Woman's Estate* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971); Sheila Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* (Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1973); Zillah R. Eisenstein, ed., *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1979) in particular, the section "Capitalist Patriarchy and Female Work."
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CHAPTER SIX

Socialization, Gender, and Changes in the Family

SOCIALIZATION AND GENDER

How do we learn the family relations and gender roles of our society? If these relations are not natural, but conditioned historically by patriarchal institutions, then we can analyze and perhaps change them. Our society socializes us to choose particular ways of expressing our sexuality and our personalities. The individual develops a character that is unique, yet conditioned by social forces. Critical theorists, feminists, and a few traditional sociologists as well have attempted to understand how the individual acquires character traits that allow him or her to participate in a patriarchal and capitalist society. The history of the family tells us about historical changes in that development; critical social theory, synthesized with feminist psychology sheds light on the relations of power and exploitation within the individual and the family that extend to the whole of society.

I. CAPITALISM, FAMILY SIZE, AND SOCIALIZATION

Around the turn of the century, families were much larger on the average than the typical nuclear family of today. Lack of contraceptive devices, plus the need for children to help with work in what was still a largely agricultural nation, resulted in larger families. With the beginning of industrialization and factory work, large families contributed to a large work force. But as production became more automated, industry's need for a quantity of laborers gave way to the need for more skilled and highly trained laborers.¹ To cut down on the costs of supervision and management, industry needed a more skilled labor force that could discipline itself. Parents could give more training and attention to each child in a smaller family. Thus the family became smaller in size somewhat in relation to the needs of production.

With fewer children, each child could receive more parental attention and social training. Childraising, rather than childbearing, became the primary function of most women's lives. In the 1890s the average woman spent 15 years of her life in the condition of pregnancy and lactation. By the 1960s, this period of time decreased to four years.² Childhood became a very important part of a person's life, and doctors, ministers, and psychologists all stress the role of the mother in shaping the future adult. The huge expansion in production of toys for children, clothes for children, special furniture for children, and doctors and psychologists for children, reflected the growing emphasis on childhood. With the advent of compulsory schooling, the state intervened in the lives of children, subjecting them to a standard education geared towards mass conformity to the values of capitalist production—a capacity for alienated labor, obedience, and passivity. Of course, it also expanded children's lives through literacy and the possibility of social and cultural mobility. It gave more individuals the tools, if not the encouragement, for critical thinking. But compulsory schooling also enabled employers to hire people at a more mature age who were more highly trained and, most important, had internal self-discipline, people who would work without constant supervision even if the work seemed meaningless or boring or dangerous.

The values of the nineteenth-century family conflicted with the growth of industrialism, which literally broke up the family as a self-sustaining unit. Compulsory schooling forced children away from their parents for a certain period of time and undermined the parents' authority, replacing it with the authority of society as a whole and its larger economic needs. Schooling, along with child labor laws, also prevented children from contributing to their own support. Urbanization made it more difficult to maintain extended systems of kinship. Lack of space, the need for geographical mobility, the inability of children to contribute to their own support, all motivated people to form smaller families more adaptable to social needs.

As the family lost its economic functions to industrialization and urbanization, and lost its social functions to the schools, its psychological functions became more and more important. Paradoxically, as it decreased in size, its emotional load became heavier. The concept of a personal life, within the confines of the individual and the few members of his or her immediate family, contrasted to the world of production, of mass conformity and competition. This separation of personal and public life expressed a radical change from the rural extended family and the

communities of small towns in which work and play, personal and public life, were not so highly separated. On the other hand, the idea of individual development through hobbies, cultural pursuits, extended or adult education, the growth of leisure time, and the problem of what to do with it, became opportunities for many people.³

Stuart Ewan has argued that monopolized industry and the growth of corporations undermined the power of the old-time patriarchal father, so that we no longer live in a patriarchy, but in a corporate society in which the corporations are everyone's father, manipulating us through advertising and schooling to want the consumer goods they produce through our labor.⁴ Commercials on television, for instance, appeal to personal fears about intimate relations as the primary method of selling us useless products such as mouthwash, deodorant, and Lysol. Corporate psychologists and salespeople, constantly invade the personal lives of families, giving us an image of ourselves and our lifestyles that we try to reproduce by buying their products—the Pepsi generation, the computer age.

However, while the man in each individual family may not retain the power he has held historically over the rest of the family, this does not mean that our society is not patriarchal. If we view patriarchy in the way that Kate Millet defined it in *Sexual Politics*—that men occupy the positions of power within society as administrators, owners, police, government officials and military—we can see that although the state and corporations may have replaced the local power of fathers, the exclusion of all but a few women on the boards of directors reserves that corporate power for men.⁵ Because the power of corporate society competes with that of the father, children must break away from the families that nurture them in order to take their place as individual members of society. The amazingly fast-paced changes that take place in a society so complex and technological as ours, make the parents' ideas and values obsolete by the time a child enters school and grows old enough to see beyond his/her parents as the only figures of authority. While society makes a show of encouraging obedience to family values, at the same time, it provides a frame of reference often opposed to parental authority. In order to grow as an individual, the child must break away from his or her parents and learn to adapt to an increasingly different society. Paradoxically then, the family maintains itself as a close unit at the expense of its members' individual development.⁶ And more and more, it seems isolated from the rest of society.

As the nuclear family becomes more isolated from the rest of society, sex role or gender distinctions become more apparent. As Talcott

Parsons describes it, the family is isolated and “almost completely functionless. It does not itself, except here and there engage in much economic production, it is not a significant unity in the political power system, it is not a major direct agency of integration of the larger society.”⁷ He does, however, see two ways that the family functions on behalf of the individual personality: 1) socializing children and 2) stabilizing adult personalities. These two functions of the family depend upon and create gender differences.

II. GENDER, AUTHORITY, AND THE MASCULINE IDEAL

Gender socialization teaches both men and women their place within the family and within society and is crucial to understanding why the family as we now experience it often seems unalterable. Our earliest years take place within a family already distinguished by differentiated sex roles. The first thing anyone wants to know about an infant is—boy or girl?—an absurd priority since the difference between male and female infants is minute and only recently developed. But the answer to that question determines so much about the way in which adults treat us, from the colors we wear, to the amount of affection and cuddling we receive. From the very beginning we learn behavior deemed appropriate for our sex. Girls don’t play rough. Boys don’t cry. Little girls sit still, but “boys will be boys.” Whatever differences we might have begun with are magnified to ridiculous extremes. We must stand in segregated lines at school, use separate bathrooms, play with different types of toys and eventually learn the appropriate occupations and interests—sports, cars, science and mechanics for one; dolls, clothes, home economics, and nursing for the other. And so boys become “naturally” active, assertive, rational, and girls become “naturally” demure, nurturing, emotional.⁸ These traits soon define a “normal” man and woman and are constantly reinforced through both example and teaching within the family. Women learn to play what Parsons calls an “expressive” role, and men an “instrumental” role in relation to children, who learn from their parents to repeat the same patterns.⁹ Those who deviate often suffer ostracism and name calling—sissy, pansy, tomboy, bitch.

This rigid socialization process, so obviously destructive to the growth of both men and women as human beings, perpetuates gender roles that preserve the monogamous, patriarchal family, insure private property, and maintain class relations. Sex role socialization combines with teaching children to accept hierarchical and authoritarian relations.

A child must learn to obey its mother and father, to submit to authority. This obedience early in life trains the child for later obedience to a boss, police officer or some other “authority.” Though men may exercise authority over wives and children within the family, they must, however, submit to authority in the economic and political aspects of their lives. Women must learn to obey their husbands and, as girls, are taught their inferiority to boys as well as to adults.

Thus the family socializes children to be good workers, and obedient citizens, and to never question the authority that has the power to determine their wages or to fire them from their jobs, to arrest and jail them, to send them to war or to command sexual subordination. The family and sexual relationships are not as “natural” as they appear to be, or even a part of a separate “personal” realm, but extend and complement social systems of sexual and class oppression. If the worker questions the boss’s authority, then he challenges the right of the boss to own what the worker makes, the right to private property. If the worker continues to question that right and appropriates from the boss what the worker has made, then the armed force of the state will intervene, as it has in numerous labor disputes. If a woman questions her husband’s authority, then she challenges the assumption that she “belongs” to him and also calls into question the nature of private property. If she continues to question that right by leaving him or by entering into sexual relations with someone else, then she may be charged with desertion. The community and the church will consider her immoral in their attempt to uphold the husband’s authority. Some social psychologists, Theodore Adorno and Wilhelm Reich, have argued that, by instilling within its members authoritarian and submissive personalities, the patriarchal family encourages mass conformity and submission to authority. They each find evidence for this idea in their studies of Hitler’s Germany, when millions of seemingly respectable family men and women blindly pledged obedience to a fascist leader to the point of exterminating six million of their fellow human beings in an attempt at racial genocide.¹⁰ We really cannot afford to take the values of the patriarchal family for granted.

Families socialize children to learn gender roles of masculinity and femininity. Though these traits are not natural, we do begin to acquire them at a very early age, even in infancy. Critical sociologists have revised Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theory of the Oedipus complex in order to explain how this early socialization takes place. Philip Slater has analyzed the ways the nuclear family creates, in early infancy, the motivation for men to pursue careers that promise them success but also

cause them great stress and, as he argues, dehumanize them. The highly successful business man who commands authority and makes a great deal of money with which to support his wife and children is certainly one of our culture's ideals of masculinity.

Slater describes the family as a class system in which children learn all the rules about how different social classes interact.¹¹ In the family, the adults comprise the upper class, and the children the lower class. The family also contains a caste system of two castes—male and female. Simply by experiencing the family, a child learns how in any society the lower classes defer to the upper classes, and the upper classes exercise power and control over the lower. In the family, however, everyone undergoes one route to social mobility; they grow up. Most actual societies, however, allow few opportunities for individuals to move from the lower to the upper class.

Slater argues that the incest taboo maintains the class system within the family, since only adults are allowed the privilege of sexual intercourse. According to the Freudian theory Slater works from, children learn the incest taboo by resolving the Oedipus complex. In the oedipal situation the child experiences love and sexual attraction for the parent of the other sex. This theory applies best to boy children who, like girls, form their first attachment to the mother, but learn to repress their desire for her by identifying with the father. Realizing that they will grow up to be like their father, they no longer compete with him for the mother's love, and they postpone their own erotic gratification until adulthood. They also learn to identify with the father's masculinity and to acquire those gender traits for themselves. According to Slater, the child may successfully resolve the oedipal conflict, but the early childhood infatuation lingers in his consciousness in the form of romanticism:

Now according to Freud, time does not exist in the unconscious. Early images of a loving face, of exchanged tenderness, of blissful feelings, of youthful and idealized parents—are preserved unchanged, uninfluenced by the reality of subsequent and less-pleasant images of family interaction. They form the raw material of romanticism in adult life. The overwhelming importance of the face in romantic ideation—as opposed to personality traits or bodily charms—suggests that some of these images may go back to infancy, when the face dominates the child's stimulus field.¹²

Slater thinks then that parents transmit to children an oedipal culture consisting of yearnings and dreams and unrealizable romantic longings. These longings form a significant part of the highly oedipal adult's consciousness—a place of love and tenderness and romantic fantasy to which the individual can always return psychically.

Slater carries through this idea to argue that the very successful man in our society is likely to be motivated by oedipal strivings. This man can easily break off real relations with parents and friends, home and family, in order to become a highly mobile success type simply because he has that fantasy ideal with him all the time. Along with the ability to break off relationships, the successful man postpones immediate gratification for some future gratification which he perceives as much greater and therefore worth the postponement. This is possible for a man who has concentrated all his emotions in that one person, the mother, so that in childhood, he was willing to reject nurturance from others in hopes of eventually receiving it from her instead. The mother becomes a symbol in later life—one person or one thing that he values above all others:

Concentration of nurturance in the mother, which tends to occur in the isolated nuclear family of today, engenders oedipal motivation. By this I mean simply that mental connections involving the concept "mother" retain inordinately high priority throughout life. They promise the "greater pleasure" for the sake of which the organism's natural striving for pleasure is suspended What survives in ordinary oedipal motivation is not so much the desire for incest with the mother as an internal pattern of emotional responses—a readiness to put all one's emotional eggs in one symbolic basket People who show a strong tendency to plan, to strive earnestly toward far distant and symbolic goals, to hold strong internalized values that are not responsive to context . . . are oedipally motivated. . . .¹³

The highly motivated careerists that Slater discusses are not likely, in spite of publicity to the contrary, to lead any kind of satisfying sex life. A busy man does not find time for long hours of leisurely love-making. Slater connects this high degree of sexual repression to a denial of humanity, a preference for highly mechanized and technocratic power in place of balanced personalities and social cooperation.

Slater points out that for women, the oedipal situation differs. Women feel attraction for the father that combines with love for the mother as the main source of gratification. Thus, instead of concentrating

all emotional energy in one place, the girl child divides hers and hence develops a less striving and achievement-oriented personality; she becomes willing to love others who are more distant and cold, as is the father in the parent-child relationship. At the same time, a little girl learns her socially ascribed inferiority to men. She also learns to take emotional risks which the boy foregoes for emotional control.

Women in general do not grow up prepared psychologically to pursue highly competitive careers; they achieve social mobility primarily through men. Women learn instead values and attitudes of emotional expressiveness, cooperation and nurturance-values that capitalist patriarchy suppresses, segregates from the public world, and denigrates. The striving, competition and achievement orientation produced in the male oedipal situation form, on the contrary, are fundamental qualities of corporate capitalism.¹⁴

Thus Slater perceives the nuclear family as a class and caste system upheld by sexual taboos. It forms the type of masculine personality structure capable of upward mobility in contemporary technocratic and corporate society—a mobility won, however, at the expense of the individual's own humanity and that of the rest of society.

For when a careerist throttles his humanity in the services of achievement, what kind of a world can he build except one in which humanity is throttle?¹⁵

III. FEMININITY AND SEXUAL COMMODIFICATION

Slater states that women achieve upward social mobility primarily through men. Women may change their class position by marrying; if they fail to attract a middle or upper class husband, they must still please men in their search for employment. Because men occupy most of the positions of authority in our society, women must act in ways that please men, ways that often turn their femininity into a sexual commodity.

Women often find themselves victims of a special kind of consumerism. They go from shop to shop looking for the right makeup, the perfect dress, and most flattering hairdo, trying to please themselves perhaps, but according to standards that will make them feel more sexually exciting or more appropriately "dressed for success." In either case, they apply to themselves images of femininity designed to attract men, as lovers, husbands, employers.

So much more than men, women are expected to be attractive, and although the fashions of beauty change from year to year, women must

try to keep slim, young, and lovely. Women's identities depend upon their ability to appear beautiful. But even more than psychologically, a woman's appearance determines her life. In almost any newspaper in the United States, want ads will feature advertisements for "attractive young woman" to do typing, phone answering, waitressing, bartending. If a woman is beautiful, her chances for survival, either in attracting a husband or in finding a job, are higher. From Revlon ads and Hugh Hefner to her husband or her boss, a woman depends upon male approval for her attempts to reach their standards of beauty. She must objectify her own self and regard her body as a commodity to exchange, in one way or another, for a living.

Meredith Tax discusses the kind of schizophrenia that women may experience because of their alienated relationship to their own bodies and faces:

From the earliest age a girl is deprived of a sense of herself (ego); her identity is made to depend on other people's evaluations of her. She is continually told what she looks like, and how important it is to have people like her.¹⁶

Men stare, whistle, and yell at women, desire and love women in response to their appearance. Women may separate their "selves" from their bodies; they may develop a sense of self that no one can see, that is inaccessible to others and thus escapes the control of others.

Whatever the process, the solution is a split between mind and body, between oneself and another. One may hate the body and consider the mind the real "self." One may glorify the body, as a means of satisfying one's desires by becoming an instrument to satisfy the desires of others; in this case the body becomes a thing, and the mind a puppeteer to manipulate it.¹⁷

The distortion a woman's personality must undergo is a kind of self-alienation, in which she regards her own self as a commodity that she must reproduce constantly according to other people's expectations so that she may survive economically and fulfill her role in the family.

The role she seeks to fulfill in the family conflicts in some ways with the image of youthful and sexually attractive beauty. That role, as Philip Slater also points out, depends on nurturing, cooperative, mothering qualities, qualities that require a woman to devote herself to others, not to her own appearance. This contradiction forms a double bind for women who may be criticized for the very vanity that their circumstances induce in them. They must at some time give up whatever power their attrac-

tiveness gives them to develop full time what Parsons calls the “expressive role” of women in the family. This expressive role suits women to motherhood, and for many adult women, femininity and motherhood become synonymous.

IV. MOTHERHOOD

Our society, as well as many others, assumes that women are biologically suited to raise children. We base our assumption on the fact that women give birth to children and nurse them during their infancy. But as Margaret Mead has pointed out, biological parentage does not equal social parentage, and social parentage does not equal womanhood:

At present the specific biological situation of the continuing relationship of the child to its biological mother and its *need for care by human beings* is being hopelessly confused. . . .

In very simple societies, such as the Australian aborigines, many South Sea Island societies, and some African societies, the male takes a great deal of care of the young infant. (emphasis added)¹⁸

Yet from a very early age women are socialized toward their future role as mothers. Adults give them dolls to play with and encourage them to fantasize that someday they will have their own children to take care of. We think in general that motherhood is inevitable for every “normal” woman and that those who resist such a destiny in favor of other things are dry, cold, and “barren”—not a nice image. But even though men play a definite biological role in the birth of a child, we do not view a man who does not have children or who does not wish to take care of children in such a negative light. He can express creativity and produce useful objects elsewhere, specifically in his job which rewards him with money and social identity. Fatherhood is not such an important aspect of his life, and being a father is not his primary identity.

Indeed the exclusion of women from industry and professions, the frustration of their efforts to achieve anything outside of the home, almost require that we glorify women’s role as mother, as a labor of love, duty, and privilege. As Lee Comer has pointed out:

Motherhood is society’s golden carrot. . . . Because of this one central assumption which underlines everything that pertains to women, that a woman’s true purpose in life and the pinnacle of her fulfillment is motherhood.¹⁹

Even the most psychologically liberated of young women have a difficult time ridding themselves of the notion that someday they ought to have a child, even if they live unconventional lifestyles, and even if they feel satisfied in their job relationships with other people. Motherhood is a very powerful ideology, one that religion idolizes in the cult of the Virgin Mary, who fulfilled her destiny as mother without even engaging in sexual intercourse, maintaining her purity beyond the power of any mortal woman. The traditional ideology that exhorts women to become mothers also teaches them that sex is shameful, even perhaps a painful duty that they must endure in order to reap the joys of motherhood. More contemporary women, while enjoying sexual pleasure, may feel that their pleasure is selfish or wild, especially in contrast to the selfless and settling responsibilities of motherhood. In this ideology of motherhood, childbirth and childrearing become inseparable activities.

Margaret Mead argues that in many cultures, the social division of labor, class structure, and hierarchies of authority separate the father from his child especially in the early stages of its growth, relegating child care to the mother.²⁰ In advanced industrial society, the actual physical separation of the father from the home for most of the day, and the exclusion of women from most areas of society other than the home, make childraising the almost exclusive sphere of women. As Juliet Mitchell points out, this function seems an inevitable “bio-historical” fact, a result of reasoning in a seemingly logical line that begins with maternity (biological fact), leads to women’s childrearing role in the family, and concludes with their absence from commodity production.²¹ Thus the family appears to be a biological fact and women’s role and subordination follow from that fact.

Of course many people take care of children who are not their biological children, as in the case of adoption, and in many places in the world children receive care outside the context of the nuclear family. The notion of women’s biological destiny as mothers seems to stem from an inability to imagine any form of life other than the isolated nuclear family with its deeply specialized roles and sexual division of labor, a form of family that, as we have seen, is vital in maintaining and perpetuating the economic system as well as the subordination of women.

Advances made in the technology of contraception have accomplished a great deal in liberating women from the necessity of childbirth. When women were forced to either remain chaste or suffer the hardships of numerous pregnancies and childbirths, the supposed connection

between maternity and woman's role in the family seemed more plausible. But when women can engage in sexual activity without fear of childbirth, when they can choose if and when to have children, the whole logical structure of marriage and the family is undermined. More and more women can venture into industry, the arts, and the professions without having to sacrifice their personal lives, specifically their sexual relationships. Motherhood is no longer the sole vocation of a woman.

Nevertheless, in spite of the choices contraception does offer some women, the ideology of motherhood remains strong in our society. More traditional people see it as a woman's natural function or her duty to her husband. People with more liberal attitudes may eulogize motherhood as a natural, even mystic experience. However, society does not really value the pregnant woman. If it did, we would not consider any child "illegitimate," a concept that assumes the property relations involved in having children. If we truly valued motherhood, employers would not refuse to hire women on the grounds that they might get pregnant. Women who want to have and raise children must make themselves dependent on a husband's financial support or suffer the indignities and poverty of welfare. Though motherhood remains a powerful ideal, in our country it has become increasingly difficult for anyone other than the affluent to afford proper medical care during pregnancy and childbirth. The U.S. is a startling thirteenth among Western industrialized nations in rate of infant mortality.²² If motherhood were truly treasured, architects would not design buildings with narrow flights of stairs, impossible to climb with babies or baby carriages; builders would not build high-rise low-cost housing for working class families in which children have no space to play, and mothers and pregnant women find it difficult to get around.

Even in what is regarded as the woman's domain, like department stores, high rise flats, etc., women with young children are simply not catered to. In fact, every aspect of our environment is designed with one thing in mind, the adult healthy male; mothers, along with the physically disabled and the very old, are ignored.²³

However, in spite of social constraints and the contradiction between ideas about motherhood and its reality, many women want very much to become mothers; they find raising children a rewarding and satisfying experience. The question that rises is why women, so much more than men, find satisfaction in this activity which is, after all, *social* rather than biologically necessary.

Like Philip Slater, Nancy Chodorow has found in Freudian theory a starting place for an analysis of the "reproduction of motherhood," the ways relations within the family socialize girl children, rather than boy children, to desire motherhood. By motherhood, Chodorow does not mean simply giving birth, but being the primary caretaker of a child. While most women grow up and marry expecting and desiring this close relationship with children, most men consider it, at most, secondary to other interests and roles in their adult lives. Chodorow believes that this gender difference results from more than differences in training and education; the deep emotional nature of this difference requires further explanation.²⁴

She suggests that the very fact that women do mother in our society is what reproduces in girl children the desire to mother. A girl child forms her first and closest attachment to her mother; so does a boy child. But the girl not only loves the mother, she also learns to identify with the mother. Though she must shift her erotic attachment to men, she is able to retain a close emotional attachment, through identification, with the mother. Boy children, however, must separate from the mother, both as an object of erotic love and as an object of gender identification. This means that the boy must reject the dependency and emotional intimacy of his relation with his mother in order to establish his masculinity. The girl child, however, can retain the emotional intimacy of her preoedipal bond with her mother; in identifying with the mother, she can hope to grow up and repeat as a mother herself the same mother-child relation. That dependency and close emotional bond becomes part of a girl's personality, something she wishes to re-create as an adult. When she marries, she may look to her husband for such closeness, but if he has had to reject emotional dependency in order to establish his masculinity, he may not satisfy her need for intimacy. She will "naturally" then wish to have children and look to them for the emotional closeness she felt with her own mother.

In this analysis, we see that ascribing to women the role of mother, re-creates in daughters the wish to mother, and in sons, a reaction against emotional intimacy, even against women. Though nature and role training may make motherhood among women possible, those factors alone do not account for the reproduced wish to mother among women. The desire to mother then is reproduced through a social relation that inscribes itself psychologically.

Both Chodorow and Slater analyze gender socialization from the point of view of the mother's relation with the child. This shifts the emphasis in critical sociology away from the authoritarian father as the force determining character traits in capitalist patriarchy. Horkheimer, Adorno, and other Frankfurt School theorists argued that the relations of the patriarchal middle class family fostered feelings of guilt and inferiority that created personalities willing to submit to authoritarian figures like Hitler.²⁵ Their attempts to locate the roots of fascism within the family certainly suggested a critique of women's subordination. However, not until the current feminist movement, have theorists taken women seriously enough to focus on their role in creating personality traits. The movement to make more choices open to women has generated a new understanding of their psychology and their role in the family.

Nancy Chodorow concludes her analysis by advocating motherhood for men. She believes that men can take care of children as well as women and that by forming intimate relations with children, they would be able to express their own repressed needs for emotional closeness. As co-parents, rather than primary mothers, women would find more time for work and other interests, as men do now. Furthermore, boy children would no longer have to reject dependency and women to identify with masculinity, and girl children would be more able to develop autonomy and individuality.

As Chodorow points out, these changes would involve more than individual men and women within the family. The sex-gender system that assigns mothering to women also organizes labor in the home and in the world of production.²⁶ These social forms of organizing labor would have to change as well since they are tied to the ways we raise children and socialize gender roles within the family. Even so, the family does change and is changing now. Within current changes, we can find possible alternatives for the future.

THE FAMILY – CHANGES AND ALTERNATIVES

Nancy Chodorow calls upon fathers to care for their children early in infancy and in a close, intimate manner; in effect, she asks men to become mothers, or at least to share mothering with women. This alternative within the traditional nuclear family would reshape gender roles and gender identities giving children of both sexes more choices in

their personal development. Such a reshaping of the family would also presumably undermine patriarchal dominance in the family and, eventually, in society.

Her analysis and solution to problems in the family emerge from the current feminist movement and stress the relations between men and women and among parents and children within the nuclear family. As an alternative, it challenges the very process by which we develop our gender identities, the psychology of gender socialization.

In the past and currently, people have attempted to create more equalitarian relations among women, men, and children and sometimes to break down class barriers through social as well as psychological alternatives to the family. Alternatives to the family are not new proposals. Plato proposed communal living and equality for women among the guardian class in *The Republic*; nineteenth-century Utopian socialists, such as Charles Fourier, and the American transcendentalists like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Bronson Alcott, experimented with communal and equalitarian living arrangements. Indeed, in the early 1800s in the United States, a wave of communal living experiments, such as the famous Brook Farm²⁷ and other less publicized communes like Fanny Wright's Nashoba,²⁸ formed as significant and influential a movement as the rural communes and urban collectives of the 1960s and 1970s.²⁹ Even communes of the nineteenth century experimented with such "radical" ideas as racial and sexual equality, free love, and communal childrearing. And throughout history, some nonconventional women have refused to marry and presented us with courageous examples of independence and of the spirit of free love—one of these, the anarchist Emma Goldman, asked "how can love be anything but free?"³⁰ Women like her and like George Sand, the French novelist,³¹ and Simone de Beauvoir, whose theories we have described in this section,³² and many others, recognized the crippling effect of marriage on women and were willing to risk the moral sanctions, that society places on sexually free women, in order to develop their own personalities and talents and to live independently.

More currently, in the mid- to late twentieth century, alternatives have emerged in the 1960s counterculture movement and the feminist changes of the 1970s and 1980s. Hippies and New Leftists of the sixties rejected monogamy and marriage, choosing communal living or "living together" arrangements between couples. Today in the eighties, college students frequently live together as lovers, no longer suffering the moral outrage of this arrangement first provoked. In the 1970s the Women's

Movement challenged the traditional double standard in sexual relations, promoting relationships based on the economic and sexual independence of women and mutual aid among women. The Gay Liberation movement has supported homosexual relationships and living arrangements. Homosexuals, although always prevalent, have long suffered persecution, perhaps because they threaten property relations based on heterosexual marriage. By challenging institutionalized sex and gender roles, the gay movement, sometimes in conjunction with the women's movement, has been able to offer a viable alternative for many people.³³

Another trend in contemporary society, particularly in urban areas, is that of individuals living alone. Many people, of course, do not live alone by choice, but as a result of the breakdown of marriages and families. The failure of the family, along with the lack of alternatives for many people, often leaves people alone when they would prefer not to be. However, for some individuals, living alone has become an attractive choice. People with occupations or professions that provide them with interesting work and networks of friends may choose to live alone and still satisfy emotional needs. This choice may become increasingly less affordable as people in the professions experience higher rates of unemployment. However, living alone may provide them with the privacy and independence they need, even if temporarily.

Alternatives to the family that have already changed peoples' lives seem concerned with two kinds of human relationships: 1) Sexual relations and friendships among adults and 2) Relations between adults and children. In some alternatives, changes in these ties are linked to changes in work and property relations.

I. SEXUAL RELATIONS AND FRIENDSHIPS AMONG ADULTS

The first concern, sexual relations and friendships among adults, has led to a number of experiments. Especially during the 1970s, many people tried living together arrangements as couples or groups, and some experimented with "open relationships." Its advocates describe open-ended marriage as for those who "do not equate sexual exclusiveness with marital fidelity. Repudiating the double standard, they enjoy intimacy, sensuality, and sometimes sex with other friends. . . . The energy of their love does not diminish for loving others—it is a synergistic process of emotional renewal and expansion."³⁴ In this more conservative decade, such ideas may not seem attractive. However, high mobility

among people who work sometimes requires this kind of freely committed relationship. Whatever the basis for open-ended relationships, they allow individuals to establish a "stable core of special primary continuing interpersonal relationships." Ideally, they are characterized by a secure bond of trust and friendship that allows each partner a degree of sexual independence.

While most long-term monogamous relationships force the partners to repress sexual desires toward other people, often resulting in resentment, deception, and the traditional clandestine "affair," an open relationship recognizes that such desires are normal and can be acted upon without threatening a freely committed relationship. The Russian revolutionary and feminist, Alexandra Kollontai, proposed this alternative in the early part of the twentieth century. She spoke of learning to experience a true or "great love" through the educational experiences of "erotic friendships" in which sexual freedom and mutual respect would prevail.³⁵ Shulamith Firestone foresees cohabitation and eventually open-ended relations as the most viable situation for most people for most of their lives.³⁶

We find at least one contemporary example of a successful freely committed and open relationship in the lifelong bond between Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. They remained lovers, friends, and intellectual colleagues in a companionship that allowed independence to each. However, it was difficult for them and is probably almost impossible for many people to overcome feelings of jealousy and possessiveness. Changes in these attitudes would perhaps require fundamental changes in our entire culture. The writer Ursula Leguin has portrayed a utopian anarchist society in her novel *The Dispossessed* in which people make love and make friends by mutual choice and with respect for each other's freedom. Sometimes such changes seem indeed utopian or even inconceivable to those of us conditioned to think of people we love as belonging exclusively and by law to us. But advocates of open relationships feel that possessiveness and unwanted obligation are the very factors that undermine love and commitment.

II. COMMUNAL LIVING AMONG ADULTS

Sociologists have studied communes and the commune movement in both Great Britain and the United States and have seen it as a significant trend in the recent attempts to replace the nuclear family with some other kind of family. This movement reflects a desire for some new kind of family

rather than simply a complete rejection of the family. Philip Abrams and Andrew McCulloch identify four types of communes: quasi-communes, utopian communities, purposive communes and family communes.³⁷ Quasi-communes offer drop-in shelter or counseling for young members of society who perhaps need a temporary reprieve from the pressures of their lives—conflicts concerning school, work, sex. They provide more transient and impermanent “rites of passage” rather than stable and lasting family groups. Utopian communes attempt “to create an instituted social order existing over and above their individual members and on the basis of the willed subordination of their selves.”³⁸ Walden Two, the community planned and run by B.F. Skinner and his associates, exemplifies a utopian commune, as do the communes of nineteenth-century America. Purposive communes commit themselves to some goal, perhaps a political or artistic project which the group considers more important than its individual members, so that membership may change, but the commune will continue.

Family communes commit themselves to living together as their primary purpose. This type of commune is most pertinent to our discussion since it most expressly attempts to create an alternative to the traditional family. Abrams and McCulloch identified seven generally shared concerns among communes they studied in Great Britain in the 1960s: (1) the generation problem; (2) a critical perspective on the nuclear family; (3) the situation of women and especially unmarried mothers; (4) the importance of play and the integration of work and play; (5) the social construction of identity counter to prevailing bureaucratic and competitive norms; and (6) the politics of revolution expressed as the “gentle revolution of the individual.”³⁹ All of these issues show a commitment to replacing the nuclear family with a system that attempts to take care of, in different and careful ways, the problems of intimate social interaction.

This commitment seems to focus on the cultivation of friendship. Communes define friendship in the manner of the ancient Greeks as something somewhere between our common ideas of romantic love and friendship—a relationship emphasizing intimacy, equality, reciprocity, goodness, and common activity.⁴⁰ Communes tend to hold this concept of friendship as the ideal and try to practice it by collectivizing resources, activities, and labor in order to foster cooperative rather than competitive values and behavior.

Family communes generally consist of young, middle class professionals who are idealistic about social change and who have a more

experimental approach to their project than members of utopian communities. No overt ideology or religion provides a sense of solidarity and commitment; rather the group focuses on simple activities such as the common meal, and on communal space such as music rooms and libraries. They develop democratic methods of common decision making.

A commune, then, is a relatively and intentionally stable group of between five and twenty-five adults with whatever children they may happen to have, recruited from more than one nuclear family and strongly, but conditionally, committed to living together and sharing as much as possible of their lives. They share the work of the common household or complex of households in which they permanently live. . . . The group is bound together morally and economically, and interaction in both these respects will proceed in a spirit of tentative and exploratory mutuality. . . . The importance of communes lies in the claim they advance that people such as they are in society such as ours can create circumstances in which it is possible to institutionalize friendship—in a remarkable full and generous sense of that word.⁴¹

Communes propose to enact immediately the cooperative values and behavior of a collectivized society. They hope to replace the social structures of both patriarchy and capitalism with relationships that are open and purely social, that is, based on mutual choice. In the midst of a society in which power and wealth accrue in ways antithetical to these values, communes face many problems. Most of the problems stem from the condition of being ideologically withdrawn from and, at the same time, structurally open to the outside world. Most communes recognize two kinds of problems: 1) practical and 2) emotional and mental difficulties. In practical matters, communes need capital in order to survive economically. This requires their participation in the market economy and involves problems of ownership and labor. Abrams and McCulloch feel that, due to a commune’s ability to pool the skills of its members and share knowledge and talent, the alienation brought about by the division of labor and the exploitation of the worker in the outside society may be attenuated in the everyday life of the commune.

Communes tend to solve these problems by partially re-entering the “plastic society” or drawing on its resources just enough to maintain economic viability without enforcing a conventional allocation of domestic roles.⁴²

This ability to suspend the experience of exploitative and alienating relationships in everyday life is particularly significant for attempts to dissolve the sexual division of labor. It is in this aspect that communes most successfully create conditions for the emancipation of women. The commune relieves or eliminates the occupational segregation of the traditional nuclear family because there are many people of both sexes with different talents and skills to share rather than the mutual dependency of one man and one woman through polarized gender roles. However, communes still relegate the role of mother to women and find it difficult to share this activity. It is the one factor which remains to inhibit women's equal participation in all communal affairs and to inhibit their personal freedom and mobility.

In fact, young mothers who are unattached to men become part of the emotional difficulties that Abrams and McCulloch claim communes face. Emotional and mental difficulties emerge in members or prospective members with "special problems." These may include drug addiction, the problems of ex-cons or people who have been incarcerated in mental hospitals, but primarily it applies to young mothers who are unattached to men. In principle, communes should be open to all of these people, but because of outside pressures and economic necessities, they often exclude those with special problems. In the case of young mothers, it is particularly a contradictory situation since such women make minimal demands—that members recognize the value of their labor as mothers or help with mothering and that they are able to enjoy the opportunity for intimate adult relationships. In the United States mothers may often bring in an income from welfare aid, so that their membership puts no economic strain on the commune, but the responsibilities of childcare and the failure of communes to collectivize childrearing means that women with children are tied to their children and prevented from developing themselves in the same conditions of freedom and autonomy as the other members.

Since communes maintain an open and experimental approach to personal relations, sexual and romantic love relations are sometimes a source of conflict. Although the emphasis on friendship makes changing and renewing personal ties a smoother transition in collective living, individuals still experience, pain, guilt, resentment and jealousy. Communes seem to be most successful in supporting an individual in times of loss and bereavement—loneliness, old age, loss of husband, child or job.

The member is more likely to be easily reintegrated into a social world that values the person as an individual regardless of family or economic status.

As Abrams and McCulloch point out, communes as alternatives for women are limited. The freedom that women gain—freedom from gender constraints, monogamy, and the sexual division of labor—reveals deeper obstacles to equality. While domesticity and personal relations become important for both men and women, and communes do value feminine roles, men still remain more independent and autonomous on the "outside"; they enjoy greater access to financial resources and less responsibility for children. Thus, of the three links in the traditional family—wife/husband, father/child, mother/child—only the first two are transformed in a consistent and serious way. Motherhood remains an exclusively and demanding female role. While communal life eliminates many of the restraints on women's freedom, the constraints of the larger society mean that men still exercise more power, and personal relations may still take on the characteristics of coercion.

This last criticism of family communes helps explain why many women, looking for an alternative to the nuclear family, choose to live in women's collectives. Women often join together in cooperative living arrangements out of necessity; poverty, lack of child care, and their need for companionship motivate them to share resources. However, they may also express ideological reasons for excluding men from their homes. One midwestern women's commune of the 1970s expressed as a collective position the idea that women need to separate themselves from men in order to learn to depend on and support each other rather than relying upon men who, in this society, have the power to degrade and oppress them. These women criticized mixed communes for maintaining elements of sexist behavior and male supremacist attitudes. They admitted that their position threatened the male ego.

If the idea of women's collectives sounds threatening, it is—to men. Women are making a definite political move which puts pressure on the men to overcome their male chauvinism.⁴³

These women felt that although it was sometimes difficult to exclude all men from their household since there were always exceptions, ultimately they agreed that:

If women are to truly get themselves together, then they need someplace where they may go and always know that the open

arms of a sister await them. We think of our house as a place where married sisters, high school sisters, and all others may come to talk if they need to get away for a while.⁴⁴

Throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, women have carried out this idea of mutual aid among women with support from feminist men. They have developed rape crisis centers, drop-in women's centers, and shelters for battered women, all of which counter the abuse made possible by sexual and social relations dominated by men.

III. ADULTS AND CHILDREN – COMMUNES AND KIN NETWORKS

The situation for children in communes certainly differs from that in the nuclear family. Ideally, children have access to a number of adults and do not become excessively dependent upon one mother figure. They are offered variety, stimulation, and a great deal of freedom of movement as well as integration into the social life of the commune. In a study of Northern Californian communes, Bennett Berger and his associates have described in detail communal attitudes and practices of childrearing.⁴⁵ As in the British communes studied by Abrams and McCulloch, mothers retain the primary moral and practical responsibility for children, and fathers feel few parental obligations. A sequential process of development guides the child toward early achievement of autonomy. Infants and "knee babies" remain almost exclusively in the mothers' care; however, a group of several mothers-with-children may share and collectivize child care within that group. From the ages of two to four and older, the children "belong to the commune" and become less dependent, though still primarily in the care of mothers. Children older than four or five are treated and behave just as another person. They acquire responsibilities and privileges similar to those of an adult. Some children establish their own residences apart from the adults. Communes view children positively, consider them worthy of respect and love, and help them to develop naturally toward autonomy. Children's experiences do not reflect on their parents. The usual conflicts of adolescence almost disappear since children become competent and independent at an early age.

Since men often do not consider fatherhood their major responsibility, and communes provide no adequate substitute for the stable presence of one adult, the task most often falls solely upon the woman to provide security for the child. Berger sees the difficulties faced by women with

children and states that children's lives may, as a result, be somewhat haphazard. In this assessment, Berger fails to recognize the deeper structures of patriarchy and sexism that leave to mothers the sole responsibility for children; he also measures the success of communal living in terms of middle class nuclear family values of "security" and "stability," values that may obscure the tensions and even violence inherent in the traditional family's relations of domination. However, Berger concludes, in spite of the difficulties he sees for children, "if communal living succeeds in abolishing adolescence, it may have been worthwhile after all."⁴⁶ In their more recent book, Abrams and McCulloch view communal childrearing in a more positive way:

Comparing communal life with the life of what have been called symmetrical or dual-career middle-class families, it would seem that on balance the world of the communal child is richer in human content and that, if only the commune can break certain barriers of size and stability, children in communes can develop a very remarkable capacity for extensive social relationships without being in any way incapable of intensive relationships as well.⁴⁷

The problem of caring for children in the context of poverty and absent fathers has been met by poor urban black families in ways that allow them to share not only child care but also goods and resources. In her study of urban black families, Carol Stack has described an extended family in which any number of relatives and personal friends may live together, share resources, and care for each other's children in lifelong patterns of intimate association and mutual cooperation.⁴⁸ These patterns often fluctuate in response to economic, social or personal needs, and relationships associated with the family may not always correspond to residence. Therefore, traditional definitions of the family do very little to help explain the black family. In fact, in the past, social scientists have presented distorted and biased views of the black family.

In 1965, Daniel Moynihan published a report indicting the black family as responsible for the sufferings of black people and for the strains upon the society as a whole that suffering produced. He defined the black family as matriarchal and located all of its problems in its inability to meet the patriarchal norms of the dominant culture. By implication, this report blamed the black woman as mother and head of her household for all the frustrations and rebellions generated by white racism. It created a cultural image of the black woman as "masculine" and domineering.

Since then, black scholars, critical sociologists and anthropologists have demonstrated that the idea of the black matriarchal family perpetuated by Moynihan is not only a myth, but a distorted and prejudiced interpretation of the black family system, which is actually a stable and complex extended family or kinship structure. They have also been able to show that the extraordinary strength and love of the black woman for her children has kept the black family a strong and stable force in the black community.⁴⁹

In her study of urban black families, Carol Stack redefined the concept "family" as "the smallest, organized, durable network of kin and non-kin who interact daily, providing domestic needs of children and assuring their survival."⁵⁰ She describes several basic characteristics of these networks: swapping, personal kindred, domestic networks, and "childkeeping."

Through swapping, black families exchange goods and services, including clothes, money, household furniture, and child care. This exchange allows continual redistribution of constantly scarce goods and resources. The families in Stack's study create complex networks of reciprocal obligation and domestic cooperation in this manner. They involve many people in systems of such mutual dependency that "not to repay on an exchange meant that someone else's child would not eat."⁵¹ These networks associate in close daily interaction biologically related kin and personal friends who become kin. Asking another person for something needed signals a wish to establish mutual ties of friendship and trust, since the entire community recognizes that everyone must be able to both give and receive help from others in order to survive. Such mutually cooperative means of sharing resources contrasts sharply with the middle class model of private domestic ownership and indicates the ability of these poor families to survive adverse circumstances by creating systems of kinship and values counter to those of the dominant white culture.

Among black urban families, as among many folk cultures, personal kindred means social, rather than biological, networks of people who share reciprocal obligations toward one another. Every child born into the community has the right to be raised by one or more people who will take primary parental responsibility for that child's care. Often the biological mother and/or father assumes this responsibility, but in case they cannot do so, the child's grandmother or aunt may assume the role of mother or sponsor. The child's biological mother may maintain ties to her child all

of his or her life but may not be known as the child's "mamma." All of those people belonging to the kinship network of the social parents will then become the child's kin, especially if they are actively engaged in patterns of reciprocal obligation. When friends meet each other's expectations for mutual cooperation and exchange, they may identify each other as personal kin.

A system that overlaps with that of personal kin is domestic networks, extending throughout several households and involving kin and non-kin who are defined as "those you can count on." These networks are kin-based but may or may not involve all kin, and may include friends who have become part of the kinship structure. The various members of domestic networks may share residences, meals, sleeping arrangements, and children at different times during their lives. However, it would be impossible to determine who they are at any particular time by residential, eating, or sleeping arrangements since these fluctuate. Hence, an individual member of a domestic network may feel simultaneous loyalties to more than one household according to the personal history of that person's interactions with different households.

The term childkeeping describes the response of black families to the difficulties faced by mothers in poverty. During their lives, children may reside in several different households and be cared for by several different adults. Changes in a mother's situation—a marriage, job, eviction—may cause her to transfer her child to another adult for a period of time. A child may acquire several "mothers" during his or her life depending on who is most willing and able to care for it at certain times. While it may appear that this practice makes the child's life unstable, it does indicate adult concern that children be raised in the best circumstances possible at all times. Childkeeping creates strong bonds between kin and members of domestic networks that, rather than signify instability, insure their survival. It contributes to a mother's secure knowledge that her children will be cared for and that the children of her kin and friends will receive care through this form of mutual aid.

IV. CHILD CARE AND CHILDREN'S CENTERS

The extended family of poor urban blacks has developed in the context of unpredictable and impoverished circumstances. It provides child care for mothers who cannot be certain of secure jobs or living arrangements. Institutionalized child care for working mothers is often too expensive or unsatisfactory or even completely unavailable.

Citizens and legislators have long crusaded to alleviate the problems of working parents and their children by securing federal support for child care centers. Since most women working today must enter the labor market out of economic need, and since fathers do not generally take responsibility for the care of children and must work also, parents either leave their children with babysitters or alone if they cannot find or afford adequate child care centers. In the United States in the 1970s more than 11 million mothers, 1/3 of them with children under age six, worked. However, there were only 700,000 licensed centers for children.⁵² When Richard Nixon was president in 1971, he vetoed a child development bill with the following statement:

. . .the vast moral authority of national government must not be committed to the side of communal approaches to childrearing . . . our response to this challenge, child development, must be . . . consciously designed to cement the family in its rightful position as the keystone of our civilization.⁵³

This attitude that forcing mothers to cope with either poverty and unemployment or to neglect their children is somehow good for the "family" has continued into the eighties with the Reagan administration. In the context of what has recently been described as "the feminization of poverty," this attitude shows a profound lack of concern for the children of any but the rich in this country. It also indicates opposition to women working anywhere but in the confines of unpaid domestic servitude.

Benefits of good child care centers include the freedom for women from twenty-four hour responsibility for children and the opportunity for children to associate with playmates. As Carol Joffe points out, "good" child care is a necessary qualification because children need more than mere custodial services. Good care would include involvement in policy and curriculum decisions to insure their children's safety, well being, and education. In this context, child care centers could offer ways for fathers and other men to become involved with children and also become places where children at a young age could be encouraged to grow and develop their personalities in a non-sexist environment.

V. POSSIBILITIES IN THE PRESENT, FOR THE FUTURE

However necessary child care centers are for the needs and interests of working parents and their children, such a system still leaves mothers with the primary moral responsibility for their children, and still segre-

gates children from the adult world. Like other current alternatives child care centers provide a way for families to adapt to economic necessity and to challenge oppressive personal relations created by rigid gender roles. However, it becomes clear that two barriers remain that prevent relations among adults and between adults and children from fully promoting their free and equal development: 1) occupational segregation of women outside of the family and 2) the exclusive mother-child relation within the family. These two characteristics of capitalist patriarchy are created and reinforced by the tension between the family and society as a whole. In chapter four we discussed the domestic/public tension that develops from associating women with nature rather than culture. This division links mothers to children in subordinant positions within the family. Our data and research reports show that occupational segregation in the world of commodity production reinforces the subordination of women in the family and vice versa. In the section on family communes we found that although communes may eliminate occupational segregation temporarily, the closed mother-child relation perpetuates male supremacy and prevents women's full participation in the social life of the commune.

The closed mother/child link in the system of traditional family relations is a crucial one. Not only does it prevent women's full emancipation, but it may obstruct the welfare of children and the socialization of healthy adult personalities. Returning to the psychological analyses of gender presented by Philip Slater and Nancy Chodorow, we recall that opening the role of mothering to fathers would make more flexible the rigid gender personalities that exclusive mothering by one woman encourages. Women should, however, be able to *choose* motherhood without sacrificing through unequal marriages their personal independence, and this requires, at least, available and affordable child care centers and, at best, collective social responsibility for child care.

We must learn to recognize and reward the great social value of child care, no longer denigrating it with low pay and low prestige. We can emphasize fatherhood as a primary activity for both men and boys and uphold the social value of this responsibility. Women who are then freed from motherhood as a primary moral responsibility or sole vocation may choose to be mothers freely without fear of social segregation and exclusion. They can remain autonomous human beings free to develop all aspects of their personalities, talents, and skills.

Actualizing this freedom, however, depends upon eliminating occupational segregation in society as a whole. To begin with, we must realize

that the ideology of "husband as economic provider" is a false one since this myth becomes the rationale for both government policy concerning child care and employment policy concerning hiring women. But we must establish more than the fact and necessity of women as workers; we must consider the freedom of women to work a fundamental right upon which women's dignity and independence rests. Women must be free to work in any sector of the labor force; work previously considered "women's work" must be integrated fully with equal pay and recognition, opportunities for promotion, pensions, and fringe benefits. We can also plan ways to sexually integrate and collectivize domestic labor, giving full credit to the social value of housework.

Full social change in the patriarchal family system then requires more than individual alternatives to gender roles and marriage. It requires 1) eliminating sexual segregation and exploitation in the work force, 2) eliminating prejudice against women including prejudice against "feminine" characteristics and "women's work," and 3) dissolving the domestic/public split by opening the exclusive mother/child relation. Along with opening the exclusive mother/child relation and eliminating economic segregation and exploitation, the rights of children will emerge as necessary to the development of freedom and equality for all individuals. Recently, social policy advisors have advocated the right of all children to adequate material care through "children's pensions" which would assure every child proper housing, food and medical care.⁵⁴ And current court decisions are suggesting the right of children to decide with whom they shall live. It is becoming increasingly evident that children require protection from physical, emotional, and sexual abuse; even though they are necessarily dependent on adults, they must be allowed to enjoy the individual right to develop free from such abuse and to grow into healthy and educated human beings. Children and young people need not be segregated by age from the rest of society, but can freely associate with, learn and grow from all members and aspects of social life. The same holds true for senior citizens who, in a more collectively responsible system, could be fully integrated into social life, rather than discarded as no longer productive or useful individuals. While these proposals may seem utopian to some readers, we remind you that we can see already these possibilities in current alternatives to the family.

NOTES

Part A. Socialization and Gender

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3. I have depended on Eli Zaretsky, *Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life* (New York: Harper & Row, Colophon Books, 1976) for much of this historical analysis.
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6. "The self-contradictory ideology of the family . . . preserves the individualism of the unit only in the increasingly disruptive individualism of its members." Julie Mitchell, *Woman's Estate*, p. 158.
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8. See Linda Gordon, *Families* (Boston, Mass.: New England Free Press, 1970).
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13. *Ibid.*, pp. 130-132.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 140-144.
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25. Max Horkheimer, "Authority and the Family," *Critical Theory* (Seabury, 1972).
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Part B. The Family – Changes and Alternatives

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