

**Unveiling the Dichotomy of Paid Labour and  
Work by Women**

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**Abstract**

The work is defined as the carrying out of tasks, which involves the exercise of mental and physical effort, and its object is to produce goods and services to fulfill human needs. A paid labor or an occupation is a work that is done in lieu of a regular salary or wage. The article reflects on the various theoretical perspectives on the paid labor and analyzes the status of women with regard to dichotomy of paid and paid work performed by women in society.

**Keywords**

Work, Paid Labour, Gender Role, Labour Market.

**Introduction**

‘Work as ‘occupation’ worked long hours and performed services that would command a substantial wage in the paid labor market’. A job is an activity performed out of necessity rather than one performed out of love. ‘Finding a job’ typically implies a process of seeking paid employment outside the home. These understandings presume that a society distinguishes between paid and unpaid labor and one in which activities performed in the home and for the family are outside the sphere of work.

According to *Acker (1990)*, jobs may be understood as activities performed for pay, as opposed to activities that do not provide wages, such as caring for one’s children or maintaining a household. She further says that, ‘jobs’ are one of the vehicles through which gender distinctions and inequalities enter into and help constitute the workplace. The concept of ‘a job’ is implicitly gendered.

Paid labor and employment are the terms used interchangeably. Work or employment is implied as labor participation in gainful

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activities. 'Work means taking part in any economically productive activity,' according to the Census. This gainful activity normally begets the production of goods and services for exchange. Thus, work may be viewed either as a productive activity for household use or for exchange. It means wage-earning.

*Marxian* value theory asserts the division between abstract and concrete labor, somewhere presumes the worth of public production is more important than private reproduction. To *Karl* Marx, 'Work as the production of goods and services holds the key to human happiness and fulfillment'. It's a necessary means for man to fulfill his fundamental needs, his individuality and his humanity. Thus, work is a completely fulfilling activity.

The work by women to support their families does not always or necessarily bring in money in return. The work done by women at home has, is often termed by economists as 'use value' rather than 'exchange value'. Women's household labor is seen as non-productive labor. Market labor is said to be the only productive labor as it has exchange value. *Clarkberg and Moen (2001)* have developed a typology of couples based on their work pattern i.e. *traditional*, where wife is not in paid work and only the husband is the breadwinner; *neo-traditional*, where wife is in part-time paid work and the husband is the breadwinner; *dual-earner*, where wives and husbands are working full-time.

### **Theories on Unpaid Labour**

#### ***Functional Theory***

Some economists advocated this theory like the '*Human Capital Theory*.' As *Talcott Parsons* argued, the 'expressive role of childcare is best and naturally suited for women', therefore women choose for part-time jobs or breaks in their career to accommodate work with family life. Due to this they suffer disadvantages in the labor market and are paid less. Their lack of training, qualification and job experience because of demands of childcare make them worthless to the employer. Therefore, men are benefitted from the labor market more than women, whose main function is child-rearing.

### *Structural Theory*

Structuralism theory emphasizes the socially significant structures particularly the job market and employment structure determine gainful opportunities for women at large, as well as their income and work participation.

*Barron and Norris (1976)*, the British sociologists who provided a reasoned explanation for gender inequality based on the *dual labour market theory*. According to them two labour markets consist of two separate domains - the primary market and the secondary market. The former market i.e. primary is held by men and characterized by high pay, good working conditions, job security, higher skill and experience for the workers and better career advancement prospects. On the other hand secondary labour market comprises of jobs for women that are characterized by low-paying jobs, poor job security, inferior working conditions, less prospects of promotion. There are also no unions which weakens their position. In this, market, workers can be easily replaced, and no additional skills are required from them. Therefore, employers consider women as best suited for these types of jobs. Once women enter into this labor market they remain entrapped through the rest of their working lives.

A study by *Burchell and Rubery (1994)* based on works in Northampton in the Mid-1980s, postulates that the labor market is not dual in nature but rather fragmented into five different segments or clusters. These are:

1. The *primary labor market* that comprised of a most privileged and secure job
2. *Stickers* had a good degree of job satisfaction and didn't prefer job change for better prospects and promotions.
3. *Female descendents*, who constituted 96 percent of women workers and such females had lost their place in the job market due to giving up permanent jobs to raise children.
4. The *young and mobile* workers.
5. *Labor market descendents* who had dropped out of the labor market due to long-term unemployment.

*Abbott, Wallace and Tyler (2005)* believe that structural constraints delimit and shape the choices of women. According to the scholars, women prefer to blend their responsibility of paid employment with unremunerated work. Their career choices and their work orientations both are a result of socially conditioned expectations of women's roles and responsibilities. There are other factors too like inequalities of class, race and ethnic power relations that affect their preferences and choices.

#### ***Preference Theory***

The preference theory was given by *Hakim (2004)* and she says that earlier women did not have access to equal economic opportunities. But recently five major transformations have changed the situation for women to get better work opportunities. These changes are the equal opportunities revolution (got equal rights to achieve all positions in the labor market); contraceptive revolution (made it possible for them to control fertility); expansion of jobs for secondary earners (increase in irregular jobs and flexi-hour working); expansion of white-collar occupations (attractive job reservoir); increased personal preferences about job (rather than financial necessity as its determining factor). She further says that these changes have brought changes in the lifestyles of women in the USA and UK and resulting in the emergence of three groups of women:

- a. *Home-centered women* represent 20 percent of women and are well-qualified but reluctant to work. They seek higher education as it opens prospects to find better life partners. They are concerned about better childcare for their children.
- b. *Adaptive women* combine family life and paid work without prioritizing one or the other. Equilibrium between the two depends on the age of their children. Therefore, they are attracted to flexi-hour working and casual employment. According to *Hakim*, this group is with the largest capacity of approximately two-thirds of women. They are also concerned about better childcare.
- c. *Work-oriented women* focus more on their professional advancement and strive to balance their family life according

to their work life. They constitute a small group of females and because of an insignificant percent of such women, men have a greater clout in the space.

### ***Marxian Theory***

Marxist feminist approaches connect gender inequality in the labor market to the capitalism. *Walby (1986)* though following Marxian footprints, has tried to link female disadvantages in employment to patriarchy. After studying engineering, clerical and textile work in Britain, she claims that these sectors have used dual policies: the exclusion of women altogether, or the confinement of women to the lower grades of work. She further says that unions are patriarchal institutions and men dominate them, and act in males' interests, even though majority of the membership of these unions are of women. She also believes that work also shapes their household relationships. As a resultant consequence of such disadvantages that women face in the labor market, they willingly accept the responsibility of managing household chores as their primary role.

### ***Radical Theory***

Radical theorists propose that gender discrimination and the use of sexual harassment by men against women create multitudinous disadvantages for women in terms of employment. *Stanko (1988)* highlights, 'men deploy various forms of sexual harassment to augment their power within organizations'. As it is seen from number of studies in Britain, she says that more than 50% of the women interviewed in these studies had experienced some form of sexual harassment at workplaces. This occurrence is found in those work areas that were traditionally male employment and women seek to enter these. Women working in traditional occupations are sexualized and objectified, like secretaries, waitresses, barmaids, etc. become the recipients of unwanted attention from males.

While *Pringle (1992)* argues that existing patriarchal demands largely influence the job role of female secretaries. The work of secretaries is not seriously taken nor valued due to those perceptions. Their work looked generally in terms of ideas about femininity. The

dominant images of secretaries are their sitting and gossiping and, filing their nails, doing knitting and extending loyalty, trustworthiness and devotion to their bosses. Therefore, it becomes hard for them to be called as skilled workers.

### ***Third Wave of Feminism***

A new third wave of feminism includes *Redfern and Aune (2010)*. Aune is an academic while Redfern is the founder of a website (F. Word, [www.thefword.org.uk](http://www.thefword.org.uk)). They see this website as an e.g. of third wave of feminism which has developed rapidly since the beginning of the new millennium. They stress that we are living in a post-patriarchal era and feminism is still badly needed. As culture has become individualistic and collective principles of feminism are difficult to retain. They believe that a lot of ground needs to be covered before gender equality can become a surreal reality. In 1971, there was a demand for women's liberation movement to deal with various issues of women. To them, the demands of the 1970s still needed to be achieved. They suggest seven areas need to be dealt with by feminists to improve women's condition, which are: liberated bodied; sexual freedom and choice; an end to violence against women; equality at work and home; altered politics and religion; popular culture bare from sexism; and feminism reclaimed.

### ***Post-Feminism Theory***

Postmodernists postulate that one fit-for-all solution to emancipate women is not plausible as women are highly a diverse group. Oppression, generalized by views on patriarchy, cannot be the same for all women. *Walter (1998)* offers the need for a new feminism, which provides a political solution instead of a personal one to the perennial problem of gender inequality.

Walter believes that women's class share some common problems like lack of equal opportunity and that feminism needs to unite them all and offer solutions. To her, there are five main areas that are necessary to be tackled are inequality in the workplace, lack of high-quality affordable childcare, higher rate of poverty among females as compared to males, higher rate of sexual and domestic violence among females and their continued domestic work and childcare responsibility.

### Conclusion

Therefore, to functionalists men are benefitted in the labor market more than women, whose main function is child-rearing while, the structuralists' view is that men are over-represented in advantaged groups, and women are over-represented in disadvantaged groups. To preference theorists gender inequality is outcome of self-determined preference rather than rationalized choices to earn greater family wealth. Marxist feminist approaches connect gender inequality in the labor market to the capitalism. The third wave of feminists suggested that a lot of ground needs to be covered before gender equality can become a surreal reality. Most feminists see women's class share some common problems like lack of equal opportunity and that post-feminism needs to unite them all and offer solutions. Thus, it can be concluded that women have a different experience than men with regard to paid labor.

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