

Who Cares? Networks of Knowledge and Solidarity

Sally Haslanger

1. Introduction

In the first lecture, I argued that societies are complex dynamic systems and that in order to promote social change we must attend to material meso-level systems, e.g., health care systems, education systems, criminal justice systems, and the like, and their patriarchal, White supremacist, and capitalist dynamics.¹ This complex systems approach – together with attention to the social formation of subjects within practices – helps us capture the phenomenon of intersectional oppression and is suited to the strategic thinking needed for social transformation.

In the second lecture, I argued that co-design is a valuable strategy for social change that is compatible with the values of critical theory. Given the path-dependence of value and the wealth of situated knowledge among the oppressed, a principled and empowering approach to transformative social change involves scaffolding the development of design skills in communities so they can collectively analyze the challenges they face and design solutions to them. This allows the movement to benefit from local knowledge (Ostrom 1990; Agarwal 1992), from participants' sensitivity to existing social meanings and practices (Escobar 1998), and from counter-publics and small scale “experiments in living” (Anderson 1991). Co-designing new practices is empowering to those directly affected and has greater democratic legitimacy (Hoffecker 2017). Exogenous interventions are less sensitive to the local social dynamics and the resources available in context and, as a result, are less likely to be effective over the long term.

This third lecture aims to bring together these two discussions. If societies are complex dynamic systems, how can local interventions scale to promote social transformation? I will discuss this question in relation to the problem of systemic gender subordination: why is it that women across time and cultures have been socially subordinated, even in the face of significant and sustained efforts to remedy this? Answering this question will require attention to the different ways that women are subordinated and the intersecting (capitalist, White supremacist, patriarchal, eugenic) dynamics at work; it will also require both support for local organizing in small communities and expansive networking in order to produce systemic justice.

Although I've raised the issue of social reproduction in previous lectures, today I'm going to dig deeper in order to better understand the systematic oppression of women, though the patterns we will discuss extend to other oppressed groups.² Just to recap, socialist feminists use the term ‘social

¹ Although in what follows I repeatedly mention just these three kinds of dynamics, there are many others, including positive dynamics, e.g., ethnic, religious, nationalist, eugenic, democratic, cooperative (mutual aid, solidarity).

² The term ‘social reproduction’ is used in several ways. In the most general sense, it refers to the processes by which societies, or social formations, reproduce themselves over time (e.g., Wright 2010, 26). In a narrower sense used by socialist feminists, it refers to the process by which we are formed as social agents and the “non-productive” labor that involves, usually by women, and often in the “domestic” sphere. I will follow the narrower socialist feminist usage.

reproduction’ to critique a reading of Marx that focuses on his conception of the economy. Marxians provide an account of (commodity) *production* that highlights the exploitation of the worker. But who *reproduces* the worker and prepares him for his role in capitalist production? Who meets the worker’s sexual, emotional, nutritional, (etc.) needs to prepare him for another day at work? Isn’t she exploited too?

Social systems not only manage sexual reproduction, but also the broad range of the social and cultural work required for humans to become part of society and to take up a place in the economic system. This is done as unwaged work in the family (usually by family members, often friends, and in some contexts, slaves) and in waged domestic work, service work, and education. And these tasks of social reproduction are usually assigned to women.³ Broadly, they include: “the activities and attitudes, behaviors and emotions, responsibilities and relationships directly involved in the maintenance of life on a daily basis, and intergenerationally” (Laslett & Brenner 1989, 381, italics mine).⁴ This is the primary domain in which social subjects are formed.

In short, modern social processes not only reproduce class oppression, and not only through wage labor contracts, but also through household activities and social structures that produce and maintain life and create and distribute forms of non-economic value. Social reproduction theory, broadly speaking, considers how these different processes interact to result in a variety of persistent forms of injustice, including sex, race, and other forms of oppression (Federici 2019; Bhattacharya 2017).

Recent feminist work, e.g., in *The Care Manifesto* (2020), has argued that we live in a time of carelessness in every domain – a broad crisis in care that extends from interpersonal relations to the global economy, and so “we are in urgent need of a politics that puts care front and center,” for care is “necessary across every distinct scale of life.” (Care Collective 2020). I agree. For the purposes of this lecture, however, I will focus on social reproduction that takes the form of unwaged caregiving in the private sphere, traditionally in families.

I choose this focus because this is a domain where gender oppression is rampant and the gender norms that govern in the family spread far and wide across society. It is also a domain that may seem to require a distinctive approach when considering strategies for social change. For example,

- Women are invested in family carework for many reasons, but among them is affection for those they care for and the intimate relationships that such carework sustains.
- Although the structure of family relations is incentivized by law and politics, the organization of family life is assumed to be a matter for adults in the family to decide, and legal approaches to mandating justice in the family (aside from formally protecting certain basic rights) are not

³ To be clear: I do not deny that some of the work of sexual reproduction, including childbirth and nursing, is done by trans men; and of course cis-men and trans-men also do other social reproductive work. But considering global gender dynamics in our current social formation, it is undeniable that both cis and trans women are assigned the bulk of this work.

⁴ Also: “the array of activities and relationships involved in maintaining people both on a daily basis and intergenerationally.....such as purchasing household goods, preparing and serving food, laundering and repairing clothing, maintaining furnishings and appliances, socializing children, providing care and emotional support for adults, and maintaining kin and community ties.”(Glenn 1992, 1)

promising, e.g., it would be an illegitimate intrusion for law to dictate the division of labor in a family.⁵

- Although cultures vary in whether or how the nuclear family counts as a private space to be protected, not just from law, but from the gaze of others, efforts to organize family caregivers can seem presumptuous or paternalistic.⁶ If there is one thing you learn as a parent, it is not to (directly) criticize another's parenting. Beauvoir frames this as a matter of dispersal of women across families and their allegiance to their particular family formation:

[Women] live dispersed among the males, attached through residence, housework, economic condition, and social standing to certain men – fathers or husbands – more firmly than they are to other women. If they belong to the bourgeoisie, they feel solidarity with men of that class, not with proletarian women; if they are white, their allegiance is to white men, not to Negro women. The proletariat can propose to massacre the ruling class,...; but woman cannot even dream of exterminating the males. The bond that unites her to her oppressors is not comparable to any other. (Beauvoir 1997/1949, xxxi)

As feminists have long urged, the personal is political, and we cannot even begin to meet the demands of social justice without confronting the burdens placed on women in families.⁷ There has been tremendous progress in improving women's condition in some cultural contexts. But inequity remains. And in other cultures, women still suffer severe inequity. We should not assume that if we are better off than our mothers, the work is done.

I will argue that a significant factor in women's ongoing oppression is the division of labor that situates women as responsible for carework in the family. This division of labor depends on a social categorization system and set of norms that, although centered in the family, extends well beyond it and affects women's lives in every domain. Unfortunately, this gendered division of labor produces a relatively stable equilibrium that is difficult to change. Those who have primary responsibility for dependents have less power in relationships than those who don't, and this makes bargaining within and exit from the relationship difficult. Although this is a general feature of many relationships that are constructed along axes of power, there are distinctive problems that arise for caregiving, because it is so deeply personal and relational. I will argue further that attention to the dynamics of social reproduction points to some strategies to change the dynamics of carework to give women more

⁵ In spite of being illegitimate, it happens, e.g., welfare benefits are sometimes conditional on marriage, and of course what counts as a legal family and who are the legal parents, is dictated by the state.

⁶ This is a more complicated issue than I suggest here, for race/ethnicity and class are factors in how isolated women are in immediate nuclear families. I am not suggesting that women mainly "work at home" and so don't have broader community contact, which of course has been a very specific (White) racial and (Upper/Middle) class formation in a particular historical time and place.

⁷ I am a pluralist about gender and think there are multiple ways to understand what gender is that are useful for different contexts. One way is to emphasize *gender identity*. I believe that a sincere avowal of one's gender is sufficient to have that gender, and I fully endorse trans rights. I also believe that within patriarchal systems, there is a *process of gendering* that does not take one's self-identity to be sufficient (Haslanger 2000). And it is useful to understand how that system works, even if we object to it, and even if (thankfully) fails to work in all cases. Gendering is a dynamic within virtually all societies we know of. It interacts with other dynamics but is not reducible to them. (See Lecture 1 for details.)

power. It will become clear, however, that I'm rather skeptical about policy changes, at least until we have done more to change social norms. I'll then sketch very briefly a model for social change through chapter-based social movements that takes aim at social norms and will mention a few examples that I believe can extend our imaginations and perhaps offer hope.

2. Systems and Transformative Change⁸

In my first lecture I argued that in order to understand a social system, we must see it not just as a fixed structure – like a road map – but as having dynamical properties. To start, imagine social space topographically, e.g., as a bowl, a mountain top, and a hillside (Figure 1).

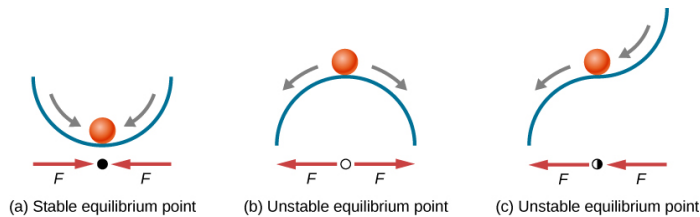


Figure 1

If we are in a bowl, change can happen (the bowl can rock and the ball will shift away from the bottom), but we will revert to the starting point. This is sometimes called a *negative* feedback loop. In such cases change is not *transformative*. Change is compatible with stability. Unstable equilibria produce *positive* feedback loops, so the system evolves away from the starting point.⁹ Such change does not return the system to the former equilibrium; this is transformative change. If we are on the mountain top, change is likely – a small push will be transformative – but could go either way. What we are hoping for in promoting social justice is to create a hillside so that going in the right direction is more likely than going back up the hill.¹⁰ In such cases, the equilibrium can be destabilized, and social transformation can be achieved, without all-out revolution.

To put the point differently, an equilibrium explanation tends to focus on stability and the dynamics that maintain a phenomenon, but complex dynamic system theory looks at systems over a broader timescale and the forces that produce transformation. In a complex dynamic system there will be some dynamics that are stabilizing and others that are pushing against the equilibrium and causing perturbations. Rather than seeing an equilibrium as fixed, recognizing that the equilibrium is susceptible to non-linear interacting dynamics, opens up spaces of possibility. If perturbations build, even a small change can create a cascading effect that results in transformative change.¹¹ Functional

⁸ Thanks especially to Sahar Heydari and Sonia Pavel for feedback on this section.

⁹ Note that the terms ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ don’t refer to good and bad outcomes, but whether the feedback loop produces stability or evolution. The atmospheric water cycle (evaporation/rain) is a negative feedback loop; climate change is a positive feedback loop. Socially, the conditions under which the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer is a positive feedback loop (in the wrong direction!).

¹⁰ Obviously, I’m not giving a theory here about what the right direction is!

¹¹ Thanks to Sahar Heydari Fard for helping me appreciate the power of complexity theory for thinking through issues concerning the dynamics of oppression. See esp. Heydari Fard (2021; 2024b).

societies need some stability but also the capacity for transformation in response to both exogenous forces and internal dysfunctions.

If, as I have argued¹², structures are networks of practices, and practices establish relations between individuals, then because there is a *looping* between individuals and structures, individuals' agency need not only reproduce the structure; practices can grow and evolve depending on how they are enacted. Patterns of action – patterns established in practices - have dynamical effects. Changing a practice has the potential to change the structure.¹³ And changes to the structure can destabilize an inequitable equilibrium.

So how might we think of dynamics in a complex social system? One feature of a complex system is “non-linearity” (Mitchell 2009, 22ff). A linear system is one in which the whole is equal to the sum of the parts. For example, if I'm making salad dressing and add one cup of vinegar to two cups of olive oil, I get three cups of dressing. If I start with two cups of baking soda and add a cup of vinegar, the result is not three cups of baking-soda-and-vinegar, but an expanding amount of baking soda, vinegar, and carbon dioxide fizz. The latter result is non-linear.

Let's consider a fictional example provided by Mitchell (2009).

Suppose you have a population of breeding rabbits [on an otherwise unpopulated island] in which every year all the rabbits pair up to mate, and each pair of rabbit parents has exactly four offspring and then dies. (23)

This is a linear system.

If you make a plot with the current year's population size on the horizontal axis and the next-year's population size on the vertical axis, you get a straight line. This is where the term linear system comes from. (24)

Of course, this is an oversimplification. There are many additional factors that affect the population size. Mitchell continues:

In order to use the logistic model to calculate the size of the next generation's population, you need to input to the logistic model the current generation's population size, the birth rate, the death rate (the probability of an individual will die due to overcrowding), and the maximum carrying capacity (the strict upper limit of the population that the habitat will support). (25)

Once you do this, the system ceases to be linear.¹⁴ The whole is not equal to the sum of its parts, or in other words, in a more realistic version of the case, we cannot just track the rabbits and their breeding behavior to calculate the population. The system is highly sensitive to the initial (or background) conditions. If we consider two islands with the same breeding pattern (each pair has four offspring and then dies), the resulting populations on the two islands will not necessarily be the

¹² See Lecture 1.

¹³ This is a point Butler (1993) makes in discussing citationality in performance.

¹⁴ Actually the actual breeding behavior of rabbits is not linear, so the example is unrealistic just in order to show what a linear system *would be*.

same over several iterations, depending on the carrying capacity of the land and other factors that may affect the survival of the offspring.

For example, consider an island with a carrying capacity of 40 rabbits. When the population reaches 40, food becomes scarce, and the rabbits start to die due to starvation. But once the population is reduced, the food source can regrow, supporting more rabbits again. This might produce a stable oscillation pattern. But it is important to note that depending on the factors in play and the degree of variation, the system may become chaotic. That is to say that the behavior of the system comes to look random and unpredictable.¹⁵

Why did I just go through all this? Because it is important to see that the dynamics of a system matter in understanding how a system evolves. In our example, even small variation in the carrying capacity of the land (which itself may vary depending on the weather, which is also non-linear), can have a huge and unpredictable effect on the population of rabbits. And if we add to the carrying capacity further dynamics such as susceptibility to disease, adaptation, introduction of other species, and more, the challenge multiplies.

Human social systems clearly exhibit such complexity. To say that capitalism, White supremacy, and patriarchy are *dynamics* is to say that they, in different ways, are useful for explaining how the system evolves. Such social dynamics are sometimes referred to as “logics” (Pavel 2025). It may help to consider a simplified version of a social “logic.”

Simple Capitalist Logic: The economy is (should be?) organized by a market that maximizes profit for the private owners of the means of production.¹⁶

This “logic” captures a pattern, especially concerning the rise and fall of employment, wages, costs of commodities, etc. that emerges from lower-level practices at the meso level. Collective participation in practices are the drivers of the patterns; as we engage in practices that constrain and enable certain kinds of behavior, patterns emerge. This is why analysis of (local, material) practices and their intersecting dynamics is so important to understand how oppression occurs. The economy is not just shaped by capitalist practices (and their norms) but by practices of all kinds.

It is important to note that the practices themselves may not encode anything as explicit as this simple capitalist logic. The point of describing a logic is not to describe what is going on “in the minds” of capitalists or workers, though some may be thinking this way. Instead, the “logic” aims to capture and explain a pattern that emerges from the behavior of individuals as they go about their lives, a pattern that may not be accessible to the agents themselves, but nonetheless reveals the collective

¹⁵ Mitchell warns us, however, not to conclude that the system *is* random or unpredictable: “The term [‘chaotic’] seems apt: the colloquial sense of the word “chaos” implies randomness and unpredictability, qualities we have seen in the chaotic version of logistic map. However, unlike colloquial chaos, there turns out to be substantial order in mathematical chaos in the form of so-called universal features that are common to a wide range of chaotic systems” (Mitchell 2009, 34). Apparent randomness at one level allows for predictability at another level.

¹⁶ I include both ‘is’ and the alternative ‘should be’ because, as I see it, the emergent pattern may be a pattern in the economic activity or it might be an emergent norm from the norms embedded in the practices, or both. I haven’t sorted this out fully, so I indicate the option for further reflection.

impact.¹⁷ Considering the economy from a “design stance,” it is *as if*, it was designed to conform to the logic (Dennett 1998, 16-22); often such a stance is helpful in identifying the stabilizing and cyclical regularities of the system.

In turn, a simplified version of a “patriarchal logic” might be:

Simple Patriarchal Logic: Power is (should be) held by (Real) men and others should defer to their interests.¹⁸

When the capitalist logic and the patriarchal logic are both factors at play in the system, then the owners of the means of production, according to the patriarchal logic, will (mostly) be “Real men,” and they may accumulate economic power in addition to political and social power that they are also granted by the patriarchal logic. Add to this a White supremacist logic:

Simple White Supremacist Logic: Power is (should be) held by (Real?) White people and others should defer to their interests.

The addition of the White supremacist logic has the result that not only Real Men, but White Real Men will hold the greatest power; and depending on how the patriarchal logic and the White supremacist logic are realized and weighted in particular configurations of practices, Real White Women or Real Non-White Men may be secondary. Modeling of the interaction of the practices instantiating these logics allows for different degrees of adherence to the practices, and this may help us explain the various social patterns.¹⁹ So, just as the carrying capacity of the land for the rabbits can vary and affect the population, so the extent to which the initial conditions for a system are already shaped by practices that conform to these social logics, and the extent to which they are preserved in the next iteration, can affect how the social system evolves.

However, let me be clear. Not all dynamics are unjust or pernicious. There are positive and even liberating dynamics. I’ve already mentioned democracy and solidarity as general forms of positive dynamics (see fn.1). Crucial for the project of social justice is distinguishing between dynamics that are part of or move us to a less oppressive system and those that don’t.²⁰ Taylor and Hunt-Hendrix (2024), for example, contrast “transformative solidarity” (xix), and “counter-solidarity” (xix) or “reactive solidarity.” (We might also want to include “regressive solidarity.”) Social movements will often aim to change the dynamics that sustain an equilibrium so that social transformation occurs. But social movements vary tremendously and not all of them promote justice. I will discuss social movements in §6 as a way to promote social transformation, but make no effort in this paper to argue

¹⁷ Elsewhere I’ve offered an account of ideology that helps explain how the overall effect of practices may be masked by those who engage in them (Haslanger 2022). In the context of structural and systemic explanation, agency is responsive to background constraints and enablements that may be taken for granted or misrepresented to agents (Haslanger 2016).

¹⁸ Robin Dembroff argues in *Real Men on Top* (2026, forthcoming) that not all males, or even all men, are Real Men. For example, trans men, gay men, poor men, disabled men, are not Real Men, though it will depend to some extent on context who counts as a Real Man (or Real Woman).

¹⁹ This is where agent-based modeling is helpful. Just as it is possible to model rabbit behavior under different conditions to anticipate population changes, agent-based modeling can enable us to anticipate the effects of small changes in social space.

²⁰ Thanks to Sonia Pavel for urging me to make this point explicit.

for a particular account of what justice is, or what dynamics we should lean on to promote social justice.

Let's now return to social reproduction.

3. The Gendered Division of Labor

Caregiving is a necessary part of human life. Humans are born helpless and require intensive attention and care to become social subjects. We are fragile and suffer illness and injury and require care to recover, or to cope with the consequences. We have limited life spans, at the end of which we are often unable to care for ourselves. And just getting through a day involves a myriad of tasks to maintain body and soul.

We are also social beings, so beyond merely keeping ourselves alive, we need connection and interaction, and such connections must be built and maintained. Coordination around such carework is required, for the work of caretaking can be all-consuming and for periods of time this can make it difficult, if not impossible, for a caregiver to also meet other basic needs such as provisioning or security, e.g., making money for food or rent (Kittay 2020). But is it necessary that women do the bulk of the carework? And at what cost?

Before proceeding, it is important to note that the caregiver/breadwinner model – where women stay at home with children full time and men go into the public sphere to earn money – is racially, culturally, and class specific (and plausibly a product of capitalism). In agricultural communities the division of labor is not divided along a private/public axis for work on a farm is more collective, and even under modern capitalism, women of color and poor White women have always worked outside the home. (hooks 1984, Delphy 1984)

And yet there are robust regularities. A Calin O'Connor (2019, 84) notes, “[The] gendered division of labor is a case where we see the full range of conventionality – some jobs are almost guaranteed to end up performed by one gender or the other, and for others their assignment is better explained by appeal to chance.” For example, in some societies rope making or pottery is done by men, and in others by women, however, caregiving – especially the caregiving of infants – is virtually always assigned to women. This does not mean, however, that females have an innate predisposition to caregiving and males to hunting big game. Rather, as O'Connor argues, the pattern can emerge as a response to very basic pressures to divide labor. Caregiving will need to be done and, almost always, some amount of it will be unwaged (unless you hire a cleaner, a 24/7 nanny, and place the disabled and infirm in care homes).²¹ And, as I will explain shortly, those who do unwaged family caregiving are systematically disadvantaged relative to those who don't.

²¹ Although women who contribute to family income tend to reduce the amount of housework they do by either insisting that their partner do more, or by hiring paid cleaners, even in heterosexual families where both partners earn the same amount, women do more of the housework (O'Connor 2019, 181; also Treas & Drobnic 2010). And the reduction in women's housework “disappears, however, in households where wives contribute more than their husbands do. Beyond this point, women increase their relative contribution to household work as if to compensate for violating traditional gender norms.” (Folbre 2020, 190)

Folbre describes some of the disadvantages that accrue to individuals whose primary work is as unwaged family caregivers:

Family care providers do not receive an individual paycheck, and the emotional rewards they hope for can be variable and unpredictable. Once committed, it is difficult for them to threaten exit. Specialization in care provision intensifies personal attachments and cultivates person-specific skills that are not always transferable. Productive contributions to family living standards and capabilities are not fungible outside the family, unlike employment history, which often pays off both in marketable skills and pension credits. Reductions in paid labor force experience lower women's future earnings and reduce their fallback position in household bargaining. (Folbre 2020, 188)

To be clear, some men give birth to children, are primary caregivers, and do substantial household work. And not all of the disadvantages Folbre mentions fall on women who also engage in paid work, though some of them do, especially because women are more likely than men to work part-time or take jobs that allow for the flexibility of combining it with caregiving responsibilities. Nevertheless, the patterns are there. So why do women continue to take on this labor? And why is it so hard to disrupt?

4. Socio-Cultural Dynamics of Inequity²²

O'Connor (2019) provides some insight into how self-sustaining unjust systems emerge.²³ She asks: what are *the minimal conditions* under which social inequity would emerge in a society and be stable?²⁴ There are several background assumptions of her broad project worth noting. First, cooperation is an essential human task. As Kim Sterelny puts it, "Cooperation is so profitable that it eventually became an obligate feature of hominin lifeways. Going it alone has probably not been an option for hundreds of thousands of years" (Sterelny 2012, 7). Cooperation usually brings advantages to everyone in the group, even when there is inequality, because the overall benefits raise everyone's well-being compared non-cooperation. Second, cooperation requires social learning, e.g., learning how to communicate effectively, how to pass skills and information along to others. Third, a division of labor tends to be highly valuable. Most importantly, it allows for specialization, which is good in multiple ways.

²² In English, the distinction between inequality and inequity has become standardized to distinguish formal and substantive equality. Inequality occurs when individuals receive different amounts, even if that difference is fair. Inequity occurs when the division – whether equal or not – is unfair or unjust.

²³ Note that although O'Connor is working within the tradition of game theory, she is an evolutionary game theorist. This matters, for evolutionary game theory does not attempt to capture formal practical rationality, but practical rationality under social conditions. "One shortcoming of classical game-theoretic analysis is that it focuses on rational choice rather than looking at how boundedly-rational individuals might learn from each other, or culturally evolve. Evolutionary game theory, in contrast, looks at the emergence or evolution of strategic behaviour in a group" (Lacroix & O'Connor 2015, 6).

²⁴ Watkins and Smead (2019, 328) argue that, in fact, "O'Connor sometimes claims to be giving how-possibly explanations, sometimes how-plausibly explanations (O'Connor uses 'how potentially'), and other times how-minimally explanations, where a model illustrates the minimal conditions needed to produce the phenomena of interest" (8–9).

So we need to cooperate, but that introduces challenges about how to do so. O'Connor notes that a central set of coordination problems are best understood as *complementary* problems: rather than coming up with a solution that has us all do the same thing (drive on the right), the solution requires us to act differently, but in sync, such as ballroom dancing (“step forward if you are a woman and back if you are a man” (2019, 39)). Complementary problems are solved by establishing roles that are suitably related. For example, it was helpful back in the day when we used paper maps to have a driver and a navigator when going to an unfamiliar location. If someone gets especially good at navigating, then it makes sense for them to regularly take up the role. Sometimes a solution to a complementary problem is arbitrary – as in the ballroom dancing case – but sometimes it has a degree of functionality to it – as in the navigator case. Doing things you are good at or are easy for you to learn contributes to the effectiveness of the cooperation and is also rewarding. O'Connor argues that conventionality occurs on a spectrum from fully functional, to fully arbitrary (2019, 26).

To get a division of labor, however, we often need more than roles, for we need methods to identify who occupies what role, since, after all, the roles require specialized knowledge; individuals need to be trained to have the relevant knowledge, and social fluency may depend on identifying who we can rely on to do what. One important way to achieve this is to establish social categories, and often markers or “tags” to indicate who occupies which category. As the range of tasks multiply, we will sometimes invent new categories to mark a division of labor.²⁵ But it is efficient to use previously existing categories, if possible. Broad categories regularly position individuals together in a category; the members of the group, then, develop and teach each other skills that build up broad competencies and shape identities. Such broad divisions of labor are efficient.

We don't need to theorize here about why most, if not all, societies have created some form of gender, i.e., adopted a social category grounded somehow in presumed female reproductive capacity. But this category has – in different ways and to different extents – expanded to solve complementary coordination problems well beyond sexual reproduction. Women do the caregiving, men do the breadwinning. Women make nets, men do the fishing. In dancing the tango, women step forward and men step back... Even if there is a degree of functionality in marking presumed females as apt for certain roles, e.g., breastfeeding, how the category extends to other labor is context specific and can be contingent and arbitrary.

A division of labor is not necessarily inequitable: distinguishing drivers and navigators is *eo ipso* unproblematic. But, O'Connor argues,

Once categories have been adopted, the cultural dynamics that lead to bargaining norms are radically changed. New norms that are inequitable, but not especially efficient, arise. And once they do, they can be self-perpetuating. In other words, the development of types sets the stage for serious inequity to spontaneously emerge and to persist between social groups (2019, 4).

For example, if Alice and Bob are bargaining, and Alice is invested in the care of another, e.g., her infant, and Bob is not, Alice's options are more limited than Bob's, for Alice will not accept a bargain

²⁵ Ventura (2022) argues that categories are not necessary for these effects.

in which the dependent's well-being is compromised.²⁶ If women are categorized as those responsible for dependents, then this generalizes. Women will often endure bad relationships, even violent ones, “for the sake of the kids.” They will forego educational and work opportunities “for the sake of the kids.” But it isn't just for kids. Women make sacrifices for the sake of their partners, their extended family, their friends and co-workers, because relationships matter. Nancy Folbre puts it this way: women are systematically disadvantaged due to a gendered form of “compulsory altruism” (2020, 35).²⁷

Crucial to the imbalance in bargaining positions is what is called the threatpoint: where do you give in because the risk of not doing so is too great. I just mentioned the risk that arises when one of the parties is more committed to a dependent's well-being than the other. More generally, those who have a better fallback position have power (124).

[In some situations], power differentials between bargaining agents become salient. Suppose one player is able to issue a more credible threat than the other, for whatever reason. Because the less powerful player now stands to lose more should the bargaining fail, the more powerful player derives an advantage. (O'Connor 2019, 117)

Credible threats often emerge as a result of background conditions, or “extrahousehold environmental parameters” (O'Connor 2019, 190, quoting McElroy 1990, 561). These include

factors like differences in social network support, legal structures, access to communal goods social norms, education, work experience, ownership of assets, chances on the marriage market, and laws such as divorce and inheritance laws (Eswaran, 2014). Lundberg (2008) points out that extremely different expected disagreement points from divorce can result from traditional division of labor with women doing home and men market labor. This is because the latter leads to private goods (money) and is more relevant to single life. (2019, 190)

For our purposes, a crucial aspect of this pattern is that it is systematic and self-reinforcing: “small differences of inequity between genders...can feed into...processes that generate more serious inequity” (O'Connor 2019, 118).

Note that this approach to gendered dynamics does not claim that women in caregiving roles are always aware of their bargaining position and the reason they remain in their position is that their options for exit are bad. In fact, one of the effects of gender ideology is that it masks the power differentials between partners; women do caring labor out of concern for the other. But this is not all. Loving relationships are intrinsically good and worth making sacrifices for. It would be a mistake recommend that individuals in loving relationships regard them as wholly transactional. But the intrinsic value of caring is compatible with there being power differentials in such relationships.

²⁶ Folbre puts it vividly: “The strategic dilemma resembles the stylized game of Chicken, in which two players may threaten to do something—whether to drive head-on into another car or to ignore a baby's dirty diaper—in the hope that the other player will capitulate. Where diaper changing is concerned, the person most worried about the baby is the one whose bluff is least convincing. She is likely to do most of the dirty work.” (Folbre 2020, 187)

²⁷ Utrata (2011, 630) describes grandmothers as the “reserve army of feminine self-sacrifice.”

Although I've focused so far on the dynamics that occur *within* relationships, the problems multiply when a relationship was never intended or established, or when it breaks down. Single mothers are much more common than single fathers because the gendered division of labor is not simply assumed within relationships, but across society. Separated, divorced, widowed, and single women are still expected to do the bulk of carework, including caring for their children, others' children, the disabled, and the elderly. So one's bargaining position within all of one's relationships – to extended family, friends, bosses, landlords – is affected by one's caregiving responsibilities. “What it means to be powerful, in caring terms, is to be able to foist off the unpleasant parts of care onto others and to take on only the care duties we find worthwhile” (Tronto 2015, 12).

Systemic inequity of this sort *is not simply a pattern in gendered relations*. It is a general feature of bargaining when one party faces greater risks in the fallback position. For example, undocumented immigrants face deportation if they don't accept terms of employment; the disabled face severe marginalization if they don't accept even inadequate accommodation; workers face a broad range of harms to themselves and their families if they don't accept the wage contract. But accepting such terms just furthers the power of the other party – the powerful gain advantage that protects them from risks in the next round of bargaining. And this advantage also enables them to punish those who fail to conform. So the cycle continues.

There are two important lessons to learn from this. First, the dynamics of inequity are systemic and are not simply capitalist, patriarchal, or White supremacist. Of course, the particular forms of disadvantage and the groups that are disadvantaged are historically and culturally specific, and in our current social formation, patriarchal, capitalist, and White supremacist dynamics are shaping the disadvantages. But just blocking these particular dynamics will not prevent systemic inequity as long as we rely on categories to divide labor, pass along relevant knowledge and skills through those categories, and the payoffs of the division are unequal. As O'Connor (2019) puts it:

perniciously inequitable conventions emerge even without factors that we usually blame for them—such as bias or stereotype threat. They are simply the common end products of cultural evolutionary processes where everyone learns to do what is best for themselves.
(194)

This is not to say that we should not work to change what “everyone learns” about what's “best for themselves.” Nor is it to say that we should not change the material conditions that shape our choice architecture. But we should be reluctant to resort to “bias” or “discrimination” to explain systemic injustice.

Second, preventing systemic inequity requires sustained intervention into the processes by which labor is divided, and such divisions are maintained. As O'Connor (2019) claims, systemic social inequity emerges

from processes driven by the basic structures of our social situation—structures that are themselves hard to do away with. What this means is that when we take steps to ameliorate the outcomes of these processes, we should expect our fixes to be temporary. The structures driving inequity are still there, and social dynamics can easily carry us back to inequitable patterns of division. The battle for social justice is against a hydra that grows a new head each time any one is cut off. (212)

So if we are thinking about transformative social change, and if we see this as disrupting self-sustaining patterns of inequity, we should not assume that we have failed unless we have put an end to all of the self-reproducing cycles of inequity that currently exist.

Conceptualizing freedom as *marronage* means rejecting freedom as a binary (one is either free or not) and holds that a linear, developmental view of progress toward a definitive freedom will always yield a distorted picture that cannot account for empirical conditions of oppression and domination. Instead, freedom in this sense affirms that we are always in the process of flight toward freedom as liberation, which is the ongoing undoing of common understandings, systems, and practices that (re)produce oppressive conditions. Put differently, [Radical Black Feminist Pragmatism] points to the wisdom that the task of those who care about justice is always and ever will be a striving to continue to *get free*. (Woodly 2022, 81-2)²⁸

If the goal is to achieve relief from systemic oppression, then to break out of even one cycle of cumulative disadvantage is a win and should not be disparaged.²⁹ It matters that the conditions of those who are subordinated are improved, even if the equilibrium remains in some form or other. Moreover, as O'Connor says, even if no one individually has much to gain by resistance, and even if our efforts look to be in vain,

the behaviors of a group can look just as inequitable as ever, while the stability of an inequitable norm is nonetheless eroded. Ultimately this erosion is useless, though, if no one actually does something different...behaviors such as protest can act as the fulcrum that levers a population toward a new equilibrium. (195)

Of course we must be attentive to the ways in which the remedy may inadvertently reinforce other forms and sites of oppression, but we should be willing to see the value of incremental changes. Such local disruptions – small moments of success – can cascade and lead to transformation (think of the mountain top or hillside).

5. Power and Exit Options

O'Connor (2019) suggests that crucial features that sustain gender inequity include (a) the use and marking of gender categories (196), (b) the emergence of type-based conventions and norms and correlated “type-conditioning” (197), and (c) inequitable payoff structures, e.g., differing

²⁸ The idea of freedom as *marronage* is from Roberts (2015). For background on *marronage*, see: <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199730414/obo-9780199730414-0229.xml> Woodly adds later, “If you are facing a social and political situation in which you and your social group are systematically deprived of self-determination (domination) and self-development (oppression), then it makes sense to measure your freedom by the distance the group has (in the past) and can (in the future) put between present conditions and future desired conditions. Likewise, thinking about one’s control over one’s own “movement” as a measure of freedom, and specifically of “flight” as the motion that conveys departure from oppressive conditions, provides another method of assessing degrees of oppression or freedom.” (Woodly 2022, 85)

²⁹ As mentioned at the start when reviewing the lessons from Lecture 2, there are many gains to be won from local efforts that solve problems in new ways.

threatpoints, resulting from “extrahousehold” parameters (185, 190, 206).³⁰ I will focus in this lecture on those conditions that are apt to affect differential threatpoints and the ways these reduce women’s bargaining power, i.e., the ways in which background conditions are often set up to privilege others in the division of carework, especially men. I explore this by considering differential exit options for caregivers and non-caregivers.

There are several ways that this focus is overly narrow.³¹ First, much of women’s experience in caregiving does not involve bargaining with another, nor should it. Women’s relationships with dependents, such as young children and elderly parents whom they care for, are not best understood through game theoretic models. Bargaining is more apt when thinking about the relationship with co-caregivers, such as another parent or sibling. But even there, the framing of decision-making as “bargaining” can be misleading. More significantly, the problem is often not that another *individual* is exploiting the vulnerabilities of the caregiver and dependent; instead the state, or the community, is exploiting the caregiver by taking advantage of their labor without adequate compensation or recognition.³² Who is the single mom bargaining with when she finds her caregiving work exceptionally burdensome? Who benefits, other than the dependent? What we want is not just individual bargaining power in relation to individuals, but collective bargaining power within a system. I will argue that transformative change *does* depend on developing collective bargaining power, and use O’Connor’s model as a tool for thinking about the aggregation and distribution of social power.

Second, I consider differential exit options because a credible threat of exit has material consequences and often increases one’s power (though, of course, it can also raise the stakes and result in violent retaliation). But in most caregiving relationships, the caregiver isn’t interested in exit from the relationship, either the relationship with the dependent or a caregiving partner. What they want is a more fair distribution of labor *within* the relationship(s). If we use bargaining as our mode of analysis, then the best way to get this is to make unfair distributions more costly to the privileged. But obviously, this is not always the best way to negotiate with a partner or dependent. The point of the discussion, however, is not to provide a self-help guide to interpersonal relations: the aim is not to identify ways to challenge the power some individuals have in a relationship, but to understand how the material conditions and cultural *technē* systematically generate power differences and how we can collectively intervene in the system. In the discussion that follows, individuals function as a kind of placeholder in a social structural analysis.

³⁰ There are places in O’Connor’s work (Ch. 9) where she focuses on (a) and (b), seeming to suggest that (c) results from (a) and (b), so they should be prioritized. In other places, she seems to allow that the extrahousehold parameters are not simply types, norms, and conventions, e.g., Ch. 5. The pressures to coordinate even on bad terms are not just a matter of norms and conventions.

³¹ Thanks to Rachel Fraser for discussion of these limitations of my discussion.

³² For example, once I was in a discussion with a single colleague without children (in a different field) about the MIT’s policies to subsidize health care to families. She complained that she chose to pursue photography as a hobby rather than have children and couldn’t understand why she shouldn’t be subsidized for her photographic equipment expenses. My reply was that she should consider that question again when she needs a doctor in her old age, and one of my children is the specialist she needs. (Note: neither of my children are medical doctors; the point doesn’t require that.)

The inability to exit an inequitable social position – and so being subject to the demands of the more powerful party – is at the heart of oppression. Being treated inequitably is bad, but oppression is more than that. In its most general sense, Iris Young, maintains, “all oppressed people suffer some inhibition of their ability to develop and exercise their capacities and express their needs, thoughts, and feelings” (1990, 40).³³ She continues, building on Marilyn Frye,

Oppression in this sense is structural, rather than the result of a few people's choices or policies. Its causes are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following those rules. It names, as Marilyn Frye puts it, "an enclosing structure of forces and barriers which tends to the immobilization and reduction of a group or category of people" (Frye, 1983a, p. 11). In this extended structural sense oppression refers to the vast and deep injustices some groups suffer as a consequence of often unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes, and structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms—in short, the normal processes of everyday life. (1990, 41)

As Marilyn Frye describes it, one is trapped in a birdcage without acceptable exit options (1983). Young emphasizes that the forces of oppression are not necessarily legal or institutional but are embedded in everyday practices.³⁴ Usually multiple dynamics interact to produce limited choice architectures that vary depending on one's class, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, gender, and more. On my view the shaping of one's options involves both material conditions and social norms. Norms for bargaining are built into social categories, and those who violate the norms are punished. But importantly, whether an option of exit is available, depends on one's fallback position, e.g., in the extreme cases whether one can secure housing, security, and the like, But the costs might also be emotional. If I refuse the bargain, will I face a loss of trust or love within the relationship? Would I be exiting a *kind* of relationship that I aspire to?³⁵

So far, I've focused on women's disadvantage *in the family* because this is where the phenomenon is most pronounced, but the patterns of bargaining also affect the workplace. Because women are interpellated to be caregivers and identify with this role, their identities are more deeply imbued with caregiving and deferential norms than men's. In the workplace they do a disproportionate amount of carework, they are less likely to bargain for what they deserve, their exit options are more limited because they need flexible work hours to be available for carework at home (whether of children or elders), and such jobs are more precarious, have fewer work-based benefits (healthcare, pensions,

³³ I see Young as relying on something like a capability approach to justice here (see Robeyns 2017 for a great overview). Although I think that a capability approach cannot alone capture what's needed for a good and just society, it is an important part of the story.

³⁴ See also Payton (2022); Kim 2024, Ch. 3. On Young's (1990) account of oppression, she is less explicit that oppression is systematic and self-sustaining, though the five faces of oppression she identifies (exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, ethnocentrism, group targeted violence) are mechanisms that set up systemic inequity.

³⁵ Thanks to Samia Hesni for raising this possibility. I regret that I don't have more space to pursue the thought.

paid time off), and they are low-paid. So even women who work outside the home do not escape the disadvantage in bargaining with other workers or life partners.

A further factor in this process that I've not yet mentioned is that some social categories rely on embodied social markers so that there is, for many, "forced entry." Gender is read off the body, and although it is not impossible, it is difficult to escape it (Glenn 2012). One does not "opt in" to the gendered division of labor, it is imposed. (Note that this is compatible with there being choices about what gender one identifies with or whether one identifies with a gender at all; my point is that the consequences of that choice are not entirely up to the individual.) So as long as sex markers are broadly meaningful as a basis for dividing labor (especially carework, but not just carework), gender inequity is likely.³⁶ Our current system of organizing carework along gender lines disadvantages women, but if we flipped it and organized it so that non-women are responsible for the carework, it would systematically disadvantage non-women.

Racial marking is another embodied social classification and produces racial divisions of labor. One does not "opt in" to being racialized. What one makes of being racialized and how one navigates that reality is one thing; but being marked as a member of a race situates one in a hierarchical system that imposes norms, divisions of labor, and systemic inequity. The risk of racial violence, the disruption of racialized families through incarceration and child removal, threats of deportation of minoritized immigrants, and the state's racially contingent protection of civil rights, all hand power to White people in controlling the Black and Brown population. Exit for those who wear the markings of their social category on their body is formidable.

Let's consider some of the factors that hold the equilibrium in place. Erik Olin Wright (2009) argues that there are three relevant forms of power to consider when organizing for social empowerment. Let's start there:

State power is...defined as the effective capacity to impose rules and regulate social relations over territory, a capacity which depends on such things as information and communications infrastructure, the ideological commitments of citizens to obey rules and commands, the level of discipline of administrative officials, the practical effectiveness of the regulations to solve problems, as well as the monopoly over the legitimate use of coercion. (119)

power is based on the kinds of economically-relevant resources different categories of social actors control and deploy within these interactions of production and distribution. (119)

Power in civil society depends on capacities for collective action through such voluntary association, and can accordingly be referred to as "associational power" or "*social power*." (120)

On Wright's account, roughly, a democratic state is one in which state power is subordinate and accountable to social power (the state serves the people). A socialist state is one in which economic

³⁶ See also Haslanger (2000) for a social position account of gender that takes gender marking linked to ideology as central to women's subordination.

power is subordinate and accountable to social power (the economy serves the people). (121)
Emancipatory social change leverages “social power” to serve the interests of the people.

The difficulty of exit is one of the most important factors in stabilizing gender inequity. There are several kinds of exit to consider: exit from *the relationship* with any co-caregiver (e.g., co-parent if there is one); exit from *the dependent*; and exit from the *kind of relationships* involved.³⁷ We can organize the factors as falling into several types of dynamic:

- *Material conditions*: lack of childcare; lack of back-up housing; food insecurity; lack of appropriate caregiving skills on the part of co-carers;; lack of time for care of self/others especially in planning exit strategies, etc.
- *Economic (economic power) conditions*: lack of (independent source of) income/wealth; lack of time for paid work; lack of credentials; cost of moving away
- *Political (state power) conditions*: fear of Child Protective Services; lack of (independent source of) health care, retirement, and such; divorce and custody laws
- *Social (social power) conditions*: lack of alternative emotional connections; lack of family/community support; punishment for violating gendered social norms, love for the dependent
- *Semiotic conditions*: meaning of motherhood, femininity, kinship; norms of spousal commitment and parenting; bionormativity of the family

Note that some of these factors are relevant, even if there are no children involved in the relationship, because (as noted above) women are expected to take care of many others, including the partner and partner’s extended family. And (as noted above) single mothers are already denied many of the benefits that are at risk with exit.

Can we identify some of the capitalist, patriarchal, and White supremacist dynamics that shape these conditions? The dynamics affecting poor women and rich women differ due to capitalist and patriarchal dynamics, for rich women may have access to greater wealth, more options for housing, an ability to pay for childcare, and more flexibility in employment. Race is also a dynamic because non-White people have been deprived of economic power due to the interaction between capitalist and White supremacist dynamics. However, the social and semiotic dynamics internal to patriarchy and White supremacy affect White women and non-White women differently. The meanings of motherhood, kinship, and parenting differ between racial groups, and social networks often trace racial categories. And, of course, capitalist, White supremacist, and patriarchal dynamics affect who has political power. What I say here is inevitably vague and over-simplified. It intended only to point at considerations that may be relevant in developing an analysis of the meso-level systems at issue.

³⁷ I mentioned above that caregiving can involve the work of maintaining social ties to friends and kin. This doesn’t fit well with seeing the main caregiving work as care of a dependent. But I’m not sure how to capture this.

6. Strategies for Structural Change

I've been urging throughout these lectures that we should consider oppression from a complex dynamic systems perspective. I've described gender inequity using O'Connor's argument and added dynamics to consider how the equilibrium she identifies might be transformed. But the question remains: it is possible to organize social reproduction so that it doesn't create inequity? Carework is necessary and can be deeply meaningful and fulfilling. However, it is more likely to be effectively done if there is a division of labor (given the specialized skills it requires). Those expected to do it are more vulnerable in bargaining than those who don't due to (a) emotional attachment to and responsibility for the dependent, (b) social norms that evolve to reinforce the attachment and responsibility, and (c) power that accrues to those who are not expected to perform such labor. So inequity is likely to evolve.³⁸ The solution is not to stop caring! Instead, communities need to organize it in ways that prevent oppression and exploitation of carework.

Professionalizing carework

One strategy is to remove social reproduction from the private sphere. The notion of 'care' has a double meaning: on the one hand, it is *an attitude* of concern or affection one might expect from a family member or friend; on the other hand, it is *an activity* that might be done by a nurse or a "care professional" (Folbre & Nelson 2000, 129). Good caring – the activity – requires skill, and not everyone who has a commitment to affective connection – the attitude – towards someone has the skills to care well.³⁹ Organizing caring activity through formal institutions, providing training in a way that cultivates caring attitudes, and paying good wages for it, is definitely one part of a solution. Unions organize workers so that they have better fallback positions and address many of these risk factors of inequity. Professionalized or waged care *activity* need not be divided along gender lines, and if it is managed well politically and economically, it would seem that oppression could be avoided. The National Domestic Workers Alliance provides an example: it organizes care workers, lobbies for better policies, changes narratives about care work, innovates solutions drawing on data, and mobilizes voters.⁴⁰ And because teachers also play a significant role in social reproduction, teachers' unions also provide opportunities to fight for equity.

Such organizing is essential to transform practices of social reproduction and make it more just. However, focusing on care as an activity does not capture the significance of care, especially personal

³⁸ O'Connor (2019, Ch. 9) considers whether we might begin by targeting the division of labor that emerges from the three minimal conditions: typing, type-conditioning (i.e., acting differently in relation to others based on type), and social learning from one's type. She argues that, at least in the case of gender, disrupting this will be extremely difficult, so instead we should focus on the conventions that treat the caregiving labor inequitably. She suggests that because changing conventions poses collective action challenges, we should turn to social movements to accomplish this. She considers the potential for social movements to (a) change ethical beliefs (including changing norms), (b) to encourage the oppressed to make higher demands, (c) find ways to lower the payoffs to the privileged. All of these have some prospect of success, but there will always be pressures to revert to inequity. I am less convinced that gender typing is as robust as she thinks, but we should also consider change of convention because even if caregiving is no longer gender-typed, it is still likely to be treated inequitably.

³⁹ And sometimes good caring activity is best done by a skilled stranger. Not everyone wants their loved ones to be involved in the nitty-gritty of bodily care.

⁴⁰ <https://www.domesticworkers.org/>

care by those to whom you have loving relationships. It matters who is caring for you when you are an infant, or ill, or dying; it matters who you are having sex with, whose emotional needs you are meeting and who meets yours, and who you intimately coordinate with in crafting your life. (Recall, social reproduction also includes sexual reproduction!) Being able to become and to remain a social subject up to the very end depends not just having one's physical needs met, but also on concern and affection by particular individuals over time. There are reasons why we hope that we will be cared for by individuals who know us well and have seen us through thick and thin. Caring is a form of commitment; caregivers are not fungible. And it is, on many accounts, a virtue, a source of meaning, something to be done for its own sake, and a central element in identity. Who we are is at least partly a matter of who we love and care for. But a commitment to emotional connection demands time and energy, and even more so if (as is typical) it includes caring activity. In central cases, caring relationships (with infants, the ill, the disabled, and the dying) aren't symmetrical.

Perhaps a better strategy for addressing carework in families is to form alliances among – organize – those who are engaged in the activity of carework with an affective dimension, i.e., those who are committed to the relationship with the dependent. However, for reasons mentioned above, strategies that are effective for workers, are not ideally suited to organize family caregivers: partners, wives, and mothers. Many wage workers spend large amounts of time together and form collective identities; they have families to go back to and provide support; it is normatively acceptable to make demands and bargain for what they can get; their work experience and training is considered an asset on the job market. In contrast, family careworkers more generally are dispersed and leaving their family destroys the site where their primary needs are met; they are attached to their family members through bonds of love; they identify with their deferential and burdensome roles and are not always comfortable with assertiveness and competition; their skills at emotional labor are not easily monetized; and they often don't have other models for shaping a meaningful life. We will return to this option, however.

State intervention

Another important strategy is to secure state benefits and protections for informal caregivers. Feminists have long worked to change divorce law to make it more permissive, to make marital rape and domestic violence crimes, to demand universal options for health care and childcare, and more. In the United States there are child tax and food benefits (WIC and SNAP) for some households with children. And the Veteran's Administration (VA) provides some support for individuals to care for their loved ones at home. There is certainly more that the state could do to recognize the burdens of carework and provide a safety net for caregivers.

But, at least in the US, government intervention is unreliable and hard to access for those most at risk; reliance on the government is stigmatized; and to be honest, the government is untrustworthy. (As mentioned in the previous lecture, Child Protective Services is weaponized in the Black community.) Black and Brown families, immigrant families, queer families, and families that don't fit the heteronormative Christian model, should not trust the state (Bohrer 2021). Most states are run by men who benefit from the gendered division of labor, and usually they enforce and uphold its norms. This is recently evidenced in the US by, among other things, the Dobbs decision that overturned *Roe v. Wade*. Pregnant persons are being forced to carry unwanted pregnancies to term.

Reliance on the state is not merely unpromising. There are deeper reasons for thinking this is not the best strategy. The state, at least in a liberal society, is focused on protecting individual rights (historically only in the public sphere and not in the “private” sphere); but the challenge of social reproduction is an issue of interdependence, not an issue of individual rights. In some state configurations, turning to the state for solutions shifts control from the community, with the rationale that the state, as an allegedly neutral party, is best positioned to solve the conflicts. But the state is not neutral and, often lacks the cultural and interpersonal knowledge – and the entitlement – to manage relations of dependence.

But we should not give up on efforts to engage the state. For example, Eric Olin Wright argues that in a deeply democratic state, social power will play a significant role in governance.

In actual capitalist societies, much economic regulation is in fact more responsive to the needs and power of capital than to the needs and power generated within civil society. The result is a power configuration [where] state power regulates capital but in ways that are systematically responsive to the power of capital itself. The question, then, is the extent to which it is possible within capitalist society to democratize state regulatory processes in ways which undercut the power of capital and enhance social power. One way of doing this is through what is sometimes called “associative democracy.” (135-36)

He continues,

To the extent that the associations involved are internally democratic and representative of interests in civil society, and the decision-making process in which they are engaged is open and deliberative, rather than heavily manipulated by elites and the state, then associative democracy constitutes a pathway to social empowerment. (137)

On Wright’s view, the key here is building democratic associations, or as I will argue, social movements, some of which work with and through the state, and some not.

Social Transformation

O’Connor’s work suggests that current gendered caregiving practices put us in a relatively stable equilibrium that is bowl shaped. However, we should ask: what background assumptions yield the conclusion that a division of labor between two groups coordinating around carework is best? most likely? merely possible? ⁴¹ And why should we think that the most plausible candidates for the two groups are women (or those who can give birth) and men (those who can’t). What if we divided the labor between more than two groups? (This can and does happen with multi-generational communities?) Or what if we divided the labor across groups differently (so not *all* the caregiving falls to one group). What are some of the system dynamics that might give rise to such changes?

Convincing individual non-caregivers to take more responsibility for caregiving may make a difference in a particular relationship; and friends can help friends manage the caregiving inequity they face. However, to move from a bowl to a hillside, we need to make caregivers *systematically* less dependent on powerful partners and create better exit options that will give them more power to

⁴¹ These are questions posed in a review of O’Connor’s book (Watkins & Smead 2019).

bargain for what they need or safely exit. If caregiving is distributed differently across multiple groups, then exit may be more feasible. To do this, we should create new practices that build support networks for caregivers that make them less vulnerable. This could happen through social movement work.

7. Socially Networked Movements⁴²

Much social movement work is focused on making demands of the state or other public institutions. What do we do if that isn't the best strategy for the purposes at hand? I don't for a moment think that there is a one-size-fits-all social movement. Different challenges and different conditions require different forms of resistance. In some cases direct confrontation with those who maintain the oppressive structure is necessary. Our question is much narrower: is there a way to disrupt family carework inequity? Key factors keeping it in place are marking of types or categories, norms (both about dividing labor and about bargaining), economic power, and risk.⁴³

Some recent examples of social movements *that have changed norms* include: the anti-smoking movement; the anti-drunk-driving movement; the marriage equality movement; the pro-gun (NRA) movement; the anti-abortion movement. There is a sense in which they have changed "what it means" to be a smoker, a drunk driver, a gun owner, to be married or have an abortion. Our assessment of the behavior has changed. These movements have very different visions of social justice and human well-being. What they have in common is that they have mobilized large numbers of people to change their ideas and their behavior and have shifted social norms. "In the absence of a predominant ideology or values set that might explain why certain sides prevailed, we knew that the answer to why some movements catapulted forth to victory while others faltered had to do with how they were organized" (Crutchfield 2018, 10). Some of them are directed at political and judicial outcomes, but these outcomes, arguably, are the result of their influence on the default understandings of how we live together.

Americans didn't suddenly stop smoking because it simply "went out of fashion." Gun enthusiasts weren't able to stock up on semi-automatic assault weapons without legislative and regulatory allowances. Heterosexuals didn't embrace marriage for same-sex couples because it seemed like "the right thing to do." These changes occurred because of the relentless advocacy of vast networks of individuals and organizations, campaigning in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles and often against entrenched, powerful opponents. In spite of it all, they prevailed. (Crutchfield 2018, 5)

On the model I've been presenting, our ways of framing the world are shaped by the practices that we engage in and the terms of cooperation that are available. Individualists tend to think that "A

⁴² Sahar Heydari Fard's work on complex dynamic systems and social movements has been tremendously valuable and has influenced me significantly in this section and elsewhere. See Heydari Fard 2024a; 2024b; 2022; 2021.

⁴³ Some (O'Connor, Bicchieri, and others) distinguish norms from conventions: "Norms involve a belief that one *ought* to behave a certain way." Conventions are regularities that build up expectations, but are not backed by the same kind of normative belief. (O'Connor 2019, 208) This depends, of course, on what kind of 'ought' is at issue in describing a norm.

person has a fixed set of tastes and preferences. When choosing amongst a set of alternatives, he or she compares the attributes of these alternatives and selects the one which most closely corresponds to his or her preferences” (Omerod 2012, 1). On this conception of social agency, the task of movement work is to convince, nudge, or incentivize people to do things differently.

Although deliberation about what to think and what to do matter, a lot of our social interaction is interactively shaped – we are fantastically adept at adjusting to others in our communities. The choices people make, their attitudes, their opinions, are influenced directly by other people. The medium via which this influence spreads is the social network.

Often, social networks are thought of as purely a webbased phenomenon: sites such as Facebook. These can indeed influence behaviour. But it is real-life social networks – family, friends, colleagues – that are even more important in helping us shape our preferences and beliefs, what we like and what we do not like.” (Omerod 2012, 2)

Once we start thinking in terms of networks and social relations, the activity of organizing looks a bit different (Ogden 2013). Education and argumentation are still important, but influence is a huge factor. And influence happens in non-explicit ways and non-rational ways.

So let’s think about your social network. Evidence suggests that

Everything we do or say tends to ripple through our network, having an impact on our friends (one degree), our friend’s friends (two degrees) and our friend’s friend’s friends (three degrees). Our influence gradually dissipates and ceases to have a noticeable effect on people beyond the social frontier that lies at three degrees of separation. (Christakis & Fowler 2009, 28)

If we add that each of us have the capacity to have 150 friends (this is called the Dunbar number), then in principle, taking into account our three degrees of influence, we can have influence on over 3 million people (Rowson et al 2010, 25). One of the best predictors of whether someone will go to a demonstration is whether a friend of theirs is going (Gupta 2017, 60). Note also that networking can be fun, provides opportunities for meaningful connection, and can combat alienation. And carework can be enhanced by building connections with others similarly situated.

Note, however, that the disenfranchised have few friends/ties to those with power or resilience. “In terms of household type, single parent families have fewer social resource connections than average” (Rowson et al 2010, 26). Moreover, members of disadvantaged communities tend to rely on strong ties to their closest support system. This can be problematic because it “leads to small bonded clusters lacking in diversity and access to information, ties and resources outside.” (Rowson et al 2010, 27) So an important way to change behavior, and provide access to resources, is to connect people in a broader network. The most powerful form of network is the many-to-many network: being in a group that is connected to another group “significantly increases your resources. This bridging or linking capital is the kind of connectivity from which most people benefit” (Rowson et al 2010, 33).

We are in a period where some groups have gained tremendous economic and state power with the result that others are struggling to keep jobs, to feed their families, to keep a roof over their heads, and to stay healthy. Dean Spade argues that,

in the face of these conditions, expanding use of mutual aid strategies will be the most effective way to support vulnerable populations to survive, mobilize significant resistance, and build the infrastructure we need for the coming disasters...mutual aid is an often devalued iteration of radical collective care that provides a transformative alternative to the demobilizing frameworks for understanding social change and expressing dissent that dominate the popular imagination. (Spade 2020, 131)

Spade is critical of social movements that focus on protests, speeches, and visibility in dominant politics. On their view,

Mutual aid is a form of political participation in which people take responsibility for caring for one another and changing political conditions, not just through symbolic acts or putting pressure on their representatives in government but by actually building new social relations that are more survivable. (Spade 2020, 136)

Although I do not want to underplay the significance of symbolic acts that may have a huge impact (Little 2020), Spade's work suggests that networks can potentially address two problems at once: broadening the distribution of resources and changing norms. Recent research on social movements suggests that chapter-based networks (such as the ones listed above) are distinctively effective in producing systemic norm change.⁴⁴ Chapter-based movements consist of a network of local organizations – or in Wright's term, associations – united by a common purpose. In chapter based networks, groups “on the ground” organize in a community. They have local knowledge of the community concerns, what is likely to motivate participation, what discursive frame will be effective, and who is a respected spokesperson. Considerable leverage is given to the local organizers. This is captured in Barbara Ransby's article on Black Lives Matter:

The idea behind that model is that when people on the ground make decisions, articulate problems and come up with answers, the results are more likely to meet real needs. And that's more sustainable in the long run: People are better prepared to carry out solutions they themselves created, instead of ones handed down by national leaders unfamiliar with realities in local communities. Such local work allows people to take ownership of the political struggles that affect their lives. (Ransby 2017; quoted in Woodly 2022, 75)

At the same time, the chapters are connected to a network that provides name recognition and publicity, advice and support, and often financial and legal resources. Ransby continues:

Brick by brick, relationship by relationship, decision by decision, the edifices of resistance are being built. The national organizations are the mortar between the bricks. That fortified space will be a necessary training ground and refuge for the political battles that lay ahead...(Ransby 2017; quoted in Woodly 2022, 75)

⁴⁴ Deva Woodly provides a theoretical background for one version of this approach which she calls *Radical Black Feminist Pragmatism*. I draw significantly on her account. *Radical Black Feminist Pragmatism*, following Dewey, among others, emphasizes four core commitments: social intelligence, a fundamental investment in pragmatic imagination, a commitment to democratic experimentation, and an aim toward liberatory ends (Woodly 2022, 69). See also the [Interaction Institute for Social Change](#).

In many ways such chapter-based networks are structured like unions, but there are significant differences that make them flexible enough to address the specific challenges of organizing carework. For example, they are not focused on the bargaining unit in a workplace; they are less locked in to strategic logics framed by capitalism; they are more focused on norms than policies; and they can be more imaginatively open-ended.⁴⁵

A key factor in the success of chapter-based movements is the new networks they create.⁴⁶ Think of it this way: the structure of a social system is a network of individuals and resources. It is not just a set or collection of individuals and resources, however, but individuals and resources *in relation to each other*. The relationships, and the dynamics built into them, make all the difference.⁴⁷ Local chapters build solidarity and commitment around a matter of shared concern, and this provides support when undertaking risky behavior, e.g., demanding more in bargaining or taking steps to reduce the payoff to the already privileged party. Strong-ties with others in the network are predictors of willingness to engage in collective action, for these ties bring mutual trust and a sense of responsibility for the other. And once there is a critical mass, the willingness to participate begins to cascade: “if most of the people whom you know and who share your (disadvantaged) situation elect to mobilize and fight, then fighting is more likely to seem like the appropriate line of action to you” (Crossley & Diani 2019, 152).

But scattered local associations (or groups) are less effective without some overarching organization that draws on the local knowledge to develop strategy. Once organized the movement has the power of commitment and insight into the phenomenon from multiple diverse sources. If the movement

⁴⁵ In her study of social movements that took place over approximately the past forty years (1980-2020), Leslie Crutchfield found the following features in successful movements:

1. Build from the grass roots: Successful movements “are fueled by energy that materializes from the bottom up.... They invest their assets—money, time, know-how, and political clout—into ensuring the grassroots not only survive but thrive.” (12)
2. Network local groups: They start local and build up momentum with small successes and “win big when their grass-tops are organized in networked leadership structures—coalitions of leaders who recognize they need to forge pathways so all of the players around them can collaborate rather than compete and achieve collective impact.”
3. Norm change is essential: Do not assume you need to “choose between either pushing for policy reform or shifting social norms and individual behaviors, [In order to] achieve lasting systems change, [a movement] must change public attitudes so people believe the changes they seek are fair and right. They strive to make the change they seek the new normal.” (13) To do this, find ways to convert lived experience to meaningful narrative.
4. Deal with adversarial allies: Seek to create opportunities for “disparate factions can come together around a common agenda — although the path to victory can be arduous and never linear.”
5. Broad outreach: Don’t assume that businesses are the enemy; find allies where you can.
6. Collaborative leadership: Instead of small handfuls of elites dictating to troops from the top down or an amorphous mob of activists ...the most effective movements find balance between the “leaderless” and “leader-led” extremes... Effective movement leaders share power, authority, and limelight and lead from behind, embracing a longterm view. This is very hard to do—it involves letting go of ego, as well as putting cause and mission ahead of personal or organizational power. It’s the main reason why some movements fail—and why the best movements win.

⁴⁶ Many references could go here, including Barabási 2002, Crutchfield 2018, Heydari Fard 2021.

⁴⁷ Gladwell 2010: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/10/04/small-change-malcolm-gladwell>

models alternative practices that are feasible (and ethically sound?), there is a potential to shift the dynamics of the system to a different (and better?) equilibrium.

An organized network of chapters whose members are committed to practices at odds with the dominant social norms and who are prepared to publicly denounce the existing norms will have some an impact on the practices that were previously entrenched. Can we address the material, economic, political, social, and semiotic dynamics that position caregivers as vulnerable to systemic disadvantage? Let us return to the kinds of networking constraints that create a bowl-shaped system:

- a. *Material conditions*: How are boundaries between family care and social networks *materially* fixed?
 - i. Distanced (suburban) living spaces
 - ii. Mobility for job at all costs (moving away from friends and families)
 - iii. Lack co-housing options, co-ops
- b. *Economic power*
 - i. Lack of flex-time at work, paid caregiving leave
 - ii. Lack of universal health care
 - iii. Lack of educational opportunities, skill development
 - iv. Lack of affordable housing
 - v. Lack of financial support
- c. *Political/State power*
 - i. Failures of foster care systems⁴⁸
 - ii. Failures of health care systems
 - iii. Failures of welfare systems
 - iv. Failures of transportation systems
- d. *Social Power* (to be leveraged)
 - i. Friend and kinship networks
 - ii. Existing social movements, alliances, organizations
 - iii. Mutual aid associations
- e. *Semiotic conditions*
 - i. Bionormativity
 - ii. Heteronormativity
 - iii. The “private” sphere
 - iv. Mobility for job at all costs
 - v. Single-generation homes

Zechner and Hansen (2015, pdf6-7) argue that in organizing social reproduction, we should be attentive to four domains of opportunity:

1. *The non-organized social of informal relations*: the extended family, friendships, informal communities, loose networks; ← starting point...identify the dynamics that should be addressed and identify social power to be leveraged. Engage in interpersonal consciousness raising and build alliances.

⁴⁸ For a full sense of the problem, see Roberts (2002); Ambroz (2022); Annie E. Casey Foundation (2025).

2. *The inhabiting social, where the organizing principle is space*: neighborhoods, homes, social centers, assembly spaces, distribution points; ← create spaces where different groups are represented; reach out to include others who are not already networked.
3. *The organized social, with protocols and formal divisions of work*: unions, associations, institutions, clubs, cooperatives, organized networks; ← form a chapter? create coalitions with existing associations.
4. *The representational, whose organizing principles are governance and mediation*: institutions, welfare and legal systems, parties, the media. (6) ← develop a broad strategy to spread the impact

There are many case studies that can demonstrate the effectiveness of chapter-based organizing. The point is not to figure out a plan and implement it, but to build networks and alliances that can develop plans as they go.

What would it mean to build these up into movements? Can a chapter-based care movement make a transformative difference? All I can say is that it is *possible*. The Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) is a chapter-based movement. It has already had major impact, and it includes care issues among its priorities.

Can several such organizations/movements build coalition to “revolutionize” our social formation, to disrupt capitalist, White supremacist, and patriarchal dynamics? Again, all I can say is that it’s *possible*.⁴⁹

Imagination is the creative divergence from the well trod habitual and lexical paths that are set in the common sense of a given time and place. Political imaginaries are very important and have all kinds of uses. We imagine communities. We imagine the good life. We imagine our futures. Pragmatic imagination also understands that the circumstances that currently condition our lives were also once imagined. In this way, imagination is a normal political faculty, its opening is useful for political change and its closure is useful for the maintenance of status quo relations of power and privilege. (Woodly 2022, 71-72)

8. Conclusion

In my three lectures, I have argued that societies are complex dynamic systems that maintain themselves while also changing. Such systems evolve as the result of the interaction of multiple internal dynamics, as well as inputs from the system’s environment. The internal dynamics include cultural “logics” of race/ethnicity, gender, capital, eugenics, politics, history, and more. The material environment includes weather/climate, the geography, other societies/systems, including complex biological systems such as our bodies. The interaction between internal and external forced result in a dynamic process that maintains itself, while also changing, without a central authority.

I have also argued that transformative social change need not aim to destroy the broad dynamic system that we are part of, but may occur by intervening in it to disrupt the durable reproduction of injustice. There is no guarantees that any particular intervention will shift us to a better stable

⁴⁹ It is striking that many texts on the politics of care either focus on policy changes or remain highly programmatic, e.g., Tronto 2015, Care Collective 2020. This is in contrast with Spade 2020.

equilibrium, but we can identify leverage points and shift incentives so that new practices, and so new structures, emerge.

In this lecture, I have argued that the subordination of women is deeply connected to a division of labor that relies on gender categories to distribute carework. I've suggested that although law and policy can make a difference, we should be working towards changing social norms, both as a way to accelerate change of policy and also to make a difference in the private domain. One important way to do this is to engage in chapter based network organizing, and work towards scaling it up so that the impact may be greater. But is mere *possibility* enough? Even broad collective action can have uncertain results.

I believe there is reason to hope, in a sense that Rebecca Solnit captures well:

Cause-and-effect assumes history marches forward, but history is not an army. It is a crab scuttling sideways, a drip of soft water wearing away stone, an earthquake breaking centuries of tension. Sometimes one person inspires a movement, or her words do decades later; sometimes a few passionate people change the world; sometimes they start a mass movement and millions do; sometimes those millions are stirred by the same outrage or the same ideal, and change comes upon us like a change of weather. All that these transformations have in common is that they begin in the imagination, in hope... I say all this because hope is not like a lottery ticket you can sit on the sofa and clutch, feeling lucky. I say it because hope is an ax you break down doors with in an emergency; because hope should shove you out the door, because it will take everything you have to steer the future away from endless war, from the annihilation of the earth's treasures and the grinding down of the poor and marginal. Hope just means another world might be possible, not promised, not guaranteed. Hope calls for action.... (2016) Chicago IL: Haymarket Books, Ch. 1.

I invite you all to become agents of possibility.

Acknowledgements:

There are many to thank for discussion of the issues in this lecture. Thanks to many who were part of the background for my interest in this work, including members of two reading groups I'm part of: the socialist feminist reading group and the structures/systems reading group. Thanks to the audience at the Benjamin Lecture in Berlin in June 2023; to the participants in a workshop at Ohio State University in February 2025, especially my commentator, Winston Thompson; and to the participants in the Workshop on Gender and Philosophy at MIT in August 2025. In addition, special thanks to Robin Celikates, Rachel Fraser, Sahar Heydari Fard, Rahel Jaeggi, Kristina Lepold, Elizabeth McDonald, Sonia Pavel, Livia Samson, Christian Schmidt, and Xin Hui Yong, for extensive discussion on the issues or for giving me comments on earlier drafts.

Works Cited

Agarwal, Bina. (1992). "The Gender and Environment Debate: Lessons from India." *Feminist Studies* 18(1): 119-158.

- Ambroz, David. (2022). *A Place Called Home*. New York: Legacy Lit.
- Anderson, Elizabeth. (1991). "John Stuart Mill and Experiments in Living." *Ethics* 102: 4-26.
- Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2025). "What Happens to Youth Aging out of Foster Care?" <https://www.aecf.org/blog/what-happens-to-youth-aging-out-of-foster-care>
- Barabási, Albert-László. (2002). *Linked: The New Science of Networks*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. (1997/1949). Trans. H. M. Parshley, *The Second Sex*. London: Vintage.
- Bhattacharya, Tithi. (2017). *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*. London: Pluto Press.
- Butler, Judith. (1993). *Bodies that Matter*. New York: Routledge.
- Care Collective. (2020). *The Care Manifesto*. London: Verso.
- Christakis, Nicholas and James Fowler. (2009). *Connected: The Surprising Power of Our Social Networks and How They Shape Our Lives -- How Your Friends' Friends' Friends Affect Everything You Feel, Think, and Do*. New York: Little, Brown.
- Crossley & Diani. (2019). "Networks and Fields." In David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, Hanspeter Kriesi, Holly J. McCammon, Eds. *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*. Ch. 8.
- Crutchfield, Leslie R. (2018.) *How Change Happens: Why Some Social Movements Succeed While Others Don't*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons.
- Delphy, Christine. (1984). *Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Dembroff, Robin. (2026, forthcoming). *Real Men on Top: How Patriarchy Shapes Our Reality*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Escobar, Arturo. (1998). "Whose Knowledge, Whose Nature? Biodiversity, Conservation, and the Political Ecology of Social Movements." *Journal of Political Ecology* 5(1): 53-82.
- Eswaran, Mukesh. (2014). *Why gender matters in economics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Federici, Silvia. (2019). "Social Reproduction Theory: History, Issues and Present Challenges" *Radical Philosophy* 204: 55-57.
- Folbre, Nancy. (2020). *The Rise and Decline of Patriarchal Systems: An Intersectional Political Economy*. London: Verso.
- Folbre, Nancy & Julie A. Nelson (2000). "For Love, or Money – Or Both?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 14(4):123–140.
- Frye, Marilyn. (1983). *The Politics of Reality*. The Crossing Press.
- Gladwell, Malcolm. September 27, 2010. "Small Change: The Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted." *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/10/04/small-change-malcolm-gladwell>
- Glenn, Evelyn Nakano. (1992). "From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor." *Signs* 18 (1): 1-43.

- _____. (2012). *Forced to Care: Coercion and Caregiving in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gupta, Devashree. (2017). *Protest Politics Today*. London: Verso.
- Haslanger, Sally. (2000). "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?" *Nous* 34 (1): 31–55 .
- _____. (2023). "Systemic and Structural Injustice: Is There a Difference?" *Philosophy* 98(1): 1-27.
- _____. (2015). "What is a (Social) Structural Explanation?" *Philosophical Studies* 173(1): 113-130.
- Heydari Fard, Sahar. (2021). *The Morality of Social Movements*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Cincinnati.
- _____. (2022). "Strategic Injustice, Dynamic Network Formation, and Social Movements." *Synthese* 200(5): 392.
- _____. (2024a). "Diversity, Polarization, and Dynamic Structures: A Structural Turn in Social Contract Theory." Michael Moehler and John Thrasher, ed., *New Approaches to Social Contract Theory: Liberty, Equality, Diversity, and the Open Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 101-122.
- _____. (2024b). "The Transformative Power of Social Movements." *Philosophy Compass* 19(1).
- Hoffecker, Elizabeth (2017). "Rethinking How Innovation Creates Development Impact." MIT D-Lab. <https://d-lab.mit.edu/news-blog/blog/rethinking-how-innovation-creates-development-impact>
- hooks, bell. (1984). *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*. Boston: South End Press.
- Kim, Hochan. (2024). *Emergent Disorders: Structure, Agency, and Injustice*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton University.
- Kittay, Eva. (2020). *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency*, 2nd edition. New York: Routledge.
- Lacroix, Travis & Cailin O'Connor. (2015). "Power by Association." *Ergo*.
- Laslett, Barbara & Johanna Brenner (1989). "Gender and Social Reproduction: Historical Perspectives." *Annual Review of Sociology* 15:381-404.
- Little, Becky. (2000). "When the 'Capitol Crawl' Dramatized the Need for Americans with Disabilities Act." *History*. A&E Global Media. <https://www.history.com/articles/americans-with-disabilities-act-1990-capitol-crawl>
- Lundburg, Shelly. (2008). "Gender and Household Decision Making." In Francesca Bettio and Alina Verashchagina (eds), *Frontiers in the Economics of Gender*. New York: Routledge, 116–134.
- McElroy, Margery B. (1990). "The Empirical Behavior of Nash-Bargained Household Behavior." *The Journal of Human Resources* 25(4): 559-583.
- O'Connor, Cailin. (2019). *The Origins of Unfairness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Ogden, Curtis. (2013). "Why Networks for Social Change?" Interaction Institute for Social Change. <https://interactioninstitute.org/why-networks-for-social-change/>
- Omerod, Paul. (2012). *Positive Linking: How Networks Can Revolutionize the World*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Ostrom, Elinor. (1990). *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pavel, Sonia Maria. (2025). "What Is a Social 'Logic'? Disentangling the Logic(s) of Capitalism." Manuscript.
- Payton, Dee. (2022). "System Caging." Manuscript. Presented at the Workshop on Gender and Philosophy, MIT.
- Ransby, Barbara. Oct. 21, 2017. "Black Lives Matter is Democracy in Action." *NY Times*: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/21/opinion/sunday/black-lives-matter-leadership.html>
- Roberts, Dorothy. (2022). *Torn Apart: How the Child Welfare System Destroys Black Families – And How Abolition Can Build a Safer World*. New York: Basic Books.
- Roberts, Neil. (2015). *Freedom as Marronage*. Chicago University Press.
- Robeyns, Ingrid. (2017). *Wellbeing, Freedom, and Social Justice: The Capability Approach Re-Examined*. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers.
- Rowson, Jonathan, Steve Broome, & Alisdair Jones. (2010). "Connected Communities." RSA Projects.
- Solnit, Rebecca. (2016). *Hope in the Dark*. Chicago: Haymarket.
- Spade, Dean. (2020). "Solidarity, not Charity: Mutual Aid for Mobilization and Survival." *Social Text* 142 38(1): 131-151.
- Sterelny, Kim. (2012). *The Evolved Apprentice*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Taylor, Astra and Leah Hunt-Hendriks. (2024). *Solidarity: The Past, Present, and Future of a World Changing Idea*. New York: Penguin-Random House (Pantheon).
- Treas, J. & Drobnic S. (2010). *Dividing the Domestic: Men, Women, and Household Work in Cross-National Perspective*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Tronto, Joan. (2015). *Who Cares? How to Reshape Democratic Politics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Utrata, Jennifer. (2011). "Youth Privilege: Doing Age and Gender in Russia's Single-Mother Families." *Gender & Society* 25(5): 616-641.
- Ventura, Rafael. (2022). "Structural Inequality in Collaboration Networks." *Philosophy of Science* 1-28.
- Watkins, Aja & Rory Smead. (2020). Review of Cailin O'Connor's *The Origins of Unfairness*. *Economics & Philosophy* 36(2): 324-330.
- Woodly, Deva. (2022). *Reckoning: Black Lives Matter and the Democratic Necessity of Social Movements*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wright, Erik Olin. July 2009 draft. *Envisioning Real Utopias*.

<https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=8e57fa3987416ccf5e2b4c38564425235eba8d12>

Young, Iris M. (1990). *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press.

Zechner, Manuela and Bue Rübner Hansen. (2015). “Building Power in a Crisis of Social Reproduction.” *Roar* 0: 7-?? <https://roarmag.org/magazine/building-power-crisis-social-reproduction/>