

social reproduction

Rayna Rapp is clearly in dialogue with Jane Collier, Ehrenreich & English

but while Collier and E&E concerned with how gender *ideology* changes with economic transformation, Rapp is doing something different: she's looking at **gaps** between the *ideologies* of capitalism and the more or less objective *realities* of how capitalism works on the ground

Q: what are the ideologies of capitalism that she goes after?

success is NOT all about achievement — *ascribed* status, inheritance, is still relevant

brings up Q of the roll of FAMILY in MODERN SOCIETY

Rapp addresses this question by first distinguishing “**family**” from “**household**”:

**households** = “entities in which people actually live”, but also “the empirically measurable units within which people pool resources and perform certain tasks” — related to the distribution of resources.

**households** (as Rapp puts it) pool resources and “are the basic units in which labor power is reproduced and maintained”, and therefore *fundamental* to wage labor economy

and family? relatives (by birth or marriage)

“the **family** is the normative, correct way in which people get recruited into **households**” (170) [nuclear family]

**Family**, particularly **marriage**, thus provides opportunities for *reproducing* and also *crossing* class lines —> household with higher or lower status, more or less resources — esp. for women: marrying “up” or “down”

Q: why especially important for women?

**Fredrick Engels**, noting these things in 19th C, argued that for modern middle class women, MARRIAGE is a relationship of SLAVERY, “the crassest prostitution”

in Engels' view, in marital ideal under capitalism: women *service* men (sexually as well as domestically), in return for having material needs satisfied (he brings home the bacon) marriage is relationship of economic exploitation; husband = bourgeoisie; wife = proletariat

BUT people themselves don't see this as exploitation.

Q: Why did/do women *say* they do what they do in the home?

E&E and Rapp make this argument —

Because they LOVE their husbands/kids.  
Because they take pride in their home (role well performed)  
Even because it's their "destiny." (God or nature)

They *don't* say it's because their labor is exploited and they're living under conditions of oppression. (until 1970s)

that's *because* of ideological separation of **public / private** spheres  
work / household  
for money / for love

Engels: economic and sexual exploitation of women *hidden* by the **ideology** of **romantic love** (**marriage** for love as **achieved** status) and by the description of women's domestic and sexual labor as wifely and maternal duties, not "work"

After all, what does "home" signify, symbolize in the modern world? (E&E)

It's a space where LOVE rules. Under modern ideology of gender and family, domestic labor is one way in which women have expressed their love.

This ideology is what E&E call "the **romantic solution**" — buttressed by scientific "experts" finding in women's psyches and biology source of *innate* nurturing, fragility, etc. — keep them (if ideally possible) out of mean, cruel market and in protective cocoon of home.

Like all ideologies, this story masks a very different reality:

**A) class difference** — working class women didn't have luxury of staying home; their bodies and psyches were different, but this evidence wasn't brought into calculation of women's "nature" (theorized from middle class norm)

**B) constructed** nature of **domestic/public** — what people do for love and for money — not so separate as we like to think

as RAPP shows, this division is an ILLUSION: Domestic/work is **false distinction**

domestic labor is absolutely *crucial* to capitalist economy; HOW?

**PLUS beyond** unpaid domestic labor, **household** site of **informal economy**:

money lending, coupon-cutting, leaving kid with neighbor during emergency

NOT incidental, or outside, of capitalist production; fully integral to capitalism.  
It is crucial to the reproduction of the labor power of employees.

“It is women who bridge the gap between what a household’s resources really are and what a family’s position is supposed to be” (175)

contemporary examples? still gendered?

SO, both authors suggest, because families are dominant means of recruiting household members, and household economies are part of market economies, family relationships can and do involve economic exploitation — Q: What do you think? was Engels right?

most famously, women’s “double day” or “double burden”

doing shopping, housework, childcare, cooking on top of full day of paid work  
most heterosexual 2-parent households, men doing more of this, but NOT 50%  
(especially not in households where there’s no hired help)  
it’s not just doing the dishes or doing the shopping, but making the shopping list;  
mental inventory of what’s in the pantry, anticipating running out of TP or  
Tylenol  
not just driving kids around but knowing when they’re due for doctors or dental  
apts, making the play dates, researching day care centers, etc.

in theoretical terms, feminist scholars have understood this labor in terms of:  
**social reproduction** — both Rapp and Nakano Glenn

recognizing the economic contribution of domestic labor

- 1) includes physical reproduction & daily maintenance of individuals (keeping labor force strong)
- 2) but also reproduce class divisions generationally

family is also mechanism for social reproduction in so far as we learn **class dispositions** as part of our socialization — including **class-based gender acquisition**

these dispositions are called **cultural capital** (Pierre Bourdieu)— language/accent, aesthetic tastes, values, knowledge of Culture, exposure to class-inflected lifestyle that we inherit, alongside economic capital, that facilitates some people’s “success” in capitalist economy. it’s the kind of thing that can make or break a job interview

so here’s another spike in the **myth of strict meritocracy** — we don’t all start as blank slates, with nothing but our God-given ability and own industry; not just economic assets, but also cultural assets

Q: What do **you** envision for yourselves, your families/careers? What do you expect?  
[we haven’t even begun to take into account two-mommy or two-daddy families]

“The Family Question” — recent *NY Times* article on ivy league women dreaming of

becoming stay at home moms...

Do you see it as an either/or choice — career or family?  
putting it that way *only* makes sense given public/private split!

Why aren't we talking about **men**? Or are we?

Is **fatherhood** today equivalent to motherhood? *should* it be?

why is it when m-c women want fulfilling career and kids, we're "wanting it all"  
when for m-c men — at least *straight* men — it's totally the norm, assumed,  
unremarkable?

from Nakano Glenn (456): "In the traditional middle-class household, the availability of cheap female domestic labor buttressed white male privilege by perpetuating the concept of reproductive labor as women's work, sustaining the illusion of a protected private sphere for women, and displacing conflict away from husband and wife to struggles between housewife and domestic."

i.e., "Rather than challenge the inequity in the relationship with their husbands, white women pushed the burden onto women with even less power."(446)

As Nakano Glenn importantly notes:

When we ask the government/employers for things like childcare provisions, we have to ask — who's going to be working in these childcare facilities? and what will *their* lives be like?

And this is what **Romero** addresses — "Who Takes Care of the Maid's Children?"

Q: what social/psychological repercussions from this piece did you find most interesting/surprising? unfamiliar? Or what struck a cord?

ambivalence — damned if do/damned if don't — all decisions about having/not having kids, pursuing/not pursuing career

problem of **ideology of choice** and **achieved status** — assume people have lives they have b/c of choices they've made — hold people accountable for life paths — motherhood, analogous to career, as achieved status; also fear others will judge us

What can we learn from this, analytically?

from Nakano Glenn (455):

When feminists perceive reproductive labor only as gendered, they imply that domestic labor is identical for all women and that it therefore can be the basis of a

common identity of womanhood. By not recognizing the different relationships women have had to such supposedly universal female experiences as motherhood and domesticity, they risk essentializing gender—treating it as static, fixed, eternal, and natural. They fail to take seriously a basic premise of feminist thought, that gender is a social construct” — interlocks with other systems of inequality (Collier)

Do you really get what she means when she says: “to represent race and gender as relationally constructed is to assert that the experiences of white women and women of color are not just different but connected in systematic ways” (457)?? example?

**race makes a difference to white women, too, their experience of gender**

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