CHAPTER 1

Caring: a labour of love

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Introduction

This chapter examines what caring means and what caring entails. Clearly, what it means to care for someone and what it entails are closely related, but they are not synonymous. The two aspects are distinguished at the outset because both need to be confronted and confronted together, if we are better to understand the nature of caring in Western society.

Caring is not something which can be neatly defined, not even by the redoubtable Oxford dictionary. However, in broad terms, it is a concept encompassing that range of human experiences which have to do with feeling concern for, and taking charge of, the well-being of others. This definition alerts us immediately to the question of meanings and entailments: 'feeling concern' and 'taking charge' have both psychological and material implications. As the chapters in this book testify, the experience of caring touches simultaneously on who you are and what you do.

Caring, although a difficult concept to define, is clearly a central one for social policy. On the one hand, the experience of caring and being cared for is intimately bound up with the way we define ourselves and our social relations. On the other, caring is an integral part of the process by which society reproduces itself, and maintains the physical and mental health of its work force.

Recognising these two dimensions is central to the analysis presented in this chapter. It suggests that caring demands both love and labour, both identity and activity, with the

nature of the demands being shaped by the social relations of the wider society. In gender-divided societies like ours, caring tends to have particular consequences for the identity and activity of women.

Recognising the multi-dimensional nature of caring is relatively straightforward: it is building an analysis around it which is the problem. Whether defined as an identity or an activity, the experience of caring slips between the tight conceptual categories of the social sciences. Such categories were fashioned for the new social relations of nineteenth-century capitalism, social relations built upon changes in the organisation of caring. Yet, significantly, they obscured both these changes in the rearing of children, in household labour, in the care of the sick and the old, and the underlying system of gender divisions on which the new patterns of caring were based. As Margaret Stacey has noted, a conceptual framework which separates reproduction from production, private from public, home from work, leisure from labour will inevitably fail to confront experiences which transcend such divisions (Stacey, 1981).

The nature of caring, and the nature of the concepts through which social scientists have comprehended it, constitute two distinct but related problems which this chapter attempts to tackle. It has to face, firstly, the fact that caring is simultaneously about our material existence and about our consciousness. It has to face, secondly, the deficiency of a scientific apparatus which is blind to the very phenomena we wish to make visible.

It is problems such as these that feminist analysis seeks to overcome. Building upon the shared experiences of women, it has begun to uncover—and to make sense of—phenomena which have remained 'hidden from history' (Rowbotham, 1973; Smith, 1974). Much of this work—on family relationships and family responsibilities, on the impact of children and the onset of old age—bears directly on the question of caring (for example, Leonard Barker and Allen, 1976; Mitchell and Oakley, 1976; Burman, 1979).

These studies suggest that, whatever the problems professionals face when talking about caring, it is a term which permeates our ordinary accounts of everyday life. It structures

our conversations about our friends and lovers: it is central to the way we think about our family (Stacey and Price, 1981, p. 186). Conversations, too, about encounters with the welfare state, as workers and as clients, are often conversations about caring (Jordan, 1976, chapter 5).

Working from and within this everyday familiarity with the concept of caring, the chapter advances its argument in four sections. The first section defines the everyday experience of caring as a labour of love. The next two sections examine the way in which social scientists have represented the love and the labour of caring, the second section drawing from the psychological literature and the third section outlining some of the insights provided by recent research within social policy. The final section, summarising the contributions and limitations of these two approaches, lays out some ground-rules for the construction of an alternative analysis of caring.

Caring: a labour of love

Everyday conversations about caring are generally recognised to be conversations about feelings. When we talk about 'caring' for someone, we are talking about our emotions. Where the word 'love' seems inappropriate, we choose the words 'care for' to convey a sense of the bonds which tie us to our friends, our lovers, our children, our parents, our clients, our patients.

Caring, in this sense of feelings, is seen as a basic human emotion. All normal people want to, and expect to, experience it. 'Caring too much' may be, as the song says, 'just a juvenile fancy' but none the less, as another tells us, we all want 'someone, somewhere, someone who'll care (and take a chance with me)'. Although a universal need, only certain social relations are seen to facilitate the giving and receiving of care. In general, caring relationships are those involving women: it is the presence of a woman—as wife, mother, daughter, neighbour, friend—which marks out a relationship as, potentially at least, a caring one. As those involved with the handicapped and the elderly know, caring—whether in the home, the community or the hospital—depends upon

women (Doyal, 1979; Finch and Groves, 1980; Parker, 1981). Male relationships, by contrast, are seen to be mediated in a different way, with the bonds—ostensibly at least—based not upon compassion but on competition (Chodorow, 1978).

Caring tends to be associated not only with women, but with those private places where intimate relations with women are found. Specifically caring is associated with the home and family. As Margaret Stacey and Marion Price note, 'the values of tenderness and care are present and are permissible in the family more than elsewhere' (1981, p. 180). By contrast, relations contracted within the labour-market are seen to engender a degree of social distance incompatible with the giving of care. There are exceptions, of course; occupations where 'the woman's touch' has been formally incorporated into the job specification. These occupations, interestingly, have a special designation: they are the 'caring professions' in which the workforce is largely female (Oakley, 1981, pp. 155-8). In nursing, social work and primary school teaching, social relations are mediated through care, with, as Margaret Adams points out (Adams, 1971, p. 558):

> the synthesizing function traditionally discharged by women . . . translated to a wider sphere beyond the home . . . Instead of (or in addition to) keeping the family intact and maximally functional, women become involved in housekeeping tasks on behalf of society at large.

The image of caring-as-feelings clearly speaks to an important aspect of our experience. We *do* care for a few people in a way which is different from the more instrumental relationships dominating most of our lives. But it is not feelings alone which distinguish these special relations. Caring involves the transaction, too, of goods and services. The caring relationships women enter into—with husbands, children, parents, clients—are built on material as well as symbolic bonds. Caring, as carers have testified through history, is experienced as a labour of love in which the labour must continue even where the love falters (*Oral History*, 1977; EOC, 1981; Spring Rice 1981).

The dual nature of caring—as labour and as love—is reflected in the social science literature. However, here the

two dimensions are treated separately. The material aspects of caring have been studied (albeit only recently) within social policy: psychologists, meanwhile, have explored its emotional significance. This disciplinary division has certain advantages. By highlighting the labour involved in caring, it has been possible to quantify the economic contribution of the caring role (EOC, 1981; Nelson, 1980). Recent research has documented how this role locks both carer and cared-for into positions of dependency, positions which the welfare state serves to institutionalise rather than alleviate (Walker, 1980; Finch and Groves, 1982). Meanwhile, psychological research has uncovered the emotional consequences of caring. Psychologists, of disarmingly different political persuasions, concur that caring is not just another work-role carved up for women in the sexual division of labour. Caring, they contend, is the constitutive activity through which women achieve their femininity and against which masculinity takes shape (Horney 1932; Baker Miller 1976; Chodorow, 1978). Any material contribution that caring might make to the maintenance of capitalism and patriarchy is thus seen as incidental to its role in the construction of women's psychology.

The disciplinary separation has inevitable limitations, however, narrowing both the range and depth of our understanding. The psychological perspective sees caring as the mechanism through which the consciousness of women and men is recreated generation by generation: but as a result, it has tended to ignore the economic and political forces which determine that consciousness in the first place. Conversely, within social policy, the opposite tendency is detectable, with psychology subordinated to economics. Caring, stripped of its symbolic role in the construction of women's identity, is reduced to the obligatory transaction of goods and services which occurs within the patriarchal family. Caring, here, tends to be defined as an act of female sacrifice and supreme selflessness, not, as many psychologists would argue, as the primary process through which both a sense of self and a sense of self-fulfilment is achieved.

Caring as women's nature: psychological perspectives on caring

This section outlines some of the psychological literature which addresses, directly or indirectly, the role of caring in gender socialisation. It is necessarily highly selective, aiming to indicate directions and tendencies within work on women's psychology rather than providing an authoritative account of work in the discipline as a whole.

Central to the psychological paradigm is the view that caring can not be reduced to a labour process—a problem inherent in recent attempts to categorise and qualify the components of caring (see EOC, 1981, and Parker, 1981). Its significance lies instead in its psychological affinity with femininity; in the fact that the qualities demanded of care-givers—a sensitivity to the needs of others, an ability to wait, watch and adapt as these needs change—are the qualities displayed by women in Western society.

This intimate relationship between caring and femininity is viewed not simply as an aspect or outcome of the sexual division of labour within the family. It is, Horney and De Beauvoir would argue, the organising principle around which it is built (Horney, 1932; De Beauvoir, 1972). 'Caring' becomes the category through which one sex is differentiated from the other. Caring is 'given' to women: it becomes the defining characteristic of their self-identity and their life's work. At the same time, caring is taken away from men: not-caring becomes a defining characteristic of manhood. Men are marked out as separate to and different from women because they are not involved in caring for (and with) others. Their sense of self is achieved by doing things for (and by) themselves (Chodorow, 1978).

The suggestion that caring is the concept which marks the boundaries between female and male is embodied in the psychologists' distinction between 'being' and 'doing' (Chodorow, 1971). 'Being' is a concept which encapsulates the other-directed but essentially passive nature of femininity; 'doing', conversely, captures the self-directed and active nature of masculinity. According to Karen Horney, for example, femininity is something a woman acquires through her sexual relations with men—and specifically through

copulation, conception and childbearing. In this relationship, 'she performs her part by merely *being*, without any doing' (1932, p. 359, italics in original). Masculinity, by contrast, must be actively achieved: the mechanics of sex and reproduction demands that 'the man has to *do* something in order to fulfill himself' (ibid., italics in original). Simone de Beauvoir and Margaret Mead see the division between 'being' and 'doing' reflected in social as well as the sexual arena. De Beauvoir notes, somewhat ruefully, that the young boy enters into the public domain to do productive work and become wealthy ('he will be a seaman or an engineer, he will . . . go away to the city, he will see the world, he will get rich, he will feel free', 1972, p. 325). Meanwhile his sister remains within the restrictive private domain, condemned to a non-productive life of inactivity chosen not by herself, but by others.

> The young girl will be a wife, a grandmother; she will keep house just as her mother did, she will give her children the same care she received when young—she is twelve years old and already her story is written in the heavens. She will discover it day after day without ever making it.
>
> (De Beauvoir, 1972, p. 325).

Mead develops a similar argument, but stresses the costs as well as the benefits accruing to men. Women's caring role gives them a 'simple sureness' in their sexual identity, while masculinity has to be 'kept and re-earned every day'. As a result, boys, unlike girls, live in fear of becoming 'unsexed by failure' (Mead, 1949, p. 303).

Although highlighting the obvious differences in the life-styles and life-chances of the sexes, these explanations of women's psychology reproduce many of the ideological assumptions we need to question. A typology which separates doing from being, working from caring, represents little more than reworking of the traditional distinction between men-who-make and women-who-mend. According to this tradition, men are defined through their relation to the labour market, by specifying their occupation (or lack of it). Women, by contrast, are introduced in less universalistic terms, through their caring relationships—as Bill's wife and Ben's mother. As George Eliot put it in *The Mill on the Floss*, 'you don't ask

what a lady does, you ask who she belongs to.'

However, instead of questioning this traditional division of labour, psychologists have tended to base their analyses upon it. As a result, they misrepresent and trivialise the nature of women's role. Caring and femininity are defined within the narrow confines of marriage and motherhood, where women are seen to achieve their state of being through their relationships with their husbands and children. However, women's dependent status is determined by economic as well as psychic forces; forces which extend beyond the marital home into a network of caring relationships within the extended family and the community (McIntosh, 1981, and the chapters in this volume by Walker and by Groves and Finch). A woman's experiences and identity as a carer are increasingly moulded not through her involvement with the able-bodied members of the immediate nuclear family but through the services she provides for the sick, the elderly and the handicapped (Parker, 1981; EOC, 1982a). A theoretical model which explains women's predisposition to care in psychological terms inevitably masks the possibility that it is not a product of an enduring feminine personality, but results from the particular way in which reproduction (in its broadest sense) is organised in our society.

Secondly, psychological accounts obscure the labour-intensive and highly stressful nature of the caring role. For example, like Simone de Beauvoir, Margaret Adams, in an otherwise-excellent account of women's psychology, argued that caring locks women into 'self-defeating trivialities' which deprive society of 'the vital and significant contributions that women might make' (Adams, 1971, p. 536). However, as empirical studies testify, caring—whether for husbands and children, or for those outside the nuclear family—is far from trivial and insignificant. It is moreover, an activity where questions of success are constantly raised, and women can indeed feel 'unsexed by failure' (Graham, 1982).

The distinction between 'doing' and 'being' misrepresents the nature of women's caring role in a third way. It masks the way in which the categories through which we define gender are social constructs and not psychological entities. What counts as caring is determined as much by who does it as by

what is done. Non-work labels, like 'child care' and 'keeping house', tend to be attached to the contributions which those in subordinate positions make to society: 'work' and, in particular, 'skilled work' are terms reserved for the activities of men. As Anne Phillips and Barbara Taylor note, such labels should be seen as ideological categories 'imposed on certain types of work by virtue of the sex and power of the workers who perform it' (1980, p. 79). None the less, caring remains unique in largely remaining outside commodity production, as a form of labour with only limited possibilities for the specialisation and mechanisation on which profit-making depends.

Jean Baker Miller and Nancy Chodorow have attempted to provide alternative perspectives on caring which take account of the ideological and economic context in which it occurs (Baker Miller, 1976; Chodorow, 1978). Baker Miller, for example, suggests that it is through their subordinate position that women acquire their psychological predisposition to care: female sensitivity, empathy and compassion are qualities finely adapted for survival in a male-dominated society. Women 'become highly attuned to the dominants, able to predict their reactions of pleasure and displeasure. Here . . . is where the long story of "feminine intuition" begins' (Baker Miller, 1976, p. 11). Although devalued, Baker Miller suggests that these are qualities on which a more caring society can be built (1976, p. 57):

> Women have traditionally built a sense of self-worth on activities that they can manage to define as taking care of and giving to others. If they can convince themselves that they are doing a good job that can be defined in this way, then they can accomplish tremendous things.

Nancy Chodorow adopts a more explicitly psychoanalytic approach. Unlike Baker Miller, she argues that the caring role is not reproduced directly through the processes of male domination. It is reproduced by women themselves, through the dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship. In caring for children, women recreate the personality types we associate with masculinity and femininity. The care a mother gives her daughter lays down the needs and capacities for her to care

for others in later life. The care she gives her son produces the personality characteristics needed for participation and success in the uncaring world beyond the home (Chodorow, 1978, pp. 167, 160):

> Girls emerge . . . with a basis for 'empathy' built into their primary definition of self in a way that boys do not. Girls emerge with a stronger basis for experiencing another's needs or feelings as one's own. From very early, because they are parented by a person of the same gender, girls come to experience themselves as . . . more continuous with and related to the external object-world. . . . Boys come to define themselves as more separate and distinct, with a great sense of rigid ego boundaries. The basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate.

In Chodorow's account, as in Baker Miller's, caring is identified as an activity intimately connected to the male-dominated society in which it is embedded. (As Chodorow notes, 'the sexual division of labour and women's responsibility for child care are linked to and generate male dominance', 1978, p. 214.) However, problems still remain. Caring can not be explained wholly in terms of psychodynamics—whether located within the mother-child relationship (Chodorow) or the relationship between dominant and subordinate (Baker Miller). The caring role has more complex origins. It is constructed through a network of social and economic relations, within both the home and the workplace, in which women take responsibility for meeting the emotional and material needs not only of husbands and children, but of the elderly, the handicapped, the sick and the unhappy. Further, as Janet Sayers argues, psychological accounts of women's role tend to assert not simply the value of caring but the value of femininity itself, an assertion which can quickly slip into an acceptance of the popular assumption that women and men enjoy 'equality in difference'. In so doing, they encourage a celebration of the ideological arrangements which support women's subordination (Sayers, 1982).

Caring as women's work: social policy perspectives on caring

A reconception of caring is central to the contemporary reconstruction of women's psychology. It is central, too, to the broader project of developing a feminist perspective on women's position in society. The key to such a perspective is seen to lie in an understanding of the nature of the family (McIntosh, 1979). Here, the concept of caring is regarded as fundamental in two respects. Firstly, as the previous section indicated, caring-by-mothers is identified as the process by which the construction of gender takes place: it is the way men and women emerge as different kinds of human beings. Secondly, caring-by-wives-and-mothers is seen as the mechanism by which families are reconstituted on a daily basis. It is the provision of high quality and unpaid care within the home which keep the family going. These two dimensions, the construction of gender and the maintenance of the family, are closely interrelated. The family—or, more precisely, the gender categories of husband, wife, son, daughter, grandfather, grandmother which make up the family—is sustained by the caring-work of women. This family unit, in turn, provides the structure in which caring is carried out: in which children are nurtured, husbands sustained, and the elderly and handicapped supported.

While psychologists explain the sexual divisions within the family in terms of psycho-dynamic needs, feminists working within social policy see the division between men-who-do and women-who-care as reflecting the needs of the wider society. The social forces at work, however, are complex and cross-cutting. The social and spatial separation of production (doing-in-the-workplace) from reproduction (caring-in-the-home) is linked to the rise of capitalism and its attendant separation of 'breadwinners' and 'dependants'. However, the logic of capitalism alone does not explain why these divisions coincide with those of gender (Breugel, 1978; Hartmann, 1979). It does not explain why caring should be 'women's work', why the home should be 'women's place', why women should be appendages and men their breadwinners. To understand the 'gendered' nature of caring, we need to confront the pre-existing sexual division of labour on which and in

which the new forms of economic organisation developed.

Where this is done, hidden dimensions are revealed within our social world (Leonard Barker and Allen, 1976; Land, 1978). The institutions most centrally involved in caring—the family, the community and the state—take on a different form. They emerge not as monoliths, solidly uniform and sexless, existing 'out there' in the social fabric, but as social structures which carry within them the class and gender relations of a social order which is both capitalist and patriarchal. 'The family', for example, long seen by social scientists as the privatised form of care necessary for 'the economy' to function efficiently, is recast not simply as the setting for group consumption within capitalist societies, but as the locus of gender struggle (Hartmann, 1981). Individuals within the family are redefined both as family members, sharing a unity of interests, and as members of gender categories with different and often competing interests. Thus, family life for men may well provide an identity which frees them from the alienation they experience at work. For women, this alternative identity often proves less liberating since it is achieved only by subjugating themselves to the needs of their family (Foreman, 1977).

Similarly the concept of dependency, although carrying no apparent gender-tag, has a very different meaning for men and women. Dependency is seen as a condition created through the processes of capitalist expansion, in which increasing sections of the population are displaced from the labour market to rely for their livelihood upon the family and the state (cf. Walker, in this volume). However, like the concepts of the family and the state to which it is crucially linked, the nature of dependency can not be understood in isolation from the sex-gender system. Some categories of dependent children, for example, receive care and support but give no tangible benefits in kind. However, for women, the experience of dependency is more contradictory. Their dependent status—as housewives, mothers, dutiful daughters—is not absolute, but is conditional upon their being simultaneously depended upon by others. Thus, for many women, being a dependant is synonymous not with receiving care, but with giving it (Finch and Groves, 1982). For children, and for

men, economic dependency and poverty is the cost of being cared for: for women, economic dependency and poverty is the cost of caring.

These two examples can only hint at the complex processes involved in the social organisation of caring. What they suggest, however, is that an understanding of caring requires a fundamental reassessment of both the institutions of caring (the family, the community, the state) and the conditions to which they give rise (dependency, poverty, powerlessness). In this reassessment, caring emerges not so much as an expression of women's natural feelings of compassion and connectedness, as the psychological analyses suggest, but as an expression of women's position within a particular kind of society in which the twin forces of capitalism and patriarchy are at work. Caring, it appears, describes more than the universal feelings women have: it describes the specific kind of labour they perform in our society.

In what ways does this perspective sharpen our understanding? Firstly, it suggests that caring is not simply something women do for themselves, to achieve their femininity. It is something women do for others, to keep them alive. As Margery Spring Rice's study of working-class wives documents, women care so their husbands and children can survive (Spring Rice 1981, p. 106):

> Her husband *must* be fed as upon him depends the first of all necessities, money. The children must be fed. Equally husband and children must be clothed, not only fairly warmly but, for school or work, fairly decently. Naturally they suffer from the poverty of the home, the lack of sufficient food and clothes and warmth and comfort, but it is undoubtedly true that . . . the mother will be the first to do without.

The extent to which caring is a labour which ensures life, as much as an emotion which expresses love, is apparent in those relationships where the recipient of care is disabled. The 1981 EOC report describes the experiences of those who care for elderly and handicapped dependants, where 'life' is something bartered between carer and cared-for. 'It is 24-hour care. I do everything for her, wash, bake, iron, shop, cook.

It's destroyed my life absolutely. My normal life is finished' (EOC, 1981, p. 17).

Secondly, as this study indicates, caring relationships are not the exclusive preserve of the 'healthy' nuclear family. Women organise and reorganise their lives to meet the needs of parents and relatives who grow older, husbands who become incapacitated and handicapped children who move into adulthood.

Thirdly, as empirical studies of the elderly and handicapped reveal, the 'daily grind' of caring cannot be defined in abstract. What is demanded of carers is determined by the perceived capabilities of the dependant and the provision of resources and services outside the family. Both these in turn are shaped by the economic and ideological climate in which the needs of dependants and the responsibilities of carers are defined. This climate, as we know, is currently changing rapidly, and with it, the labour that women perform as the carers of children and husbands, the sick, the handicapped and the elderly (CIS, 1981).

Caring is thus experienced as an unspecific and unspecifiable kind of labour, the contours of which shift constantly. Since it aims, like so much women's work, 'to make cohesive what is often fragmentary and disintegrating', it is only visible when it is not done (Adams, 1971, p. 559; Graham, 1982). As Adrienne Rich notes, caring is an unending labour characterised by 'its attention to small chores, errands, work that others constantly undo, small children's constant needs' (Rich, 1980, p. 43).

Fourthly, caring is not only a diffuse and unbounded form of labour, it is also a privatised one. Although springing from the co-operative nature of women's psyche, it is one which typically remains unseen and unspoken. It is something women do as an expression of their connectedness with others, yet is something they invariably do alone. Caring, in our society, demands the adoption of a life-style which isolates the carer (and frequently the cared-for) from the outside world. Home, as the setting in which most caring is carried out, becomes not so much a haven from the rigours of the labour market, as a prison. Again, Margery Spring Rice captures the realities of caring (1981, pp. 105, 106):

> the working mother is almost entirely cut off from contact with the world outside her house. She eats, sleeps, 'rests' on the scene of her labour, and her labour is entirely solitary. . . Whatever the emotional compensations, whatever her devotion, her family creates her labour, and tightens the bonds that tie her to the lonely and narrow sphere of 'home'.

Although Spring Rice describes the domestic situation of carers, escaping into employment does not necessarily remove 'the coercion of privacy' (Dahl and Snare, 1978). A woman's paid work is often the market equivalent of her unpaid work at home. The growth of service-sector employment has involved the transfer of many of the more highly specialised aspects of caring from the home, with the result that in secretarial and clerical work, in nursing, teaching and social work, the woman finds again 'her self always in response to others—an unending, unspecific task of helping, nurturing, educating, supporting' (Garrett, 1977, p. 22). As a result, women often confront in their roles outside the home, the very demands which oppress them within it (Adams, 1971, pp. 558, 559):

> Both family and professional commitments incorporate the insidious notion that the needs, demands and difficulties of other people should be women's major, if not exclusive, concern and that meeting these must take precedence over all other claims . . .

A conception of caring-as-women's-work clearly advances our thinking in a number of ways. We can appreciate its economic and ideological nature, as a labour which, although essential for survival, is invisible, devalued and privatised. However, in its emphasis on the structural forces at work, such a perspective can quickly lose sight of the personal significance of caring. Stripped of the emotional bonds which encompass it, caring becomes redefined as 'tending', 'the actual work of looking after those who, temporarily or permanently, cannot do so for themselves' (Parker, 1981, p. 17). But caring is more than this: a kind of domestic labour performed on people. It can't be 'cleaned up' into such

categories without draining the relationship between carer and cared-for of the dimension we most need to confront. Caring cannot be understood objectively and abstractly, but only as a subjective experience in which we are all, for better or worse, involved.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to draw the boundaries around the concept of caring. It has been suggested that caring defines a specific type of social relationship based upon both affection and service, and, moreover, that these two interlocking transactions have been carefully dismantled by social scientists, and reconstructed within the separate disciplinary domains of psychology and social policy. In this process of reconstruction, the everyday experience of caring as a labour of love has been lost: left stranded between the scientific frameworks into which other social phenomena apparently fit so well.

The two frameworks identified in the chapter are—inevitably—crudely drawn. However, they do alert us to the nature of the empirical and theoretical material which addresses, albeit obliquely, the question of caring. Fundamental to the two perspectives is a distinction between two types of social relationship. These social relationships are defined in gender terms. One is prototypically female, and here caring, as either a psychological or material transaction, is present. In the other, 'caring' is replaced by 'doing', a concept seen to define a prototypically male relationship to the social world. From this common starting-point, the perspectives diverge: tracing the origins of the gender division to the needs of the personality system on the one hand and the socio-economic system on the other.

Both perspectives, it is argued, offer a reified picture of caring. The psychological studies tell us what caring means in emotional terms, but not in material terms. By neglecting the material basis of caring, an aspect so central to the understanding of gender relations, the psychological perspective is seen to run dangerously close to essentialism, to an argument that caring reflects women's biological nature and women's

psychic needs. As Sayers observes, this perspective ends up legitimating the status quo, a status quo built around the glorification of the specific and special kinds of relations which women have with the social world (Sayers, 1982). The more recent work within social policy, particularly that initiated by marxist-feminist writers, has corrected this tendency by focusing on caring (and dependency) as a political and economic relation supported by the wider system of gender divisions. In spelling out the material benefits for the state, this work has highlighted the exploitation of women's labour on which the present organisation of family care rests. In so doing it tends to underplay the symbolic bonds that hold the caring relationship together. The roots of people's deep resistance to the socialisation of care is thus lost. Whether provided through the institutions of the state or through the intervention of 'good neighbours' in the community, both carers and their dependants recognise that the substitute services are not 'care', since they lack the very qualities of commitment and affection which transform caring-work into a life-work, a job into a duty. As Finch and Groves note, a feminist analysis which reveals the exploitative nature of the caring relationship still leaves us with the question 'would you put your sister into care?' (Finch and Groves, 1982).

Such unanswered questions are the inevitable result of a piecemeal approach to caring, in which labour and love are analysed separately. They relate, too, to a more fundamental problem. It is possible, as in other areas of the social world, that, in fragmenting the experience of caring into its two constituent parts, that its most distinctive and most compelling qualities have been lost. Although the process of retrieval has begun, there is still little empirical evidence on which to build an alternative perspective.

As a beginning, this chapter has argued that caring is experienced as a labour of love. Unlike the labour-contracts negotiated through the cash-nexus, caring is a work-role whose form and content is shaped (and continually reshaped) by our intimate social and sexual relationships. This work-role, moreover, provides the basis on which women negotiate their entrée into these intimate relationships and into the wider structures—of the community, the state and the

economy--which surround them.

What this chapter argues is that the experience of caring is the medium through which women are accepted into and feel they belong in the social world. It is the medium through which they gain admittance into both the private world of the home and the public world of the labour market. It is through caring in an informal capacity--as mothers, wives, daughters, neighbours, friends--and through formal caring--as nurses, secretaries, cleaners, teachers, social workers--that women enter and occupy their place in society.

If this understanding of the experience of caring is correct, then it suggests that we must begin our analysis by recognising that caring defines both the identity and the activity of women in Western society. It defines what it feels like to be a woman in a male-dominated and capitalist social order. Men negotiate their social position through something recognised as 'doing', doings based on 'knowledge' which enables them to 'think' and to engage in 'skilled work'. Women's social position is negotiated through a different kind of activity called 'caring', a caring informed not by knowledge but by 'intuition' through which women find their way into 'unskilled' jobs. Thus, caring is not something on the periphery of our social order; it marks the point at which the relations of capital and gender intersect. It should be the place we begin, and not end our analysis of modern society. As Stacey notes (1981, p. 189):

> We shall never be able to understand the social processes going on around us so long as we tacitly or overtly deny the part played by the givers and receivers of 'care' and 'service', the victims of socialisation processes, the unpaid labourers in the processes of production and reproduction.