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MARRIAGE AND PRODUCTIVITY: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY ANALYSIS

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I. INTRODUCTION

Married people experience economic activities differently than do singles. Married men work and earn more than single men, married women work and earn less than unmarried women, and people in married households do not consume the same bundles of goods and services purchased by singles. In the United States, married men earn between 8 and 30 percent more than single men, after other factors are accounted for (see Kenny, 1983), whereas married women earn some 3 percent less than single women (Becker, 1981). Similarly, in England, married men earned between 10 and 14 percent more than single men, whereas married women earned 3 percent less than single women (Greenhalgh, 1980). A positive marital-status differential was also found in Sweden by Duncan and Holmlund (1983).

The reasons for these differentials have not been studied adequately by members of the various disciplines to whom this issue is of interest. While offering relatively well-developed empirical estimations of the marital-status differentials, economists explain them using theories of limited scope. Sociologists and sociopsychologists bring a wider range of explanations, but their approach is generally nonquantitative. The most valuable contributions by noneconomists have been made at the micro-

level—the study of the organization (family or firm)—by microsociologists (a term coined by Turner [1970]) and social psychologists. This makes generalization difficult.

The underdeveloped state of this area of study derives from the fragmentation of the behavioral sciences. Academic border treaties have assigned one part of the problem—production and productivity—principally to the disciplines that cover economics and business and the other part—marriage—primarily to such other behavioral sciences as psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Within the present incentive structure, academic border crossing rarely pays off (Douglas, 1977; Grossbard, 1978). As a result, the effect of marital status on productivity has received insufficient scholarly attention, and large gains from trade can be reaped through intellectual cross-fertilization.

This paper discusses some of the relevant sociological and sociopsychological literature and compares it to research economists have performed in this area. The emphasis will be on developing testable hypotheses and suggesting directions for further research. Section I reviews economic theories dealing with marital-status differentials, and Section III summarizes some of the sociological theories on the same subject. Section IV gets more specific, in that it concentrates on one particular theory that has been mentioned in both the economic and the sociological literature, namely, wives' investments in their husbands' careers. This section distinguishes different forms such investments can take. Section V presents a theory of occupational differences in marital-status differentials in male productivity. The theory is summarized and extended in the concluding section. The entire discussion focuses on men's benefits from being married. Many of the arguments can be extended to the case of working women.

II. ECONOMIC THEORIES

Economists have explained the observed marital-status differentials in earnings on the basis of five different theories. The most commonly referred to is the specialization theory (see Mincer, 1962; Becker, 1964). As a result of differences in endowments, utility, or both, men and women specialize in the production of different goods and services which they then trade with each other. Because of their comparative advantage in household production, married women work less and therefore earn less outside the home than do single women, whereas the opposite is true for married men. For a man, marriage implies engaging in an exchange of earned income for household income. Married men therefore specialize in work outside the home more than single

men and earn more, even during the same number of working hours. Married men are more productive because of their richer work experience and their stronger need to maintain their earning power in the future (Kenny, 1983; Bartlett and Callahan, 1984).

While this first theory relates earnings differentials to productivity differentials, other economists have also presented the "perceived-need" hypothesis, wherein employers pay married workers more because such workers need to support a family. Pay scales often reflect such policy, especially in Europe (Bartlett and Callahan, 1984).

A third theory mentioned in the economic literature is that of statistical discrimination (Siebert and Sloane, 1981). According to this theory, employers discriminate against single men and married women because of past statistics relating average productivity and marital status.

Fourth, economists have used the human capital investment theory to provide an alternative explanation for the observed marital-status differentials in productivity and earnings. According to this theory, married men owe their higher earnings to a wife's investments in her husband's human capital (see Benham, 1974). In a similar vein, Marxist economists have written about domestic labor (principally the wife's) as "the care, maintenance and continued socialization of human beings" (Himmelweit and Mohun, 1977).

This last theory is closely related to the first one, for the same activities—such as cooking or nurturing—that women specialize in often lead to improvements in human capital; for instance, through better nutrition and physical or mental health. Indirect evidence for such an investment process has been found in the effect of a wife's schooling on her husband's earnings (Benham, 1974), health (Grossman, 1976), and religious practice (Grossbard-Shechtman and Neuman, 1986). Interestingly, the wife's investment theory has not been mentioned in some of the most recent economic literature (Kenny, 1983, Bartlett and Callahan 1984).

Finally, economists have theorized that causality does not necessarily proceed from marital status to earnings, but rather from earnings to marital status. Men earning higher wages are more likely to get married either because higher income encourages people to marry (see Becker, 1981; Grossbard-Shechtman, 1984) or because the same desirable and unmeasured characteristics that lead to higher earnings also increase the probability of a worker being married (Kenny, 1983).

III. THEORIES OF OTHER BEHAVIORAL SCIENTISTS

Specialization theory also takes a major place among the explanations sociologists and psychologists have offered for the observed marital-

status differentials. Sociologists generally call it role specialization (e.g. Parsons, 1942).

Social scientists attempting to explain the origin of such specialization are divided regarding the relative influence of nature and nurture. Psychologists who specialize in the study of gender differences can be found on both sides of the controversy (e.g., Maccoby and Jacklyn, 1974). Anthropologists and sociologists tend to be particularly interested in demonstrating the dominance of cultural influences (e.g., Mead, 1949) although a few have recently come to emphasize biological factors. According to the so-called sociobiologists (e.g., Wilson, 1975), biologic differences in reproduction technology and in the ability to provide for dependents determine gender role specialization observed among a species, including the human race.¹ Most researchers view existing human role specialization as the result of both biologically and culturally determined gender differences.

Sociologists were writing on the wife's contribution to her husband's success at work before economists got interested in the subject (e.g. Whyte, 1956; Moore, 1962). Sociologists differentiate between the wife's *indirect* contribution—her specialization in household tasks, which frees her husband from such responsibilities—and her *direct* contribution.

To designate the wife's direct assistance to her husband's success at work, sociologist Papanek (1973) coined the term *two-person career*. The term implies that both members of a married couple are actually working, although only the man is officially employed.

Sociologists and social psychologists studying wives' contributions to their husbands' success at work generally take a micro perspective in the sense that they focus on one occupation or one organization, mostly the corporation. Their insights often originate from careful observation of workers on the job. In contrast, economists writing on this subject have not paid attention to occupational differences in wives' contributions to their husbands' success. Similarly, economists do not study the effect of husbands' occupation on wives' labor supply outside the home, a related subject of research.²

Next, I present an inventory of possible investments wives make in their husbands' careers, derived from both the economic and the sociological literature. The subsequent section looks at occupational differences in marital-status differentials.

IV. TYPES OF WIVES' CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEIR HUSBANDS' WORK PERFORMANCE

The following discussion distinguishes between wives' direct contributions to their husbands' work performance by means of (1) assistance in centi

tasks, (2) investment in husbands' human capital (including organizational capital), and (3) contributions to husbands' peripheral tasks and to the communication of information.

According to Weinstock (1963), a job often includes central and peripheral task specifications. Central tasks are technical requirements of the occupation directly related to performance. Peripheral tasks refer to the "nontechnical, institutionally required social aspects of the job." This distinction is helpful when discussing the two-person career (see Mortimer, Hall, and Hill, 1978), as are the concepts of human capital (Becker, 1964) and organizational capital (Tomer, in this volume).

A. Contributions to Husbands' Central Tasks

Wives sometimes help their husbands by doing the work that could be done by a paid employee. For instance, a salesman's wife may promote sales, or a writer's wife may type his manuscript. According to Kanter (1977a, p.110), the winners of one company's award for exceptional salesmanship all had wives without outside jobs who reported spending a considerable amount of time helping their husbands with sales work. Wives may also aid their husbands' success by acting as "sounding boards," thus helping their husbands think through technical work problems, or by giving concrete advice that will enhance productivity. The latter form of direct help may be more relevant to more complex, generally professional, white-collar occupations.

B. Investment in Human Capital (Including Organizational Capital)

This is the only direct contribution economists have related to (i.e., Benham, 1974). The sociological literature mentions wives' contributions to workers' good nutrition and good physical and mental health. Parsons' (1942) mention of wives' expressive role relates to their help as a sounding board and mental health counselor. Likewise, Lasch's (1977) view of the family as a "haven in a heartless world" centers on the stress-relieving functions of the wife.

In addition, wives can help develop their husbands' motivation to work and organizational capital. The motivation argument restates in part the "marriage-as-need-for-income" argument also mentioned in the economic literature. Using the sociologists' distinction between instrumental (or extrinsic) and intrinsic rewards of work, we see that marriage tends to increase the need for work as an instrument (means) to acquire goods. This is what economists generally mean when presenting this argument.

Sociologists also write of marriage as a means of promoting the intrinsic motivation to work—what economists call the nonpecuniary ben-

efits of work. Turner (1970), for instance, mentions people's need to identify with their job as a major intrinsic, nonpecuniary reward of work. If a husband can get his wife to identify with his work, his own commitment to the job will rise; so will his motivation to work and, consequently, actual productivity.

Whereas workers have intrinsic needs for identity and commitment, organizations also have an interest in promoting such commitment. If the commitment is specific to a firm, it is often called loyalty. Such loyalty can be viewed as organizational human capital, a type of human capital that should be distinguished from technical human capital in that it enhances productivity through better work relations within the organization (see Tomer, in this volume). Loyalty contributes to productivity in two possible ways: by decreasing the likelihood that a worker will quit and by increasing his or her work effort.

The value of loyalty as insurance against a worker quitting follows from conditions of uncertainty and from the relative importance of specific on-the-job training (see Becker, 1964). The value of loyalty and motivation to work hard derives in part from the absence of well-defined property rights. Once a worker has been hired in a team situation, his or her individual extra work effort is a public good. Therefore, individual workers may have an incentive to be free-riders (Leibenstein, 1982) with respect to their team or to the firm as a whole. Loyalty reduces free-riding tendencies by fellow workers or employees and therefore increases workers' productivity³ (see also Leibenstein in this volume).

Wives can contribute to their husbands' loyalty in marriage. If we assume here that the propensity for loyalty is an acquired trait, which needs to be learned within an organization. Since it is a general skill, individual firms have limited incentive to teach their workers how to be loyal. The family being such a pervasive organization, it can serve as a teaching ground for loyalty. In turn, the institution of marriage reinforces the loyalty elements in family relations, and women do so more actively than men (see Grossbard-Shechtman, 1982). In other words, marriage can produce loyalty (mostly the wife's contribution to her husband's potential for loyalty toward his employer). A similar argument has been stated by Marxist economists Himmelweit and Mohun (1977, p.16) when they consider the family as a producer of a disciplined working class.

In principle, corporate loyalty and family loyalty can compete with each other. One reason corporations frequently move their employees may be as an attempt to subordinate family loyalty to corporate loyalty. Moreover, Pahl and Pahl (1971, p.184) hypothesize that the company sponsorship of social events for their employees increases wives' willingness to support their husbands' commitment.

C. Contributions to Husbands' Peripheral Tasks and to the Communication of Information

Workers get involved in activities that do not seem central to their job and are often unrelated at first sight. Examples of such activities are entertaining and participation at public events. A closer look may reveal, however, that such activities often promote a worker's success on the job. Such peripheral tasks often serve to communicate valuable information, and here a spouse can play an important role.

Parties, which can serve as an efficient means of promoting circulation of information within the organization, are often catered by wives. Other peripheral activities enable the employee to communicate personal information of value to the firm that otherwise is hard to gather.

As mentioned earlier, the firm is interested in workers' loyalty and consequent motivation to contribute to joint work efforts, but information on the basic character of a worker is hard to obtain. The wife's behavior often serves as a testimony and a clue to the character and personal side of her husband.

First, a wife makes it possible for her husband to advertise his propensity for loyalty by simply remaining married. Men often tend to advertise their family loyalty at the workplace. Kanter (1977a) reports that in the large corporation she studied, pictures of wives and children adorned men's offices so commonly that they seemed almost mandatory. Such photographs may play the role of advertising loyalty to the family, possibly implying a willingness to be loyal to the firm as well.

Next, husbands working for corporations benefit from their wives' involvement in charitable and community service. Similarly, wives of independent businessmen can help generate business by promoting a favorable public image via their volunteer work. In this case the wives' activities serve the same function as Mobil Oil's funding of a National Geographic special on television. Such wives advertise good will and concern for the community, which can generate direct income for the independent businessman and promotion for the executive contributing to his corporation's sales.

V. WIVES' CONTRIBUTIONS AS AFFECTED BY NATURE OF HUSBANDS' OCCUPATION

Given the types of contributions wives can make to their husbands' success at work, it follows that occupations differ in the degree to which they allow for potential contributions by wives. The following hypotheses

were derived from the theoretical considerations discussed in the previous section.

HYPOTHESIS 1. Marital-status differentials will be larger in occupation with potentially steeper earnings profiles.

The more a man can earn on his job, the larger the potential differences in earnings, and therefore the larger the potential contribution a wife can make by whatever means are available: indirect assistance by allowing the husband to specialize at work, as well as direct assistance applicable to the work situation. If the husband is an employee, there probably will be more pressure on the wife to contribute to her husband's career the higher the career "ceiling" and the more steps in the ladder (Tausky and Dubin, 1965; Hall, 1975; Mortimer, Hall, and Hill, 1978).

This is one reason executives tend to benefit more from being married than do workers in general, and therefore why executives are more often married than other workers (Whyte, 1956). For instance, in 1969 93.1 percent of the male managers earning \$15,000 a year or more (nearly all the managers) were married, 72.25 percent to women not in the paid labor force. As income and status go up, even fewer of the wives hold paid jobs, and even more of the men are married (Kanter, 1977a).

Self-employed men with large potential earnings are also likely to gain large benefits from being married. Independent businessmen or farmers with large growth potential, for example, may experience higher marital status differentials in earnings than do people of similar background without a growth potential. The hypothesis was tested among resettled farm families given land with growth potential in the Columbia Basin project. The farmers who were most successful were more likely to have wives who conceived of their roles in traditional terms (Straus, 1958).

Although these occupational differences in marital-status differentials have not been tested rigorously, their frequent appearance should lead us to consider this hypothesis seriously. However, the same apparent findings can possibly be explained with the help of additional hypotheses.

When careers have a large growth potential, generally only a small proportion of aspiring ladder climbers ever achieve the highest echelon. This often creates fierce competition and therefore stress, resulting from intensive efforts to move up the ladder. Kanter (1977b) called such careers "absorptive," in the sense that they absorb a large fraction of a person's time and energy. The career-minded husband and his family experience stress in two ways: pressure on the husband's health and pressure on the wife and children, who must put up with many irregular and unpredictable demands of the husbands' job (Turner, 1970). This conclusion leads us to another hypothesis.

HYPOTHESIS 2. *The more stressful an occupation, the larger the potential marital-status differential in earnings.*

There is more potential for the wife of a husband whose occupation generates a high level of stress to contribute in the sense that there is more need for her to accommodate her husband's work demands; this constitutes an indirect contribution. There also is more room for direct contributions, such as direct assistance in central tasks and assistance in health maintenance. Although careers with high growth potential often tend to be stressful, the two hypotheses are separable to the extent that job stress and absorptiveness are in principle continuous and measurable. Tests can be designed to ascertain how stress level influences marital-status differentials, given a certain pattern of potential growth in earnings. Moreover, in performing such tests one should control for additional aspects of a job that are also likely to affect marital-status differentials.

HYPOTHESIS 3. *The marital-status differential is likely to be higher in occupations involving more peripheral tasks.*

As was shown in the previous section, one means by which a wife can promote her husband's career is by helping in peripheral tasks such as entertainment and community service. The more such tasks are potentially relevant to an occupation, the more a wife can contribute. Such tasks are more commonly found in high-prestige occupations (Mortimer, Hall, and Hill, 1978, p. 294), in occupations involving extensive personal contacts (Weinstock, 1963), or in occupations highly dependent on the maintenance of a stable clientele (Moore, 1962, p. 84). Therefore, we expect higher marital-status differentials among managers than among engineers of similar ability, and among owners or managers of firms that depend more on their public image because of the type of product they sell.

Again, this hypothesis helps explain the apparently high marital-status differential among corporate managers and independent businessmen. It also explains why wives of university presidents (Clodius and Magrath, 1984), politicians (MacPherson, 1975), officers in the military (Goldman, 1973), and ministers (Taylor and Hartley, 1975) can make important contributions to their husbands' careers.

HYPOTHESIS 4. *The more complex and potentially substitutable the central tasks of a husband's occupation, the larger the potential marital-status differential.*

Blue collar workers rarely are in a position to delegate any of their central tasks to their wives. But business managers and writers can have their wives do secretarial work, clergymen's wives can run the Sunday school, and wives of storekeepers can tend the store. Wives assisting in central tasks are not necessarily unpaid. Epstein (1971) found in his study of married lawyer teams that the wives did much of the paper work contributing to the husband's success in court or with clients.

HYPOTHESIS 5. The more that loyalty contributes to workers' productivity—for example, because of the profitability of investments in human capital—the larger the earnings differential between married and single men.

As mentioned in the previous section, one of the ways in which wives can potentially contribute to their husbands' careers is by increasing their husbands' propensity to be loyal to the firm. Moreover, the fact that a man is married signals his potential for loyalty.

The potential need for workers' loyalty varies by occupation and by the industrial system. Firms need loyal workers more if they consider investing in the workers' firm-specific skills. An industrial system such as Japan sets a particularly high value on loyalty to the firm (Clark, 1979). It is therefore not surprising that employers' discrimination in terms of slower advancement of unmarried workers is more common in Japan than in the United States. In Japan, marriage also serves as a declaration of the willingness to curb individualistic aspirations and to contribute to the firm and to society at large (Hendry, 1986).

VI. SUMMARY AND EXTENSIONS OF THE THEORY

It has been argued here that marital-status differentials in earnings are expected to vary with occupational characteristics such as growth potential, stress and absorptiveness, amount of peripheral and central tasks involved, and need for loyalty. Preliminary evidence based on the sociological literature was offered in partial support of these hypotheses.

The above-mentioned hypotheses all have corollaries, which are derived from the process by which people select marital status, spouse, occupation, and employers. Positions with larger marital-status differentials are more likely to be filled by married men, the result of voluntary selection and possibly encouragement by the employer. Larger marital status differentials are also likely to lead men to marry women who are particularly adept at contributing in the areas of most importance to their job.

Wives' characteristics that are most likely to contribute effectively to the tasks discussed earlier are a higher education and full-time housewife status. Benham's (1975) finding that the husband's income increases with the wife's schooling even when the husband's own education and years of work are controlled supports this view. Interestingly, he found that the positive contribution of the wife's schooling stops at the point of graduate education, possibly because of the substantially higher percentage of women with graduate degrees who work outside the home.

Further direct evidence of the advantage of a nonworking wife from the husband's point of view has been offered in a study of male engineers and accountants (Burke and Weir, 1976). Husbands of working wives reported more job pressures, expressed more dissatisfaction with their jobs, marriages, and other aspects of their lives, and manifested more symptoms of stress than the husbands of homemakers.

What also needs to be determined in this process of matching by spouses, workers, and employers are the terms of cooperation both at the workplace and in the home. In a period of easy divorce and increasingly attractive opportunities outside the home, it is clear that most women do not invest in their husbands' careers without expecting or actually receiving compensation in return. The more they accept traditional marital roles, implying few personal returns for their investments, the more women are likely to support their husbands' careers. Lopata (1971) found that wives of successful men were more likely to accept traditional marital roles. The more prestigious the husband's occupation, the more likely the wife was to turn the enjoyment of her husband's success into part of her reward (Mortimer, Hall, and Hill, 1978). Some women may, in fact, be caught in a bind, not happy about the compensation they receive for their contribution and unable to find better opportunities through divorce and remarriage. Many corporate wives suffer from marital problems, according to Kanter (1977a, p. 109).

This theory also has implications for employers' policies. First, they may discriminate against unmarried workers. Second, they may select two persons to fill a position that tends to be a two-person career. Employers in fact often interview wives of prospective employees as well as the applicants themselves (Kanter, 1977a). Employers may also organize activities that encourage wives to contribute to their husbands' careers, such as family recreation.

Finally, this theory has implications for divorce and its effect on earnings. Divorce may be less common and remarriage more rapid when men engage in occupations with high marital-status differentials. Bartlett and Callahan (1984) found that men who were divorced or widowed and who had remarried experienced particularly rapid growth in wages.⁴ If marriage really contributes as much to earnings as is claimed here,

the upward trend in divorce that has characterized recent decades may be one explanation for the downward trend in productivity left unexplained by conventional methods of study.

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NOTES

1. Economists writing on gender differentiation as it affects labor supply have either ignored the nature-nurture controversy or emphasized biological influences (for instance Becker, 1981, p. 25). Becker's position on this issue is consistent with his general view of social, legal, and political institutions as promoting long-run individual well-being. According to this view, commonly espoused by economists, socially determined influences on behavior—such as nurturing methods unrelated to natural differences—which do not reflect real factor prices and endowments, would not be socially optimal and would therefore disappear over time. This assumes competition in the broadest sense and the absence of exploitation of one group by another.

2. A critique of the economic literature on female labor supply along these lines can be found in Mortimer, Hall, and Hill (1978).

3. A related discussion of loyalty can be found in Akerloff (1983).

4. This could also possibly reflect the causality discussed in Section I, whereby high income facilitates remarriage.

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