

## **RATIONAL CHOICE AND THE PRICE OF MARRIAGE**

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One of the most discussed family trends in the United States has been the substantial decline in the share of women who are married. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce (1994: Table 59), the percentage of women married declined from 68.5 to 59.2 percent between 1970 and 1993; among African-American women, it declined from 61.7 to 41.1 percent.

Departing from their libertarian stance on most public policy issues, virtually all U.S. politicians pronounce that the government should encourage heterosexual marriages. Historically, this position was rooted in a breadwinner model of family life where men specialized in market production while women specialized in home production. Many sociologists (Parsons 1949, 1954) claimed that this sexual division of labor was crucial to family stability, allowing each spouse to have complementary rather than competitive roles. For these analysts, husbands and wives benefited equally from their choice of marriage so that patriarchal exploitation could not be the norm. Building on the work of Gary Becker (1973, 1981), neoclassical economists also contend that marriage is efficient because it enables partners to specialize in what they do best.

Most feminists reject this idyllic vision of marriage. In the not so distant past, women were often forced to marry or remain under the authority of a father or brother. Constrained access to well-paying jobs and societal pressure against unwed mothers had created a "reserve army" of women willing to marry at virtually any price. Elaine McCrate (1987: 79) writes, "Men's power, much like capitalists', enable them to extract economic benefits from the dependent group." According to Heidi Hartmann (1981:10), these economic benefits include a disproportionate share of "luxury goods, leisure time, and personal services." While during the second half of the

twentieth century the situation changed substantially, these feminists continue to believe that in the marriage market, women pay a patriarchal price.

In order to assess systematically the changing situation, a rational choice marriage model is developed. This model builds on Becker's work but departs from his narrow focus on income allocation.<sup>1</sup> The model developed here assumes that the allocation of income is but one dimension of the marriage contract. However family income is allocated, women might be forced to conform to the demands and desires of their husbands. These qualitative losses may be more important than the quantitative income changes.

This model defines a marriage price that measures the excess services provided by wives to their husbands and assesses how this price and the number of marriages change. It will demonstrate that government policies that provide incentives for women to marry and/or limit their earnings potentials invariably increase the marriage price. Most importantly, this paper will enumerate the reasons why women continue to face a substantial marriage price despite the legal and social changes that have occurred since World War II.

## **THE MARRIAGE MODEL**

Let us define an equitable marriage as one in which sexual behavior and the allocation of household time and income are determined by only comparative advantage and each individual's preferences. In particular, a marriage would be equitable even if the wife did the bulk of household services as long as this allocation reflected genuine altruism or an acceptable compensation for services rendered. The actual services provided by each spouse in the typical marriage can deviate from those that should be provided in equitable marriages. The **marriage price** is defined as the dollar measure of the lost welfare of wives due to their provision of

services beyond those that should be provided in an equitable marriage. These excess services may include ceding control of an excessive share of household income to the other spouse, requiring the dominated spouse to do an excessive share of household production, and/or ceding to the dominating spouse excessive influence over the choice and frequency of sexual activities.

Once the marriage price is defined, marriage offer curves can be used to analyze the marriage decision. For each gender, the marriage offer curve is the relationship between the marriage price and the quantity willingness to marry. Marriage offer curves are culturally specific, and we would expect to find considerable variation in them across countries. In the following discussion, I will focus on circumstances in the United States.

A number of factors other than the marriage price influence female and male marriage decisions. The male marriage offer curve is influenced by male preferences and the number of men available. In addition, some studies (Goldscheider and Waite 1986) indicate that marriage is a normal good for men so that they will be more willing to marry as their earnings increase.

Female marriage offer curves are influenced by the income of men. If male income declines, men may be perceived as less valuable so that fewer women seek marriage. (Valerie Oppenheimer 1988) Becker suggests that the female-male earnings ratio also influences female marriage offer curves. He (1981: 248) contends that an increase in the female-male earnings ratio reduces the gains from the sexual divisions of labor so that the value of marriage (husbands) is reduced.

Female marriage offer curves are also influenced by female income potentials. Independent of male incomes, as female earnings rise, fewer women may seek marriage. Samuel Preston and Allan Richards (1975) and Frances Goldscheider and Linda Waite (1986) found that women with higher incomes tended to have lower marriage rates even though they should be considered more

valuable to men. McCrate (1987) found that her measure of female economic independence was inversely related to marriage rates.<sup>2</sup>

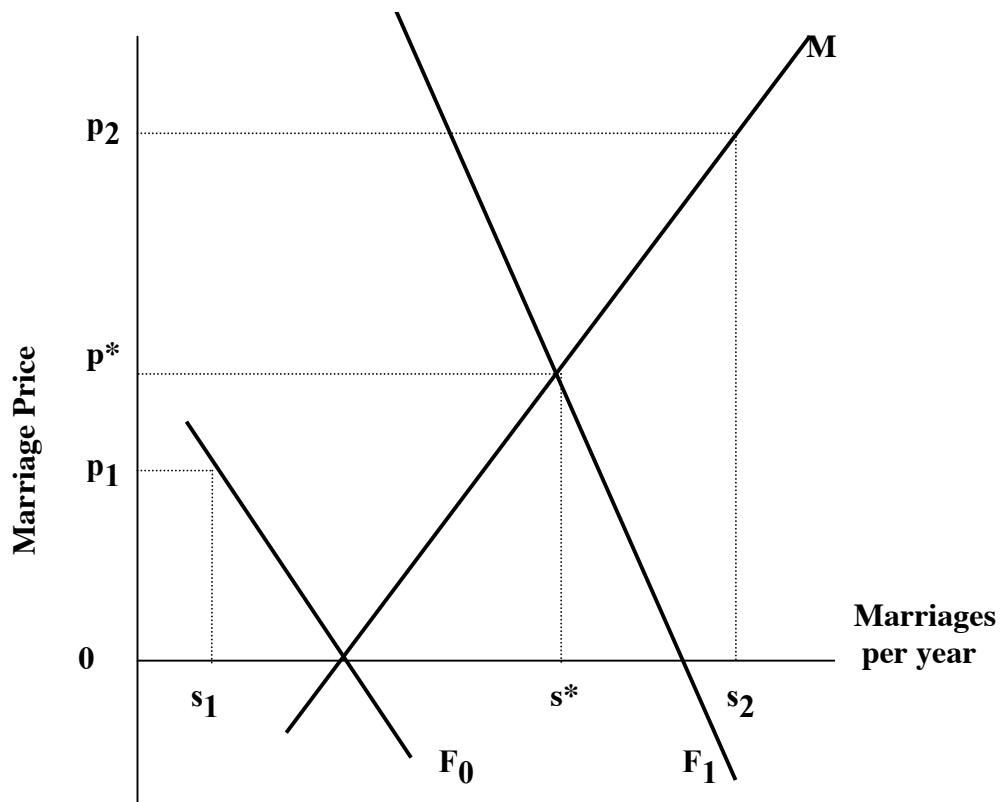
Female marriage offer curves are influenced by the viability of alternative to marriage available to women. By living alone, many gains from joint production and joint consumption are lost. If, however, some of these losses are compensated for by society -- such as through the provision of daycare services -- alternatives to marriage become more viable. Joint production, joint consumption, and sexual intimacy can also be provided by alternatives to marriage including other forms of collective living arrangements among unmarried adults. As the price and access to these alternatives vary, the female marriage offer curves will shift. Finally, since childrearing responsibilities limit many women's ability to function independently, changes in the preference for children also influences female marriage offer curves.<sup>3</sup>

Let us begin by assuming that in the absence of patriarchal policies,  $F_0$  and  $M$  in Figure 1 reflect the initial female and male marriage offer curves respectively. At a very high marriage price,  $p_2$ , the quantity of men willing to marry equals  $s_2$ , while at  $p_1$ , the quantity of women willing to marry equals  $s_1$ . The male marriage offer curve is positively related to the marriage price. As the marriage price declines *ceteris paribus*, a smaller quantity of men are willing to marry. The female marriage offer curve is inversely related to the marriage price. As the unequal services provided by women declines, the quantity of women willing to marry rises.

At negative prices, the quantity of females willing to marry is greater than the quantity of males willing to marry so that the marriage price rises. At positive prices, the quantity of females willing to marry is less than the quantity of males willing to marry so that the marriage price declines. Let us assume that the marriage market is efficient so that its price adjusts until

equilibrium is established.<sup>4</sup> These initial offer curves are drawn so that the marriage price equals zero; no excess services would be paid to either spouse.

**Figure 1: The Marriage Market**



Now let us introduce patriarchal policies that limit women's alternatives to heterosexual marriages and/or lower their earnings potential. Since at each marriage price more women would be willing to marry, these policies would shift the female offer curve to  $F_1$ . Now when the marriage price equals zero, the quantity of women willing to marry is greater than the quantity of

men willing to marry. In this case, the marriage price rises until a new equilibrium price is attained at  $p^*$ , reflecting excessive services provided to husbands in the typical marriage.

This outcome reflects the price paid by women in the typical marriage. The actual marriage price will deviate around this market-determined price according to the bargaining power of individual women.<sup>5</sup> This mirrors the pattern in labor markets where the wage paid to individual workers deviates around the market-determined wage according to their bargaining power.

In capitalist societies, market forces could generate this outcome. Men do not formally have to control the decisionmaking of women. As Folbre (1982: 324) points out, "Lacking access to some independent means of livelihood, [women] are likely to continue to cooperate within a patriarchal family despite its inequalities." Unlike output markets, however, there are no potential self-regulating mechanisms that could eliminate inequitable marriage outcomes. No new male "firms" will automatically enter the market. As contestable market theory suggests, the "monopoly" power of men can be eroded by the development of alternative living arrangements. However, there is no reason to believe that these alternatives would be close enough substitutes to cause the marriage price to reach zero, especially when societal institutions enforce patriarchal policies.

The framework developed here can help explain the differential degree of inequities experienced by different groups of women and how the level of inequities changes over time. It also indicates that equitable relationships may be unattainable simply through changes in market parameters since institutions, culture, and male power can perpetuate patriarchal policies. Marcia Guttentag and Paul Secord (1983: 26) contend that "men use their superior power [over political, economic, and legal structures] to limit women's marital and familial options."<sup>6</sup>

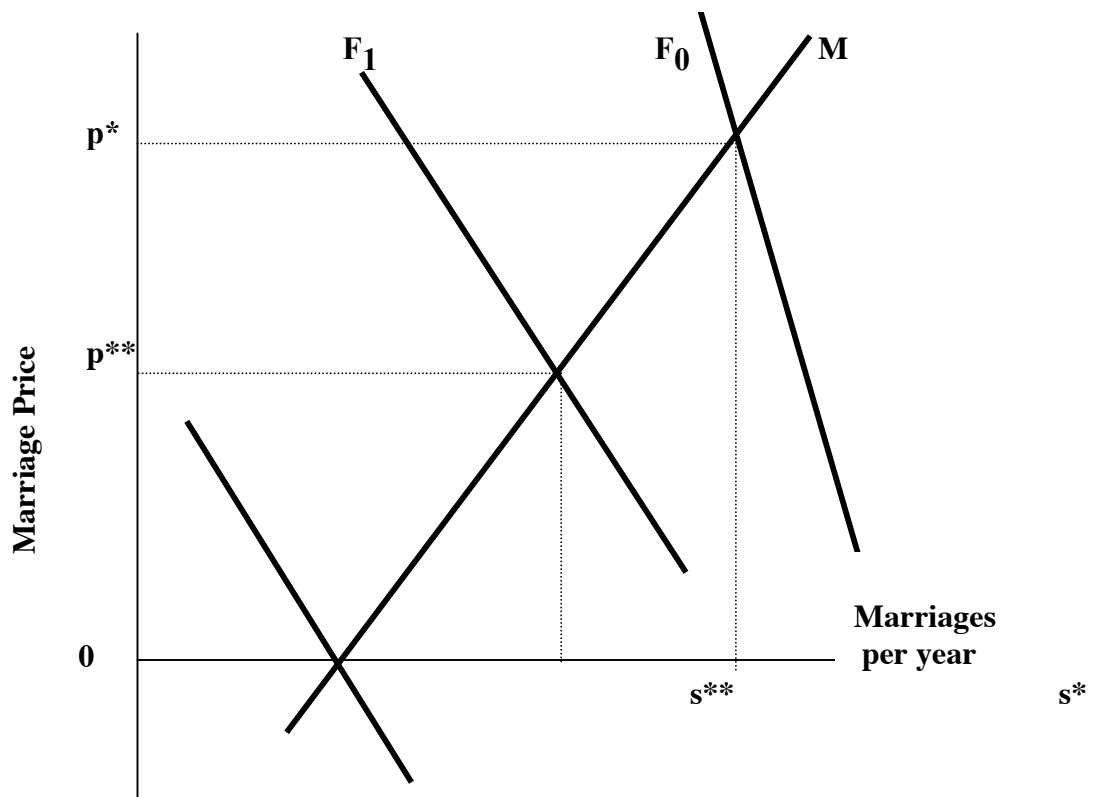
Evidence of the critical role of patriarchal policies is provided by Teresa Amott's and Julie Matthaei's (1991) discussion of the experience of Chinese women in California. The U.S. Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 created a severe shortage of Chinese women in the United States; 13 men for every woman. Becker-type models would predict that nineteenth century Chinese women living in the United States would be in a highly favorable situation. However, few of these women benefited from their scarcity. Almost all of these women were forced into prostitution and the payments they received were controlled by Chinese men. It was the patriarchal policies enforced by Chinese cultural institutions, not supply and demand factors, which primarily determined the marriage price.

Similarly, west of the Mississippi River there was generally a shortage of women during the nineteenth century. In a few cases, this enabled white women to escape some of the limitations of patriarchy. For example, some western states were among the first to allow women to vote. However, the shortage of women did not necessarily lower the marriage price. Instead, cultural institutions often enabled men to import women. Dorothy Smith (1987: 29) notes that in Canada, as competition lowered the price farmers received for their output, it became necessary to lower labor costs:

"Women's labor is substituted for hired labor in working the land and in the production of subsistence for the family ... Increased inputs of her labor compensate for the lack of money at every possible point in the enterprise. Her time and energy, indeed her life, are treated as inexhaustible ... Women were virtually imported into Canada in this period to serve these functions."

When marriage was a social and/or economic necessity, the female marriage-offer curve  $F_0$  in Figure 2 was price inelastic. With male marriage offer curve  $M$ , the equilibrium price  $p^*$  reflected a high level of excess services provided to husbands and a high marriage rate,  $s^*$ . In recent years, however, patriarchal polices have lessened, reducing these constraints on female behavior. Ellen Boris and Peter Bardaglio (1987: 132) write, “If at first the courts reinforced the status quo ... they gradually began to promote the rights of individual family members at the expense of the patriarchal father.” Changes in divorce laws, abortion laws, maternity leave policies, and welfare regulations have tended to provide women with more substitutes to the traditional family so that at a given marriage price, some women are no longer willing to marry. This shifts the female offer curve to the left, eventually lowering both the marriage price and the number of marriages.

**Figure 2: The Marriage Market**





## F<sub>2</sub>

The marriage price and marriage rate also depend on the responsiveness of men to the changing environment they face. John Kenneth Galbraith (1973) has argued that men seek marriage for the material benefits they receive, pointing out that patriarchal social norms enabled men to obtain domestic services at much more favorable prices through marriage than if purchased in the marketplace. However, as the excess marriage services obtained by men declined, there would be a movement downward along their marriage offer curve. Supporting this notion, McCrate (1987: 83) notes, “Men may be abandoning marriage rather than adjusting to women’s new demands.” Eventually, equilibrium is reestablished at a marriage price,  $p^{**}$ .

A number of U.S. government policies have further extended female choice in recent years. City governments have begun passing legislation to extend fringe benefits including medical insurance and parental leave to significant others. The federal government’s Earned Income Tax Credit now provides substantial income transfers to low-income working women. Women with two dependent children can receive up to \$4000 annually to supplement their wages, reducing the necessity of marriage. In theory, these changes could eventually shift the female marriage offer curve to  $F_2$  so that truly equitable marriages would become the norm.

### **PERSISTENCE OF THE MARRIAGE PRICE**

Unfortunately, the theoretical ideal has not been realized; the marriage price remains substantial. Many researchers (Hunt and Hunt 1987; Huber and Spitze 1975; Oren 1973) continue to find that inequities are greatest with respect to household activities that have

historically been assigned to women (cooking, cleaning, childrearing, etc.) If these tasks reflected desired specialization, there should have been a shift in allocation as a result of the growing labor force attachment of married women. However, numerous recent studies (Seccombe 1986; Perry-Jenkins and Folk 1994; Marke et al. 1994) find that in households where both husbands and wives are fulltime year-round workers, over 70 percent of these household tasks are done by wives, and the number of hours husbands spend on them has been unchanged since the 1960s.<sup>7</sup>

Other researchers also argue that the direct power men exert over their wives is an important component of inequality within the family. Jan Stets (1995) found evidence among college daters that men compensated for lack of power in other areas by seeking greater control over the behavior of their girlfriends. This control is especially important in areas Folbre and Ferguson (1981) characterize as sex-affective production. Besides childrearing activities, these areas include the fulfillment of human needs for affection, nurturance, and sexual expression. Patriarchal power often enables men to dictate the forms of intimacy allowed or the beauty styles that are acceptable. This section will enumerate the reasons why equality in marriage remains the exception rather than the norm.

### 1. The Persistence of Patriarchal Social Norms

Social norms continue to constrain women. This was most visible after World War II. As a result of the war effort, female labor was needed in industry. Ruth Milkman (1976) found that articles and stories championed the value of day care and the benefits of paid work for women. Firms provided day care and a willingness to hire women in nontraditional occupations -- "Rosie the Riveter." With their patriarchs at war, women were also less constrained. With the ending

of the war and the return of men, opinion changed. Now it was found that absent mothers were responsible for juvenile delinquency and that certain jobs detracted from femininity. Firms eliminated day-care facilities and again refused to hire women for certain jobs. Men began to reinforce their desire for women to be full-time mothers and housewives. Not surprisingly, many women left the work force, resigning themselves to becoming “happy homemakers.”

While not as powerful, a similar movement arose in the 1970s. Led by Phyllis Schlafly (1978), this movement reaffirmed that the preferred way to raise well adjusted children was for mothers to be full-time homemakers. Her efforts were supported by 1977 survey data that indicated a majority of women believed “married women’s paid work was discretionary and should not come at the expense of men’s paid work.” (McCaffery 1997: 77).

Initially some feminists, like Michele Barrett (1980: 217) were hopeful that there would be a genuine change in male attitudes since the traditional patriarchal family “deprived men of significant access to their children.” Julie Matthaei (1980: 325) hoped that “marriage is being transformed from a complementary relationship, based on masculinity and femininity, to a symmetric one, based on a new kind of personhood.” This hopefulness was soon abandoned, however, when an intense backlash occurred.

The ambivalence society feels towards married women working when they have children is still significant. McCaffery (1997: 210) documents that in 1991, 88 percent of working mothers felt that “if I could afford it, I would rather be home with my children” while 82 percent of the American public believed it is best for “young children to be cared for by one or more parents or by extended family members.” During the 1990s, the Moral Majority continued to decry the decline of traditional family values while the Promise Keepers promoted the reestablishment of patriarchal families, led by caring and sensitive men.

The latest wrinkles on this theme have been recent studies that seek to explain variations in the earnings of men. Holding productivity factors constant, husbands with working wives earned on average 10 percent less than those whose wives were full-time homemakers. Husbands with working wives were somewhat less willing to relocate, to work overtime, or take on special projects. These studies reinforced traditional notions that career women sacrifice the interest of all members of their families -- husbands and children. Not surprisingly, this stigma continues to burden women in ways that limit their earnings and independence; in ways which enable men to maintain patriarchal relations within the family.

## 2. Policies To Increase Female Willingness to Marry

Many traditionalists believe that the marriage rate decline is due to changing female behavior. If women are the culprits, government should undertake social policies that increase female willingness to marry. One such policy, known as Bridefare, was enacted by the Wisconsin legislature in 1994. It allowed the welfare department to raise monthly benefit from \$440 to \$531 for recipients who marry. To the extent this policy increased the willingness of unwed mothers to marry, it increased the marriage price they offered. Fearing this harmful outcome, Wisconsin state representative Gwendolyn Moore stated:

“The Bridefare program ... may place battered women in more danger ... Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) has traditionally been one way that women could escape from abusive situations that were dangerous for them or their children. Let us not begin telling battered women that if they do not marry, they and their children will be thrust deeper into poverty.” (Cherry 1997: 42)

Dismissing the seriousness of the harm bad marriages can do to poor women, traditionalists blame welfare for the decline in marriage rates among poor women. As welfare became more generous, they maintain, women increasingly traded dependence on man for dependence on the government. The problem with this thesis is that the growth in welfare caseloads occurred during the 1980s when welfare became less generous. However, there is no question that as more women have been pushed off of welfare in the 1990s, many have been forced to seek male partners, raising the marriage price they must pay.

### 3. Changes in Male Preferences for Marriage

As has been noted, in response to the lowering of the excess services they obtain, the number of men willing to marry declines. However, some observers argue that there has been a more fundamental change in male marriage behavior -- fewer would now choose marriage even if the excess services provided to them remained the same. Emphasizing this point, Elaine McCrate (1990) noted that among African American men with stable employment, almost one-half of those 25 to 34 years old were unmarried; for those 16 to 24 years old, more than 80 percent were unmarried.

Barbara Ehrenreich (1983) traces the change in male marriage preferences to the 1950s. Historically, male self-image was derived from their ability to be the family breadwinner. Men were expected to marry young and focus on providing for their family. Patriarchy allowed men to be “king of their castle” but it required them to seek fulfillment through financial support provided, not personal activities. For many men, this social norm was a heavy burden. Trapped in joyless marriages, sacrificing their happiness for the family good, these men did not feel that these patriarchal rules served their interests.

Ehrenreich believes that this explains the meteoric rise in circulation of Playboy magazine. It now became more acceptable for middle-class men to seek gratification outside of marriage, to no longer suppress their desires. Rather than marrying their high school or college sweethearts, more men began to delay marriage until they had spent time being free of familial responsibilities. This new male attitude, she maintains, was one of the reasons that the Frank Sinatra, Las Vegas “Rat Pack” had such mass appeal. After all, these were men who rejected the “home life” and instead, sought hedonistic pleasures. Through them, middle-class men could live vicariously.

Ehrenreich believes that the 1960s counterculture movement accelerated this “flight from commitment.” Women were attracted because it allowed them to rebel against oppressive sexual mores. Men were attracted because it freed them from traditional male responsibilities: getting a steady job so that they could marry and support a family. Indeed, Ehrenreich believes that female rejection of patriarchal sexual mores, however justifiable, reinforced male devaluation of marriage. These changing male values help explain why the marriage price has remained.

#### 4. The Growing Scarcity of Marriageable Men

William Wilson (1987) has emphasized that low marriage rates among poor women reflect the declining number of marriageable men available. This is particularly the case in the black community. Cherry (1999) noted that as a result of the fourfold increase in incarceration rates between 1970 and 1990, there were as much as 20 percent more black women than black men in the noninstitutionalized population in some regions. In addition, since the mid-1970s, the wages of low-skilled men have not kept pace with inflation so that the share of male workers who work full-time year-round but do not earn enough for a family of four to escape poverty rose from 9 to

13 percent between 1979 and 1994. (Mishel et al. 1999) Not surprisingly, Kathryn Edin found that poor black women were very conscious of the employment record of the men they were considering partnering with. As one of her respondents offered:

“If after I lived with him for a couple of years and I see that nothing’s gonna change in the relationship, then maybe I’ll marry him. But he’s gotta be somebody that’s got [enough] money to take care of me.” (Edin 2000: 29)

However, Edin’s study indicated that the reluctance to marry available black men went well beyond income calculations. Just as our model predicts, given the scarcity of available men, these women realized that they face a high marriage price. As another respondent stated, “There’s a shortage of men so that they think, ‘I can have more than one women. I’m gonna go around this one or that one, and I’m gonna have two or three of them’ ” (Edin 2000: 29) Many of these women feared that they would become their husband’s personal slave, cooking their meals, cleaning their house, and doing their laundry. They lamented, “A man gets married to have somebody to take care of them ‘cause their mommy can’t do it anymore.’ ” (Edin 2000: 31) They expected that their husbands would feel free to spend money on personal leisure activities rather than on family necessities. As one respondent recounted:

“I gave my child’s father the money to go buy my son’s Pampers. He went on some street with his cousin and they were down there partying, drinking, everything. He spent my son’s Pamper money on partying.” (Edin 2000: 29)

Unfortunately, the price that many of these vulnerable women paid for their relationship was domestic violence. From a wide variety of mid-1990s studies, Jody Raphael and Richard Tolman found that 15 to 20 percent of women on welfare experienced physical abuse during the most recent twelve months and about 60 percent at sometime in their past. Current abuse was about 20 percent higher among recipients who were currently involved in a relationship with a man. In a New Jersey study, Raphael and Tolman (1997: 14) found that "three times as many abused women as nonabused women (39.7% as compared with 12.9%) reported that their intimate partner actively prevents their participation in education and training."<sup>8</sup> Even if partners did not overtly sabotage their efforts, more abused recipients than nonabused recipients had symptoms of depression, which itself creates a barrier to sustaining employment or educational efforts.<sup>9</sup>

## 5. The Tax System

While paid work is not sufficient to end patriarchy in the home, for many women it is a precondition. As a working-class Mexican woman recounted:

“Of course it is important because if you can earn your own money, you yourself distribute it and you do not have to beg for it. You buy food or a dress for your daughter, the socks for your son. He used to tell me, ‘You must wait, because I do not have enough money this month.’ But he would never do it, neither today, nor tomorrow. Now I want to buy it, I buy it. If he gives me money, fine. If not I buy it myself. And one feels fine and useful with one’s own money. Also, in case of an emergency, an accident, if I have my own money I can fetch a taxi and take the child to the hospital. And it is money well spent because I earned it myself. Otherwise he would tell me, why didn’t you take a bus, why did you spend on a taxi.” (Roldan 1988: 229)



Traditionalists have consistently used the federal tax system to discourage middle-class women from working. Beginning in 1948, except in special situations, married couples have been required to file joint returns which continues to be a major impediment to the ability of married women to gain from paid employment. A numeral exercise adapted from McCaffery (1997) will demonstrate this point.

Let us assume a simple married tax schedule with rising marginal tax rates: The first \$15,000 of adjusted gross income is untaxed; the next \$25,000 is taxed at 15 percent; while any subsequent income is taxed at 30 percent. Now let us look at the situation of more than 80 percent of married couples where husbands earn more than their wives. Specifically, let us assume that the husband earns \$40,000 while his wife earns \$25,000. In this situation, it is reasonable to assume that the wife is considered the secondary wage earner in the household.

Let us look at the economic consequences of the wife's decision to work. If she chooses not to work, household income is \$40,000 and its tax liability is \$3750 -- 15 percent of the last \$25,000 the husband earns. If the wife chooses to work, her income is added on and is taxed at the higher 30 percent rate. Thus, \$7500 -- 30 percent of \$25,000 -- of her income would go to federal taxes. If we add on social security and state taxes, close to one-half of her income would be lost to taxes. If we then add on the childcare and business expenses incurred, the net additional income to the household could be quite small. Not surprisingly, this could easily discourage the wife from working, resulting in a strengthening of the patriarchal family.

The simplest way to solve the secondary wage earner problem is to eliminate joint returns, forcing all households to file individually. (This would also solve the marriage-penalty problem many households face.) Eliminating joint returns is unpopular with traditionalists for two reasons. First, by raising their net earnings, it would induce more married women to work.

Second, it takes away the current benefits accruing to households where one spouse has very little income. Indeed, the reason that the joint return was instituted in 1948 was to enable middle and upper income married households with one wage earner to reduce their tax liabilities by having the husband's income taxed at the joint rate that was lower than the single rate.

The secondary wage earner bias could also be reduced if the highest tax rate is lowered. Since this is the tax rate at which the wife's income is taxed, it would increase the net income she receives. With more net income, more married women would find it profitable to work. This was exactly the outcome in the 1980s when the highest tax rate was reduced from 70 to 28 percent. Married women, especially those whose husband's earnings placed them in the 70 percent tax bracket, had little to benefit financially from working before the rate reductions. Once rates were lowered, many entered the labor force.

A more direct method is to reduce the tax rate on secondary wage earners. This can be accomplished by eliminating a certain percentage of the wife's income from taxation. In our example above, suppose that only 60 percent of the wife's income is taxable. In that case, she would only add \$15,000 -- 60 percent of \$25,000 -- to the household's taxable income. Thus, the household's taxes would rise by only \$4500 -- 30 percent of the \$15,000; a tax savings of \$3000.

Traditionalists strongly oppose this method. They argue that it would undermine the notion that households with the same income should be taxed the same. In particular, households with adjusted gross income of \$65,000 but where wives have no income would not benefit from this proposal and would be paying \$3,000 more taxes than household where husbands earn \$40,000 and the wives earn \$25,000. When Congress legislated this method of reducing the marriage penalty in 1981, traditionalists were taken by surprise but were able to incorporate its repeal into the 1986 tax reform bill. When this method of eliminating the marriage penalty was being

discussed again in 1999, traditionalists responded immediately. They again voiced their opposition because of the inequity it would create between married households with and without working wives. (Interestingly, this method was part of presidential candidate George W. Bush's tax proposals.)

A final way to increase the benefits to married women who work is through child-care credits. Federal taxes could be reduced to offset child-care expenses. If the credit is 40 percent, the household's taxes would be reduced by \$2400 if \$6000 is spent on child care, again improving substantially the benefits from work.

Traditionalists have responded in two ways. First, they made sure that the child-care credit is available to households with taxable income, whether or not both spouses are working. In this case, the credit is not linked to work and, at least for some married women who already have their children in day care, this policy does not increase the benefits from work.

More importantly, traditionalists have fought attempts to increase the generosity of this policy. Instead, they have lobbied for tax relief through a child credit program. This program was a centerpiece of the Republican Contract with America, and was enacted in 1998. It allows households to subtract \$400 from their tax liabilities for each dependent child. Since this shifts income to households with children whether or not the secondary wage earner is working, it has no effect on their benefits from work. Married women still face higher marginal tax rates and still are discouraged from working, sustaining patriarchal relations within the family.

## 6. Special Needs of Women

As long as women have primary responsibility for childrearing, they will not attain labor market equality. Many jobs are structured by patriarchal notions of the family. Employees are

expected to sacrifice household responsibilities if they conflict with corporate needs. If employers require overtime, unexpected rescheduling of work hours, or other sudden changes, spouses are expected to adjust their schedules. As long as many jobs are structured in this way, job applicants who do not have spouses willing to accommodate to employers' prerogatives are at a disadvantage. Patriarchy posits that women be the accommodating spouse. Thus, even if employers are genuinely nondiscriminatory, without a change in job requirements, women will continue to be at a disadvantage.

The most visible example of the dilemma professional women face has been their experience in major law firms. As Jennifer Kingson (1988) noted, these firms pay high salaries but also require long hours. Moreover, to gain partnership, junior lawyers have to further extend themselves by networking in order to demonstrate an ability to draw customers to the firm. This networking can often require attendance at professional and social events on top of the long hours at the office. Not surprisingly, many women find it impossible to balance these demands with those of their families. In recognition, law firms began developing what became known as “mommy” tracks. Women would have the option of working shorter hours but would sacrifice upward mobility within the firm.

For these reasons, there should be a greater focus on public policies that limit the conflict between work and home faced by working mothers. There are two models that can accomplish this. The universal breadwinner model emphasizes providing services, particularly quality day care, which free women from childrearing responsibilities. The caregiver model emphasizes policies, such as flex-time and family leaves, that allow women to fulfill their childrearing activities without sacrificing their earnings potential. In the past decade, many companies have adopted one or more of these policies and it has enabled women to break through previous glass

ceilings. However, as long as these policies are not universally required, many women will be unable to compete on an equal basis with men, reinforcing the patriarchal family.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The neoclassical model developed by Becker assumes away the possibility that marriages can be inequitable. The unequal allocation of time for household activities is simply a matter of specialization and domestic violence or sexual coercion has nothing to do with the workings of the marriage market. In contrast, the model developed here assumes that the marriage market has biases similar to the labor market. In capitalism, workers and owners do not necessarily negotiate from an equal position. As long as there is substantial unemployment, workers must adapt to the desires of capitalists if they wish to avoid poverty. Similarly, men and women do not necessarily enter the marriage market from equal positions. Only if women have equality in the labor market, can they bargain effectively. As long as women cannot earn a decent living, many must adapt to male desires if they wish to avoid poverty.

This marriage model emphasizes how market forces, not inherent traits, determine behavior. When we find capitalists paying their workers starvation wages, we don't argue that those who become capitalists have inherently different values than those who remain workers. Instead, we focus on the market forces that compel capitalists to act that way. Similarly, men take advantage of the marriage market by extracting the available patriarchal price from their spouses. We should not consider men to be inherently different from women -- men are from Mars, women are from Venus. Instead, we should realize that they are simply responding to the market outcomes available to them. Change the marriage price and men will respond differently.

Movements toward equality would be accelerated if men rejected the benefits they can obtain from market forces. Dicken's Christmas Carol and Its a Wonderful Life promote the view that an individual's ethical values can overcome market forces. Historically, ethical values were embedded in religious dogma. Since most religions are strongly patriarchal, however, this vision of transformation does not seem realistic. As a result, we may be forced to focus on secular solutions to patriarchy that rely on changing market relationships. Women must have the same alternatives as men, which, at a minimum, require full gender equality in the labor market.

Finally, there is a downside to this secular solution to patriarchy. It risks dramatically devaluing children. They are increasingly viewed as burdens, diminishing the ability of men to partake in hedonistic activities and constraining the occupational mobility of women. Michael Males (1996: 1) captures this danger:

“Maybe America, for all its prating about family values, hates its children. What else can explain the cruel abandonment of so many kids to such wretched circumstances: bad schools, poor health care, deadly addictions, and crushing debts -- and utter indifference.”

Unless market systems find a way to socialize the cost of childrearing, harming children may be one unfortunate legacy of the quest for gender equity within capitalist societies.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Frances Woolley (1996: 115) criticizes Becker for the "offensive" nature of some of his assertions: (1) girls oriented toward market rather than household activities are deviant; (2) the average divorced person can be presumed to be more quarrelsome and in other ways less pleasant than the average person remaining married; and (3) more beautiful, charming, and talented women tend to marry wealthier and more successful men. For other feminists criticisms of Becker, see Diana Strassman (1993), Paula England (1993), Julie Nelson (1994) and Barbara Bergmann (1995).

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<sup>2</sup> For an additional measure of female economic dependency, see Annamette Sorensen and Sara McLanahan (1987).

<sup>3</sup> For evidence of changing preferences, see Goldscheider and Waite (1986).

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that the actual number of marriages could be different than the equilibrium quantity,  $s^*$ , due to search behavior and locational mismatches. Oppenheimer (1988) has explicitly used a search model to analyze changes in the timing of marriage.

<sup>5</sup> Recent survey of bargaining models are found in Janet Seiz (1992), Theodore Bergstrom (1996), and Shelly Lundberg and Robert Pollak (1996).

<sup>6</sup> For a critique of this view, see Scott South and Kim Lloyd (1995).

<sup>7</sup> George Stigler's (1946) found that households increased dramatically the share of expenditures going to domestic servants as family income increased; this was especially true for working-class households. This suggests that easing the wife's burden was a priority expenditure.

<sup>8</sup> In a Massachusetts study, Mary Ann Allard et al. (1997) found that 15.5 and 1.6 percent of nonabused and abused welfare mothers, respectively, reported that their present or former partner would not like it if they had a job or enrolled in a job-training program.

<sup>9</sup> Allard et al. (1997) found 40 and 27 percent of abused and nonabused recipients, respectively, suffered symptoms of mental depression. Raphael and Tolman (1997) reported a New Jersey study where 31 percent of all recipients but 54 percent of those currently in an abusive relationship indicated that they were currently depressed. See also Cherry (forthcoming).

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of childrearing costs, see Nancy Folbre (1994). For recommendations on how the government can improve accessibility to quality child care, see Bergmann and Suzanne Helburn (2001) and Isabell Sawhill and Adam Thomas (2000).