SOCIOLOGY Vol. 25 No. 1 February 1991
061–078

THE CONCEPT OF CARING IN FEMINIST RESEARCH: THE CASE OF DOMESTIC SERVICE

HILARY GRAHAM

Abstract Over the last decade, a significant body of feminist research has developed which has home-based reproduction as its focus. Strategically placed at the interface of sociology and social policy, this literature has had a significant impact on wider debates about everyday social reproduction. Yet, it has remained largely uncritiqued. Recognising the lack of critical debate, the paper reviews the way in which the concept of caring has been theorised within British feminist research. It suggests that caring has been typically defined by feminist researchers as the unpaid work of kin within the private domain of their family. Gender is seen as the dominant system of social relations which shapes the organisation of such care. Thus, rather than a broad structural analysis of everyday reproduction within families, most feminist research on caring has been restricted to one form of care (unpaid care by relatives) and one structural division (gender). The way in which racial and class divisions are embedded in everyday reproductive work has been largely eclipsed. Drawing on the critiques of Black women writers, the paper highlights forms of, and divisions within, home-based reproduction obscured in past and present feminist research on caring. It takes domestic service as a case-study which highlights how the social divisions of 'race' and class, as well as gender, have been constituted through women's experiences of looking after families.

Introduction: the concept of care within policy and research

The paper is concerned with re-searching, in its literal sense of 'looking again at', the way in which one aspect of social reproduction has been defined and theorised within British sociology and social policy over the last decade. It is concerned with the day-to-day reproductive work of households. Among the range of concepts that have been introduced to describe such work, it is the concept of care that has gained most widespread currency within the policy and research literature.

The concept of care has figured centrally in policy debates since the 1970s. A new set of terms – informal care, carer, caring networks – have entered the policy vocabulary to describe the organisation of care outside institutions (like long-stay wards of hospitals, and state and private residential homes) and within households (DHSS 1981; Social Services Committee 1985; Wagner 1988; Griffiths 1988). At first glance, these terms appear to signal a broad concern with the reproductive work that goes on within families and communities. However, the new vocabulary has a more restrictive focus around the

Downloaded from soc.sagepub.com at Apollo Group - UOP on February 1, 2015

from the SAGE Social Science Collections. All Rights Reserved.

unpaid care, and the unpaid carers, of those who might otherwise require institutional care. Thus, carers are those caring at home for children and adults who are ill, physically disabled or have severe learning difficulties, together with those caring for frail older people (see DHSS 1981; Green 1988; Griffiths 1988; Wagner 1988).

Tracking the growth of political interest, there has been a rapid development of sociological research concerned with the organisation of care within households. Feminism has provided a significant current within, and resource for, this body of research. Through a series of theoretical and empirical studies, feminist researchers have argued for a structural analysis of everyday care which highlights its base within the wider system of social divisions. Specifically, feminist researchers have suggested that the ideology and practice of informal care rests on and reinforces a sexual division of labour which leaves women responsible for the day-to-day work of keeping families going (for example, Finch and Groves 1980 and 1983; Graham 1985; Ungerson 1987; Lewis and Meredith 1988; Dalley 1988). These studies, in turn, has opened up a small but significant inter-disciplinary field of research 'on caring'. Located at the interface of sociology and social policy, the field has provided a foothold and a focus both for the development of British feminist scholarship, and for the development of comparative feminist analyses within Western Europe and the United States (for example, Finch and Groves 1983; Holter 1984; Lewin and Olesen 1985).

While providing a systematic critique of the perspectives which inform policies on everyday care, feminist research has been subjected to little by way of review and re-appraisal within the disciplines of sociology and social policy. Further, this important body of literature appears to have been relatively unaffected by the wider currents which have been re-shaping feminist perspectives since the early 1980s. In particular, research on caring has remained largely untouched by Black feminist and anti-racist scholarship. Black writers have increasingly questioned the theoretical base of contemporary (white) feminist analyses, arguing that the concepts on which they are built do not provide the resources for either understanding or challenging the position of Black women. Since the concepts identified at the core of (white) feminism are also ones that underpin (white) feminist research on caring, black feminist analyses provide – by extension – a powerful critique of the way in which the experience of caring has been theorised in feminist literature.

The paper aims to research and re-assess the concept of caring as it has developed within British feminist research. In trying to stimulate a critical appraisal, I will be identifying issues and concerns that relate to a *genre* of research which my own work in many ways exemplifies. I cite specific examples from this body of work only to illustrate my arguments about the *genre*, and not to single out other individuals within it.

The paper is divided into three sections. The first and second sections outline the characteristics and the limitations of British feminist approaches to home-

Downloaded from soc.sagepub.com at Apollo Group - UOP on February 1, 2015

based care, extending this critique through recent analyses concerned with racial divisions in women's home-based work. The third section focuses on residential domestic service in Britain and the USA. Domestic service is taken as a case-study which highlights dimensions of, and divisions within, the organisation of care in families which are eclipsed in contemporary feminist research on caring.

In the space of a short paper, only some of these complex dimensions and divisions can be explored. The paper focuses more on the gender and racial structuring of domestic service: as a result, the ways in which social class inter-locks with these complex structures receives less attention. Further, the material discussed in the second and third sections relates primarily to the position of Black American women in the USA and Afro-caribbean women in Britain. As a result, the experiences of other minority ethnic groups – and differences among Black American and British Afro-caribbean women – are inevitably obscured.

Mindful that important aspects are neglected in the paper, the case-study seeks to locate domestic service within a broad analysis of the structuring of home-based care. Thus, in looking at Britain, attention is drawn to the way in which the patterns of migration and employment among white working class women born in Britain, like women of Irish, South European and Asian descent, have been structured through the organisation of care in the home. In looking at the USA, we find that domestic service figures centrally not only in the employment experiences of Black American women but also in the experiences of migrant women from other minority ethnic groups.

Themes in Feminist Research on Caring

In the early papers that marked out caring as a field of feminist enquiry, the emphasis was on defining the work that goes into looking after able-bodied and dependent people at home (Stacey 1981; Balbo 1982; Graham 1983; Ungerson 1983; Waerness 1984:a; 1984:b; Stacey and Davies 1983) and pointing to the way in which social policy reinforced the disadvantaged position of those who care for the family (Land 1978; Graham 1979; Finch and Groves 1980). Alongside these early critiques were empirical studies concerned with describing, typically in the words of the participants, the lives of those caring for adults and children with long-term dependencies (Equal Opportunities Commission 1980, 1982; Nissel and Bonnerjea 1982; Wright 1983; Glendinning 1983; Baldwin 1985). Since the mid-1980s, feminist empirical enquiry has continued to burgeon (for example, Ungerson 1987; Abbot and Sapsford 1987; Lewis and Meredith 1988; Glendinning 1988).

In seeking to summarise what is now a large body of literature, there is a risk that the summary will be too crude to be useful. Nonetheless, it is possible to outline this important field of study in broad terms. This is because a common

Downloaded from soc.sagepub.com at Apollo Group - UOP on February 1, 2015

perspective appears to have informed the development of feminist research on caring through the 1980s. While feminism is seen to be in the throes of conflict and change (Delmar 1986; Segal 1987; Parmar 1989), consensus and continuity emerge as the hallmarks of British feminist research on caring.

This theoretical unity appears to stem from the influence of a set of articles published in the early 1980s. Articles by Finch and Groves (1980), Stacey (1981) and Graham (1983) appear to have played a particularly significant part in shaping the parameters of British feminist research on care within families. It is the perspectives articulated in these early papers which continue to inform both empirical and theoretical work today. Even in the most recent wave of studies, it is still the early critiques which provide the conceptual framework for defining and understanding home-based care. Thus, for example, a number of important studies by Ungerson (1987), Dalley (1988), Lewis and Meredith (1988) and Stacey (1988) locate their perspectives in terms of papers published at the beginning of the decade. The debt is often explicitly acknowledged: these authors all cite papers from the early 1980s in tracing the theoretical development of their work.

A common intellectual heritage has given feminist research a clear intellectual identity. Its essential elements can be characterised in the following way:

> *feminist studies have taken the concept of care embedded in welfare policies and explored its implications in terms of gender, drawing on a distinction between the private and public spheres to inform and guide their analyses.*

In characterising feminist perspectives in this way, I am highlighting three central elements. I am suggesting, firstly, that feminist studies have incorporated significant elements of the policy-maker's concept of care and, secondly, that they have identified gender as the central social division in the day-to-day reproductive work of households. I am suggesting, thirdly, that the conceptual framework of the private/public domain links these two elements: it serves to integrate the definition of care into a gender-based analysis of reproduction. Each of these three elements requires further elaboration.

1. *Feminists have incorporated key aspects of the policy-maker's concept of caring.* Informing the development of community care policies – and state welfare policies more generally – is a concept of care which defines care in terms of 'at home' and 'by one's family' (or, more rarely, 'by one's friends'). For example, the Griffiths report on *Community Care* defines care in the community as care which aims (Griffiths 1988: para. 3.6):

> — to enable an individual to remain in his home wherever possible, rather than being cared for in a hospital or residential home;
> — to give support and relief to informal carers (family, friends and neighbours) coping with the stress of caring for a dependent person.

Downloaded from soc.sagepub.com at Apollo Group - UOP on February 1, 2015

As this statement implies, the policy-maker's concept of care is one that refers simultaneously to the place in which care is carried out ('his home') and the social relations through which it is carried out ('family, friends'). It is a concept which collapses a number of structurally-distinct aspects. In particular, it fuses the location with the social relations of care. Informal care is the care of dependent people at home; it is also care by one's family which, governed by the normative obligations of kinship, is typically provided without pay.

Feminist studies have adopted a similar definition of care. Most of the research has defined 'care' (and 'service') in terms of the unpaid reproductive work done by relatives for and in their families. It was this approach that was articulated in the early studies (Finch and Groves 1980; Balbo 1982; Graham 1983; Waerness 1984:a), and was the focus of empirical work on caring for disabled children and adults (Equal Opportunities Commission 1980; 1982; Baldwin 1985; Ungerson 1987; Lewis and Meredith 1988). Thus, while seeking to provide a critique of community and informal care policies, feminist research through the 1980s appears not to have seriously challenged the concept of care that underpinned these policies.

Nonetheless, feminist research has encompassed – and highlighted – dimensions of care-by-relatives that are obscured in policy debates about informal care. In its feminist variant, care is seen to include not only the informal care of adults and children with long-term needs for care, but to cover the day-to-day care of able-bodied adults and children as well (Land 1978; Graham 1985; Joshi 1987). In its feminist variant, too, social divisions are recognised as central to the organisation of everyday reproduction. Informal care – like family care more generally – is analysed in relation to gender divisions.

Feminist enquiries have thus provided a broader and more critical perspective on care by and within families. However, these enquiries appear not to have been extended into a more fundamental analysis of the organisation of care in the home. Like the policies they critique, feminist analyses have yet to explore the conceptual distinction between the location and social relations of care: between where the care is carried out and the social relations that determine who gives and who gets care. The result is a mode of analysis which obscures forms of home-based care that are not based on marriage and kinship.

2. *Feminist studies have been primarily concerned with gender divisions.* In seeking to understand care-by-relatives, feminist studies have been sceptical of biological explanations of why this type of care is seen as 'women's work' (see, for example, Dalley 1988). They have been cautious, too, of uncritically adopting psychological explanations of why women care (see Graham 1983; Ungerson 1983; 1987). Instead, feminist writers have tended to favour structural analyses which links the organisation of family life to the wider social divisions of capitalist society (see, for example, Stacey 1981; Graham 1983).

While favouring structural perspectives, research has been primarily – and

Downloaded from soc.sagepub.com at Apollo Group - UOP on February 1, 2015

sometimes exclusively – concerned with gender (see, for example, Balbo 1982; Graham 1983; Waerness 1984:a; 1984:b; Balbo 1987; Dalley 1988). Feminist studies have devoted little attention to the ways in which class and racial divisions impact upon, and take shape within, the patterns of care within families.

Some recent work has challenged the gender-based analyses which typify feminist research on caring. However, the challenge does not turn on feminists' neglect of racial and class divisions. Instead the criticisms relate to the perceived failure of feminist research to take account of the significant proportion of men involved in informal care (Arber and Gilbert 1989a; 1989b). Where social class and 'race' are introduced into the analysis, they are typically treated as intervening variables, which mediate rather than directly shape women's position in the home. Thus, we find social class treated as a factor affecting the carer's financial position and access to welfare benefits and services (for example, Baldwin 1985; Lewis and Meredith 1988). In the few studies which explicitly recognise that not all carers are white, it is the ethnic background of the carer rather than the racial structuring of caring that is the object of analysis (for example, Hicks 1988).

3. *Feminist writers have drawn on the concepts of the private and public domains.* In trying to understand why it is women's lives and identities which are shaped by caring (by the home-based and unpaid work of looking after relatives), feminist perspectives have turned to the concepts of the private and public domain. A distinction is made between the private sphere, where the home provides the location in which women work unpaid for their families, and the public sphere, where men, sustained by the unpaid care of women, engage in paid productive work (for example, Waerness 1984:a; Davies and Stacey 1983; Lewis and Meredith 1988; Stacey 1988). Stacey provides a succinct summary of the concepts of the private and public domain and of their place in feminist analyses (Stacey 1981: 173):

> I use the terms public and private or domestic domain to distinguish two arenas of action . . . The private domain is the domain of the home, where social relations are based on family and kin, on mating, marriage and procreation. The public domain includes government and the market place.

As Stacey's definition indicates, the private domain – like the concept of caring that it illuminates – is defined in terms of its location ('the domain of the home') and its social relations ('based on family and kin, on mating, marriage and procreation'). The public domain, while less elaborated in feminist research on caring, tends to be seen in contrasting terms. The public domain is thus located outside/beyond the home, and dominated by the social relations of the labour market.

While depicted somewhat baldly here, feminist studies of caring have not

Downloaded from soc.sagepub.com at Apollo Group - UOP on February 1, 2015

drawn on the concepts of 'separate spheres' in an uncritical way. It has been noted, for example, that the concept of the private domain is as much an ideological concept which prescribes idealised family forms, as it is an analytical concept which helps us understand women's lives (Davidoff 1979; Stacey 1981; Barrett and McIntosh 1982; Stacey and Davies 1983). Further, in developing the concepts of a private and public domain, feminist researchers have stressed that they do not represent rigidly separate spheres. Stacey and Davies in particular have emphasised that caring-related activities can cross the two spheres or occupy an intermediate zone between them (Stacey and Davies 1983; Stacey 1988). However, while recognising that the kinds of work found in the private domain – caring work, home-based work, unpaid work, women's work – are also found in the public domain, the concept of a private domain is one which conflates these dimensions. In a sense, this is its purpose: to highlight how the complex dimensions of location and social relations are fused in the organisation of family life.

The three interlocking themes identified in this section – themes which revolve around *care by relatives*, *gender divisions* and the *private domain* – have marked out the field of British feminist research on home-based care over the last decade. Its hallmark is a perspective which incorporates all three themes, a perspective in which home-based care is defined in terms of the unpaid work of female relatives within the private domain of their family. Articulated a decade ago, it is an approach which continues to dominate – and to typify – this field of enquiry.

It is an approach which has provided a solid and clearly-articulated framework in which theoretical and empirical research, including doctoral research, has been able to develop. This body of research, in turn, has yielded important insights into the organisation and experience of home-based care. Feminist studies, for example, have drawn attention to the way in which caring both confirms family ties and breaks family taboos (Ungerson 1983; 1988). They have pointed to the complex processes by which kin become carers (Lewis and Meredith 1988; Ungerson 1987; Rose 1988) and the wider structuring of family obligations on which caring rests (Finch 1989). Another significant contribution (and one to which the paper returns) has been the light shed on the ways in which gender is lived out through the everyday routines of caring. Following early work by Gilligan (1982) and Graham (1983), studies have pointed to the way in which gender identities are socially constructed and confirmed through caring (see, for example, Ungerson 1987: 146–9; Lewis and Meredith 1988: 5–8; Dalley 1988: 8–10). The daily routines of care in the home, in other words, are seen as the medium through which women are accepted into and feel they belong in their social world.

This kind of approach, developed in the early years of the decade, provided analyses that were missing from the policy debates and from mainstream research within social policy and sociology. In the context of the early 1980s, the analyses offered important insights into the way in which gendered social

Downloaded from soc.sagepub.com at Apollo Group - UOP on February 1, 2015

relations and gender identities are constructed through care in families. However, it is an analysis which, as currently formulated, appears to have fundamental weaknesses.

Problems in White Feminist Research on Caring

In offering a synopsis of themes in feminist research on caring, the previous section has also been engaged in a critique. It has pointed to tendencies in feminist research which obscure dimensions which should be integral to its analysis. I would identify two particular areas of weakness.

Firstly, caring is seen as all about the unpaid work of those who are related to each other through birth or marriage. As a result, it is difficult to identify and conceptualise forms of home-based care which are not determined through marriage and kinship obligations. Secondly, caring is seen as all about gender. Because of the way in which care is defined, feminist research has constructed a one-dimensional perspective on social divisions. Other social divisions, like other kinds of care, are eclipsed.

These two problems are closely related. With care defined as the unpaid work of families, it is gender divisions that emerge – alone – as central to an understanding of everyday reproduction within the home. With everyday reproduction approached through gender, the parameters of home-based care are marked out in terms of unpaid care by kin. This restricted focus has shaped a programme of feminist research which has side-stepped the complex issues that arise when we try to integrate different forms of care and different social divisions into an analysis of women's experiences of looking after people at home.

While these issues have been marginal to British feminist research on caring, they have figured centrally in feminist analyses which have sought to build the divisions of 'race' and social class into their analyses of social reproduction. It is a current of research and scholarship which has been resourced by Black women writers, both here and in the USA (for example, Joseph 1981; Carby 1982; Hooks 1982; Dill 1983; Amos and Parmar 1984). While researchers have been cautious about applying frameworks outside the society in which they were developed, American studies have provided an important reference point for research into the lives of Afro-caribbean and Asian women in Britain (Mama 1984).

A central theme in British and American writing is that Western social science, both mainstream and feminist, has been constructed within and out of white-dominated intellectual traditions and white-dominated societies. Feminist studies which have turned to personal experience as an alternative resource on which to build perspectives on women's lives are seen to reflect, rather than avoid, this problem (for example, Carby 1982; Parmar 1982; Dill 1983; *Feminist Review* 1984; Glenn 1985). Articulating the interests and concerns of white (and

Downloaded from soc.sagepub.com at Apollo Group - UOP on February 1, 2015

middle class) women, these perspectives treat racial divisions as structures that only affect black women (Phoenix 1988). The result, it is argued, are analyses which do not adequately address racism and its impact on both the shared experiences of Black women and the different and changing realities of their lives.

Emerging around the time in which British feminist research was developing its frameworks, this critical current of work appears to have had little impact on the way in which caring has been theorised within the British feminist literature. Nonetheless, it provides a trenchant critique of perspectives which do not look beyond gendered family relationships in their analyses of social reproduction.

In developing their arguments, Black and anti-racist researchers have paid particular attention to the conceptual tools by which feminists have sought to understand women's lives. The analyses have highlighted, in particular, the linked concepts of reproduction, the family and the private domain (see, for example, Joseph 1981; Carby 1982; Dill 1983; Amos and Parmar 1984; Glenn 1985). They have argued against definitions which centre around women's unpaid work for relatives in the private domain: definitions which fail to distinguish between the location and social relations of reproduction.

For example, in an early paper, Carby criticised definitions of social reproduction which centred on the work women do for their own families in their own homes. She pointed out that such definitions obscure the work that Black women also do for and in white families (Carby 1982). The notion of 'separate spheres' has been reviewed in similar terms, particularly in relation to Black American women's lives (for example, Dill 1983; Glenn 1985; Jones 1985; Abramovitz 1989). Glenn suggests that, while the notion of 'the family' as a 'private domain' may be particularly useful in understanding white women's experiences, it is less useful when Black women's experiences are included in the analysis. She notes that Black women's lives have been shaped historically by a 'colonial labor system' in which Black women's work outside their own families took precedence over the needs of their own families. For Black women, she suggests, it is the absence rather than the presence of a clearly defined private sphere which has structured their experiences. The struggle was, and is, to care for one's kin and keep one's family together (Glenn 1985). Thus, rather than experienced in oppressive ways, caring for partners, children and older relatives can be experienced as a way of resisting racial and class oppression (Jones 1985; White 1984; Abramovitz 1988).

In their critiques, the work of Black (and white) writers underlines the importance of forms of social reproduction which have been neglected in feminist research on caring. While not yet a major focus of study, domestic service has been identified as one major example (for example, Carby 1982; Jones 1985; Abramovitz 1988). As a case-study, domestic service challenges some of the engrained themes and ways of thinking about home-based care that I suggested have come to typify British feminist research.

Downloaded from soc.sagepub.com at Apollo Group - UOP on February 1, 2015

Service and servitude as dimensions of home-based reproduction

Domestic servants work in the homes of people to whom they are not related. While located within the private domain, domestic service is not only structured by gender. The social relations of domestic service, today and in the past, also reflect the divisions of class and 'race'/ethnicity. There is evidence – much of it unearthed by feminist historians – which suggests that these interlocking divisions have been central to the development of the home as the location of family care in Britain. This evidence suggests that the labour systems of colonialism have been forcibly inscribed in the organisation of domestic service – and into the organisation of everyday care by partners, parents and relatives within black and white working class households.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Black slaves were brought to Britain from Africa and the West Indies to work as personal and household servants. The majority of the 10,000 Black men and women in Britain in the eighteenth century worked as cooks, maids, pages and valets (Fryer 1984: 72). Unlike white working class servants, Black slaves worked in the home without pay: 'no wages are paid, whereas free servants are not only clothed and boarded at the master's expense, but receive wages into the bargain' (Granville-Sharp 1769: 76–7, quoted in Fryer 1984: 198). According to Granville-Sharp, those advocating the maintenance of slavery cited the fact that the domestic labour of Black people was unpaid in defence of their case. Through the nineteenth century, Afro-caribbean women in Britain continued to be employed as servants, while colonial expansion beyond Britain established domestic service as a major source of employment for women in India and the Caribbean (Barr 1976; Lebra 1984; Grant 1988). While their lives are only now beginning to be told, there is a more extensive literature on the lives of white women engaged in domestic service.

This literature suggests that, in nineteenth century Britain, the maintenance of the private domains of white middle class families was a major source of paid work for white working class women. Lewis estimates that, in the 1880's, as many as one in three women aged 15 to 20 had entered domestic service, with 'poor mothers anxious for their daughters to get their feet under someone else's table as soon as possible' (Lewis 1984: 56). In London, in 1861, 55% of women in employment were engaged in personal service, with domestic servants representing the largest group within this category (Stedman Jones 1984). The patterns of service among women workers from the mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century are shown in Table 1.

Migration has been a central feature of the experiences of white women, and Black women and men, engaged in domestic service in Britain. The forced immigration of slavery, the regulated immigration of work-permits and quotas and the patterns of internal migration have all been woven deeply into the fabric of Britain's domestic service sector. Because of the scale of its operation, domestic service had a particular impact on the patterns of female migration in

Downloaded from soc.sagepub.com at Apollo Group - UOP on February 1, 2015

Table 1
Personal service and women's employment

	% of women in employment in personal service				
	1881	1901	1921	1931	1951
Personal Service:					
Indoor domestic	36	33	23	24	11
Other		9	10	11	12
Total	36	42	33	35	23

Source: E. James (1962), Figure 2, p. 291.

the nineteenth century. As a result, while more men emigrated from Britain, it was female migration that was more important within the British Isles (Lewis 1984). Only a quarter of those employed in domestic service in late nineteenth century London were London-born. Studies of domestic service outside London suggest that, here too, a significant proportion of female domestic workers had migrated within and from outside Britain to secure service (Lewis 1984; Higgs 1986). Through the nineteenth century, Irish women formed the largest group of migrant workers emigrating to work in British households (Phizacklea 1983).

Residential domestic service remained the largest single occupation for women well into the twentieth century. Over 1,000,000 women were employed in service in the 1930s, an occupation that the Registrar General defined – as it still does – as a semi-skilled manual working class occupation (Davidoff 1979). As the twentieth century progressed, institutional service, particularly in hospitals, increased the demand for domestic labour outside its traditional location in the home. Again, racial divisions were inscribed into the organisation of this work. Phizacklea, in her study of migrant women's work, notes that two thirds (65%) of all work permits issued in 1947 for migrant workers were for domestic service. Until 1979, reflecting the continuing demand for domestic workers in hospitals, hotels and private homes, special quotas were set for the recruitment of foreign workers into domestic work (Phizacklea 1983). In the 1940s and 1950s, it was Irish and Italian women who were the main source of domestic labour, joined during the 1960s by Spanish women. In the 1970s, it was Filipino and Malaysian women who formed the largest group of migrant workers coming into Britain as domestic workers (Phizacklea 1983).

In the 1980s, domestic work continues to characterise the position of many black women within the labour market: engaged in low-paid, low status work which services the needs of those working in more privileged positions within the household/organisation. According to Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe, the service work of Afro-caribbean women represents, 'little more than institutionalised housework, as night and daytime cleaners, canteen workers, laundry workers and chambermaids – an extension of the work we had done under capitalism in

Downloaded from soc.sagepub.com at Apollo Group - UOP on February 1, 2015

the Caribbean' (Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe 1985: 25). Confirming this occupational position, a recent ethnic monitoring exercise by the BBC found that, while only six per cent of its staff were Asian or Afro-caribbean, they formed over twenty per cent of its cleaners and nearly 30 per cent of its catering staff (BBC 1988: 1). Within the health service, an organisation centrally concerned with meeting daily needs for care, Black and white women are again hierarchically placed in the organisation of care and service. Ethnic minority women as a group are disproportionately represented in posts where the emphasis is on domestic and personal service rather than on nursing care (see Doyal, Hunt and Mellor 1981; Doyal 1985).

These patterns are strongly etched into the health care system in the USA. Paid health care is 'rigorously stratified by race and gender' (Mullings 1984: 127). Seven in every ten health care workers are women; and seven in every ten are non-white (Coleman and Dickson 1984). Again, these patterns have been linked to the racial structuring of women's reproductive work within the home.

In a major historical review, Jones has described how, after slavery, 'service' continued to define the occupational position of Black American women. As during slavery, domestic work in the homes of white families provided the major alternative to manual work for Black women in the American south through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At the same time, Mexican–American women were also seeking paid work in private households as servants and in the domestic service industries, as washerwomen in commercial laundries and cooks and maids in hotels (Glenn 1985). In these servant and service roles the reproductive work of Black and migrant ethnic minority women maintained the private domain of white women – and undermined the care arrangements which supported their own family life. Studies suggest that the relationships which dominated the lives – but rarely the identities – of a significant proportion of women in America at the turn of the century were thus ones of enforced service within a colonial system rather than of voluntary care within a kinship system (Jones 1985).

In twentieth century America, gender and racial divisions have continued to intersect in a way that defines domestic work as Black women's work. In the American south of the early twentieth century, nine out of ten of those employed as servants were Black American women (Jones 1985). As the twentieth century progressed, the racialised nature of paid reproductive work became even more sharply defined. While there was a rapid growth in clerical and sales occupations in the northern cities of America, these new industries provided work for white women. As a result, in the north as in the south of the United States, black women's work was synonymous with domestic service. In Pittsburgh in 1920, for example, Jones notes that ninety per cent of Black women in paid employment were engaged in domestic and personal services: as day workers (domestic servants who returned home at night), as live-in servants or as laundresses (Jones 1985: 164). It was not only among Black American women that domestic service marked out their place in, and their point of entry

Downloaded from soc.sagepub.com at Apollo Group - UOP on February 1, 2015

into, the labour market. In the early decades of the century, private household service offered the only major source of employment outside the ethnic community for Chinese–American women (Glenn 1985). These patterns changed slowly. In the 1930s, over sixty per cent of Black women in the labour market worked in service occupations; among Mexican–American women, the proportion was over forty per cent (Table 2).

While there has been a shift away from the domestic sector as Black women and women from minority ethnic communities have moved into clerical and sales work, domestic service remains a racialised sector of women's employment (Almquist 1979; Glenn 1985). In the late 1970s, one in three Black American women and one in four Mexican American women in employment were engaged in private or institutional service. Among white women, the proportion was eighteen per cent (Table 2).

The research reviewed in this section suggests that, in both Britain and the USA, racial and class divisions have been central in constructing – and undermining – the family as a private domain. Through the complex inter-locking of racial, class and gender divisions, women have been hierarchically placed within the process of everyday reproduction. White middle women have had greater access to a private domain sustained by their everyday care; Black and white working class women have found their family lives shaped by the servicing of these private domains. Gender, class and racial divisions emerge as integral and inter-connected structures within the organisation of everyday reproduction. They should therefore figure equally centrally in feminist answers to the question 'who cares for the family?'.

Table 2
Proportion of Employed Black, Mexican–American and White Women in Service Occupations, USA

	Black (%)	Mexican (%)	White (%)
1930*			
Service (excluding servants and laundresses)	35	14	20
Servants/laundresses	27	31	3
Total service	63	44	23
1979**			
Service (including private household)	32	23	18

*10 years and over
**16 years and over
Source: Glenn 1985 (from US Bureau of Statistics)

Downloaded from soc.sagepub.com at Apollo Group - UOP on February 1, 2015

Conclusion: care and service in everyday social reproduction

This paper has been concerned with the British feminist research on caring as it developed through the 1980's. It is a literature that has provided a major resource for welfare research, both in and beyond Britain. However, while influencing the work of others, this literature appears to have remained relatively unaffected by wider currents within feminism. It appears to have become rooted in the paradigms of the early 1980s, with current empirical work continuing in the mould set by theoretical papers which marked out the field a decade ago. Subject neither to external scrutiny nor to internal critique, theoretical work on the concept of caring appears to have been suspended. As a concept, it is under-theorised.

In reviewing the concept of caring, the paper has drawn heavily on recent critiques of white feminist analyses of reproduction. It has suggested that the concept of caring, as employed in feminist research, conflates the location and social relations of social reproduction. Defined as home-based work for one's family, 'caring' is a concept which has facilitated an analysis of (white) women's reproductive work for kin, in which gender divisions are central. The concept of caring has thus served to highlight the importance of everyday care in sustaining (white) gendered identities and gendered divisions of labour within – and beyond – the home. But in highlighting these dimensions of social reproduction, it has obscured others. Specifically, feminist perspectives on caring appear to obscure other forms of home-based work and other social divisions which are inscribed in them.

In trying to test these arguments, the paper has taken domestic service as a case-study. As a form of home-based reproduction that falls outside the concept of caring, domestic service highlights, too, social divisions which currently lie beyond the boundaries of feminist research on caring. Opening up these boundaries – as research on domestic service seeks to do – opens up a perspective in which everyday social reproduction is seen to be structured not only by gender but by the hierarchies of 'race' and class. In this perspective, social divisions are seen to interlock, shaping a woman's access to a private domain in which she can care for her family.

As a case-study, domestic service points to the need to re-construct feminist perspectives on a site which is broader than that of home-based kin-care. If divisions other than those of gender are to be integrated into an understanding of 'who cares for the family', then the core concepts have to be ones that engage with these wider divisions. A dual conceptual base in care/service may be one way forward. In the place of research linking (white) women to caring, there could be a broader structural framework which examines the complex links between women's class and racial position, on the one hand, and their role in the division of unpaid and paid care/service, on the other. In this perspective, care/service could be recast as a process through which not only women's gender identities but their social class and racial identities are constructed, integrated and lived out.

Downloaded from soc.sagepub.com at Apollo Group - UOP on February 1, 2015

Built around one case-study, the paper can be seen as no more than a beginning: an attempt to open up a concept to debate. While inchoate, the task is an important one. Despite the rapid development of Black feminist and anti-racist scholarship through the 1980s, its debates have been largely conducted outside the mainstream of British sociology and social policy – and outside the major disciplinary journals like *Sociology*. In this context, critiques by white feminists may open up strategic spaces in which this rich current of scholarship can begin to have more impact on the form and content of a field of research that is central to both disciplines.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Jenny Douglas for conversations which provided the backcloth to this paper, and Janet Finch and three anonymous referees for their detailed comments on earlier versions of the paper.

References

ABBOT, P. and SAPSFORD, R. 1987. *Community Care for Mentally Handicapped Children*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
ABRAMOVITZ, M. 1989. *Regulating the Lives of Women: Social Welfare Policy from Colonial Times to the Present*. Boston, MA: South End Press.
ALMQUIST, E. 1979. 'Black women and the pursuit of equality' in Freedman, J. (ed.) *Women: a Feminist Perspective*, Palo Alto, California: Mayfield Publishing Company.
AMOS, V. and PARMAR, P. 1984. 'Challenging imperial feminism', *Feminist Review* 17:3–19.
ARBER, S. and GILBERT, N. 1989. 'Men: the forgotten carers'. *Sociology* 23:111–8.
ARBER, S. and GILBERT, N. 1989. 'Transitions in caring: gender, life-course and the care of the elderly' in Bytheway, B. (ed.) *Becoming and Being Old*, London: Sage.
BALBO, L. 1982. 'The servicing work of women and the capitalist state'. *Political Power and Social Theory* 3:251–270.
BALBO, L. 1987. 'Crazy quilts: rethinking the welfare state from a woman's point of view' in Sassoon, S. (ed.) *Women and the State*. London: Unwin Hyman.
BALDWIN, S. 1985. *The Costs of Caring: Families with Disabled Children*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
BARR, P. 1976. *The Mensahibs*, London: Secker and Warburg.
BARRETT, M. and MCINTOSH, M. 1982. *The Anti-social Family*, London: Verso.
BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION. 1988. *Data on Ethnic Origin, Gender and Age*. London: British Broadcasting Corporation.
BRYAN, B., DADZIE, S. and SCAFE, S. 1985. *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*. London: Virago Press.
CARBY, H. 1982. 'White women listen! Black feminism and the boundaries of sisterhood' in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain*. London: Hutchinson.

COLEMAN, L. and DICKSON, C. 1984. 'The risks of healing: the hazards of the nursing profession' in Charkin, W. (ed.) *Double Exposure: Women's Health Hazards on the Job and at Home*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
DALLEY, G. 1988. *Ideologies of Caring*. London: Macmillan.

Downloaded from soc.sagepub.com at Apollo Group - UOP on February 1, 2015

DAVIDOFF, L. 1979. 'The separation of home and work? Landladies and lodgers in nineteenth- and twentieth-century England' in Burman, S. (ed.) *Fit Work for Women*. London: Croom Helm.
DELMAR, R. 1986. 'What is feminism?' in Mitchell, J. and Oakley, A. (eds.) *What Is Feminism*? Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECURITY. 1981. *Growing Older*. London: HMSO.
DILL, B. 1983. 'Race, class and gender: prospects for an all-inclusive sisterhood'. *Feminist Studies* 9: 131–150.
DOYAL, L., HUNT, G. and MELLOR, J. 1981. *Your Life in Their Hands: Migrant Workers and the National Health Service*, Critical Social Policy 1:54–71.
DOYAL, L. 1985. 'Women and the National Health Service: carers and the careless' in Lewin, E. and Olesen, V. (eds.) *Women, Health and Healing*. London: Tavistock.
EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMISSION. 1980. *The Experience of Caring for Elderly and Handicapped Dependants*. Manchester: Equal Opportunities Commission.
EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMISSION. 1982. *Caring for the Elderly and Handicapped: Community Care Policies and Women's Lives*. Manchester: Equal Opportunities Commission.
Feminist Review. 1984. *Many Voices, One Chant: Black Feminist Perspectives*. Issue 17.
FINCH, J. and GROVES, D. 1980. 'Community care and the family: a case for equal opportunities?' *Journal of Social Policy* 9:487–511.
FINCH, J. and GROVES, D. (eds.). 1983. *A Labour of Love: Women, Work and Caring*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
FINCH, J. 1989. *Family Obligations and Social Change*. Oxford: Polity Press.
FRYER, P. 1984. *Staying Power: the History of Black People in Britain*. London: Pluto Press.
GILLIGAN, C. 1982. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. London and Harvard: Harvard University Press.
GLENDINNING, C. 1983. *Unshared Care? Parents and their Disabled Children*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
GLENDINNING, C. 1988. 'Dependency and interdependency: the incomes of informal carers and the impact of social security' in Baldwin, S., Parker, G. and Walker, R. (eds.) *Social Security and Community Care*. Aldershot: Avebury.
GLENN, E. 1985. 'Racial ethnic women's labor: the intersection of race, gender and class oppression'. *Review of Radical Political Economics* 17:86–108.
GRAHAM, H. 1979. 'Prevention and health: every mothers' business': a comment on child health policies in the seventies' in Harris, C. (ed.) *The Sociology of the Family: New Directions for Britain*. Sociological Review Monograph 28. Keele: University of Keele.
GRAHAM, H. 1983. 'Caring: a labour of love' in Finch, J. and Groves, D. (eds.) *A Labour of Love: Women, Work and Caring*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
GRAHAM, H. 1985. 'Providers, negotiators and mediators: women as the hidden carers', in Lewin, E. and Olesen, V. (eds.) *Women, Health and Healing*. London: Tavistock.
GRANT, J. 1989. 'Call loud: the history of Mary Prince', *Trouble and Strife* 14:9–11.
GREEN, H. 1988. *Informal Carers: General Household Survey 1985*. London: HMSO.
GRIFFITHS, R. 1988. *Community Care: Agenda for Action*, a Report to the Secretary of State for Social Services, London: HMSO.
HICKS, C. 1988. *Who Care? Looking After People at Home*. London: Virago.
HIGGS, E. 1986. 'Domestic service and household production' in John, A. (ed.) *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England 1800–1918*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
HOLTER, H. (eds.). 1984. *Patriarchy in a Welfare State*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
HOOKS, B. 1982. *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. London: Pluto Press.
JAMES, E. 1962. 'Women and work in twentieth century Britain'. *Manchester School of Economics and Social Studies* 3: 283–99.

Downloaded from soc.sagepub.com at Apollo Group - UOP on February 1, 2015

JONES, J. 1985. *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family from Slavery to the Present*. New York: Basic Books.
JOSEPH, G. 1981. 'Black mothers and daughters: their roles and functions in American society' in Joseph, J. and Lewis, J. (eds.) *Common Differences: Conflicts in Black and White Feminist Perspectives*. New York: Anchor Press.
JOSHI, H. 1987. 'The cost of caring' in Glendinning, C. and Millar, J. (eds.) *Women and Poverty in Britain*. Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books.
LEBRA, J. (ed.). 1984. *Women and Work in India*. New Delhi: Promilla and Co.
LAND, H. 1978. 'Who cares for the family?'. *Journal of Social Policy* 7:257–84.
LEWIN, E. and OLESEN, V. (eds.). 1985. *Women, Health and Healing*. London: Tavistock.
LEWIS, J. 1984. *Women in England 1870–1950*. Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books.
LEWIS, J. 1986. 'Introduction' in Lewis, J. (ed.) *Labour and Love: Women's Experiences of Home and Family 1850–1940*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
LEWIS, J. and MEREDITH, B. 1988. *Daughters Who Care: Daughters Caring for their Mothers at Home*. London: Routledge.
MAMA, A. 1984. 'Black women, the economic crisis and the British state'. *Feminist Review* 17:21–35.
MULLINGS, L. 1984. 'Minority women, work and health' in Charkin, W. (ed.) *Double Exposure: Women's Health Hazards on the Job and at Home*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
NISSEL, M. and BONNERJEA, L. 1982. *Family Care of the Handicapped Elderly: Who Pays?* London: Policy Studies Institute.
PARMAR, P. 1982. 'Gender, race and class: Asian women in resistance' in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain*. London: Hutchinson.
PARMAR, P. 1989. 'Other kinds of dreams', *Feminist Review* 31:55–65.
PHIZACKLEA, A. 1983. 'In the frontline' in Phizacklea, A. (ed.) *One Way Ticket: Migration and Female Labour*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
PHOENIX, A. 1988. 'Narrow definitions of culture: the case of early motherhood' in Westwood, S. and Bhachu, P. (eds.) *Enterprising Women: Ethnicity, Economy and Gender Relations*.London: Routledge.
ROSE, C. 1989. *For Love or Money: the Relationship of Kin Carers, Foster Carers and their Dependants*. Ph.D. thesis, Colchester: University of Essex.
SEGAL, L. 1987. *Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism*. London: Virago.
SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE. 1985. *Community Care with Special Reference to Adult Mentally Ill and Mentally Handicapped People*, Second Report from the Social Services Committee Session 1984–5, Volume 1, House of Commons.
STACEY, M. 1981. 'The division of labour revisited or overcoming the two Adams' in Abrams, P., Deem, R., Finch, J. and Rock, P. (eds.) *Practice and Progress: British Sociology 1950–1980*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
STACEY, M. and DAVIES, C. 1983. *Division of Labour in Child Health Care: Final Report to the SSRC 1983*, University of Warwick.
STACEY, M. 1988. *The Sociology of Health and Healing: a Textbook*. London: Allen and Unwin.
STEDMAN JONES, G. 1984. *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books.
UNGERSON, C. 1983. 'Why do women care?' in Finch, J. and Groves, D. (eds.) *A Labour of Love: Women, Work and Caring*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
UNGERSON, C. 1987. *Policy is Personal: Sex, Gender and Informal Care*. London: Tavistock.
WAGNER, G. 1988. *Residential Care: a Positive Choice*. London: HMSO.

Downloaded from soc.sagepub.com at Apollo Group - UOP on February 1, 2015

WAERNESS, K. 1984:a. 'Caring as women's work in the welfare state' in H. Holter (ed.) *Patriarchy in a Welfare State*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
WAERNESS, K. 1984:b. 'The rationality of caring', *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 5:185–211.
WHITE, E. 1984. 'Listening to the voices of Black Feminism'. *Radical America* 18:7–26.
WRIGHT, F. 1983. 'Single carers: employment, housework and caring' in Finch, J. and Groves, D. (eds.) *A Labour of Love: Women, Work and Caring*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Biographical note: HILARY GRAHAM is Professor of Applied Social Studies at the University of Warwick.

Address: Department of Applied Social Studies, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL.

Downloaded from soc.sagepub.com at Apollo Group - UOP on February 1, 2015