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Familiar Exploitation: A New Analysis of Marriage in Contemporary Western Societies.
Christine Delphy , Diana Leonard

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Review

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compared to the rest of the world, and in these countries, there has been a sustained decline in divorce until quite recently. As Goode's analysis makes clear, the traditional high-divorce family system differs in important ways from the modern Western high-divorce society. In the former, women were a valuable resource for families, and for that reason, remarriage rates were high, so very few women ended up as single heads of households. Most divorces occurred among young people very early in their first marriage, and later marriages typically were much more stable than first marriages, again contrary to the pattern observed in modern Western societies. The high divorce rates reflected a family system where marriage was used in the mate selection process (usually directed by the family of the young man): prospective wives were tested out and, if found unfit, sent back to their parents. Declines in divorce rates occurred when industrialization began to undermine the traditional family system. Here it is interesting to note that divorce in these societies, because of its acceptance under the traditional family system, began to be considered "rather uncouth" when these systems began to break down (p. 316). Nonetheless, once a modern family system has replaced the traditional, divorce will begin to increase again, and in some countries this trend has already begun.

Although Goode is somewhat hesitant about making predictions of future trends in divorce, he does conclude that most developed countries are or will become high-divorce-rate systems, because individuals are relatively independent of the family in these societies. Divorce will be common in modern and postmodern society. The lesson from the traditional high-divorce societies is clear: "We should institutionalize divorce—accept it as we do other institutions, and build adequate safeguards as well as social understandings and pressures to make it work reasonably well" (p. 345). Only in that way can the negative consequences of divorce be minimized.

Familiar Exploitation: A New Analysis of Marriage in Contemporary Western Societies. By Christine Delphy and Diana Leonard. Oxford: Polity Press, 1992. Pp. 301.

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Delphy and Leonard modify Marxist-feminist analyses of the subordination of women in Western societies by focusing upon the relations of exchange within the institution of marriage. They target "relationships based on love," and focus their exploration upon the practical, sexual, procreative, and symbolic work done by women for men within family relationships. The credibility of this modified approach resides in the authors' reconceptualization of household labor and its ties to family relationships, and in that regard they offer some insights that

extend the human capital model of family behavior and decision making.

Like others before them, they observe how marriage per se transforms the household into a unit of unpaid, unowned, and "unproductive" labor (by noting how, in contrast, the same labor of a housekeeper or a prostitute is considered productive because their labor occurs outside the context of marriage). They clarify how the line between production and consumption in the household is obscured, making difficult the assessment of household productivity, and how the value added by women to goods purchased with husbands' outside wages for consumption within the household is an unrecognized but essential contribution to a family's standard of living. Furthermore, they clarify that what is produced within the household has both use value and exchange value and that the two are not mutually exclusive as presumed by other scholars. They observe that exchange value can extend beyond the household unit, but because families see household labor as satisfying their own perceived needs, household labor is widely regarded as having no exchange value. This point complements England and Kilbourne's arguments (see "Markets, Marriages and Other Mates: The Problem of Power," in *Beyond the Marketplace: Rethinking Economy and Society*, edited by R. Friedland and A. Robertson [New York: Aldine, 1990]) about the non-transferability of women's relationship-specific investments in marriage. The authors' theoretical analysis may provide insights for scholars particularly interested in further examination of Becker's tenets about the family (in *A Treatise on the Family* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981]).

Delphy and Leonard link these insights to the structural and patriarchal determinants that affect behavior within the institution of marriage. While familial relationships are organized by the family to suit itself and to maximize its own resources, Delphy and Leonard argue the family cannot be treated as an economic unit (in contrast to Becker's thesis), primarily because it is not comprised of equals. Age and gender are not just differences among family members; they are the basis for inequalities among them in the production, consumption, and intra- and interfamily transmission of household labor and its products. While this point is largely overlooked by economists interested in family decision making, its conceptual and empirical significance remains largely undeveloped by Delphy and Leonard.

The limitations of their framework are especially evident in the final chapter, which is devoted to an examination of some of the work done by wives within the context of marriage (e.g., direct contributions to husband's waged labor, moral support, domestic labor) compared to that done by husbands. Delphy and Leonard's unwavering commitment to a Marxist perspective generates some interesting theoretical insights into household labor, but that paradigm alone is insufficient for explaining the intersection of culture, affect, rationality, and power in the institution of marriage. Works such as DeVault's on the hiddenness of women's

caring work within families (*Feeding the Family* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991]), Fenstermaker's on household work as a gendered accomplishment (*The Gender Factory* [New York: Plenum, 1985]), and Brines's on gender beliefs as the currency of a symbolic exchange within social relationships ("The Exchange Value of Housework," *Rationality and Society*, 5, no. 3 [1993]) are more empirically grounded and conceptually richer because they draw upon multiple theoretical perspectives. In sum, while *Familiar Exploitation* might remind sociologists about the relevance of Marxist theory to debates about the institution of marriage, the book is incomplete as either a theoretical explanation or a program for empirical research.

Dividing the Child: Social and Legal Dilemmas of Custody. By Eleanor E. Maccoby and Robert H. Mnookin. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992. Pp. xi + 369.

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Dividing the Child is a major addition to the literature on an important social issue: child custody and support after divorce. It examines the roles of gender and conflict in the process by which parents make arrangements for the care and support of their children during and after divorce and the impact of public policy on that process. The authors studied 1,124 families who filed for divorce in two California counties and who were interviewed three times over a period of about three and one-half years. In this review I discuss the three most important issues explored in the study.

The role of gender.—Regarding the role that gender plays in the parental arrangements, the researchers found, as might be expected, that before divorce both parents shared in the care of their children and contributed to family support. However, their primary roles were clearly gendered. In the majority of cases mothers were the primary caretakers, even when they worked full time, and fathers were the primary supporters, earning about twice as much as mothers. After divorce, mothers continued to be the primary child-care givers, but fathers were no longer the primary supporters of their children. Although 88% of the noncustodial fathers were ordered to pay child support, noncustodial financial support made up only about 15% of the custodial parent's postdivorce household income. Furthermore, as other studies have shown, compliance was a problem. By the end of the study those who paid in full had fallen to 57%.

Fathers in this study were much more involved than those in other studies. After three and one-half years only 14% of the children in sole mother custody had not seen their fathers within the last year. Fathers were also more apt to be involved in custody arrangements. For example,