

## Book Review

### *Care Work: Gender, Labor and the Welfare State*

Edited by Madonna Harrington Meyer  
New York and London: Routledge, 2000, 348 pp.  
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Although many of the essays in *Care Work* are focused exclusively on the United States, several are explicitly comparative and the issues discussed will be familiar to those concerned with care throughout industrialized societies. The essays are excellent and provide a valuable resource for anyone concerned with the current logic and organization of care.

Home care is not the primary focus of this volume. However, issues of care are increasingly being debated in the context of provision of services outside of institutional settings. This change of setting challenges all notions of the relationship of care to professional work and to traditional, gendered, family life. Many of the essays in *Care Work* are centred on these two incomparable spheres. Deborah Stone's contribution, "Curing by the Book," focuses on the conflict between getting the caring tasks done and the more central but amorphous aspects of care. She writes, "The essential elements of care can be squeezed out by the norms and rules of work in the public world. Talk gets displaced by tasks and is no longer a fully legitimate part of care. Love is taboo; detachment is correct. The idea of a client being special is wrong in the moral culture that defines fairness as treating everyone the same. Patience, the sense of devoting as much time as a person needs, is impossible when care becomes systematized and caregivers work on schedule" (p. 110). Stone's argument seems to be that such dilemmas are irresolvable. Francesca Cancian is slightly more optimistic in her contribution, "Paid Emotional Work." Cancian's research suggests that the institutional settings in which care is organized can determine whether the emotional elements of care are included, and how thoroughly they are treated.

A major theme of this book is how care is transformed when the boundary between public and private care is eroded. As Clare Ungerson succinctly puts it, "The dualism of paid and unpaid work is

dissolving...welfare states are searching for ways to underwrite the provision of care within households and kin networks through cash subvention given both to caregivers and to care recipients. The consequence is the marketization of intimacy and the commodification of care" (p. 69).

This commodification of care — the subsidization of family workers to provide care — is part of a general pattern as welfare states implement measures designed to contain costs. Attempts to curb rising state budgets for the provision of care result in care being increasingly forced out of the public domain. Once pushed back into the home, however, it is subject to the same cost-control pressures, as described by Trude Knijn in her account, "Marketing and the Struggling Logics of (Home) Care in the Netherlands." Alternatively, the state may simply divest itself of any responsibility for the delivery of care, so that it must be provided in the home by default. Since nursing homes are reluctant to take Medicaid patients, explain Madonna Harrington Meyer and Michelle Kesterke Storbakken in "Shifting the Burden Back to Families?", the result is a two-class system in which the poor are relegated to home care.

In raising such questions, this collection explores issues of race, class, and ethnicity. Mary Tuominen, in her account of child care, explores questions of class, race, and gender. African-American grandparents who take care of cocaine-exposed children are the subject of an essay by Assata Zerai. Many of the contributions also make it clear that when public care becomes heavily reliant on home care, less well-off individuals will receive poorer care. Robert Frost's familiar verse can increasingly be seen as describing the public provision of care: "Home is the place where, when you have to go there/They have to take you in." As long as neoliberals can revert to an image of care as a private concern, the more thoroughly class will determine who gives and receives adequate care.

"Home" is becoming the site of professional and semi-formal work and care. This collection of essays contains some of the best current thinking on the ways in which the boundaries between public and private care are being blurred.

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