

# Greedy Work and the New Gendered Division of Labour

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## Abstract

Recent years have seen the emergence of a new gendered division of labour. More men than women occupy 'greedy jobs' that offer high wages and swift career progress in return for long work hours and unforeseeable schedules. As a result, women earn less income and occupy fewer positions of power than men. This division of labour is the result of patriarchal norms that make it costlier for women than for men to occupy greedy jobs. This article analyses the morality of greedy employment. It offers a novel explanation of why norms that give rise to the new gendered division of labour are morally objectionable. The main claim is that it is morally objectionable to adopt the new gendered division of labour because this perpetuates patriarchal norms that impose unjustifiable costs on others.

## Keywords

Gender Justice, Gender Inequality, Employment, Greedy Work, Gendered Division of Labour, Social Norms

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## Introduction

On average, men earn more income from paid employment than women (Chancel et al 2022, chap. 5). Men are also more likely than women to occupy positions at the top of an organizational hierarchy within the labour market (Ortiz-Ospina and Roser 2018; Scott 2020, chap. 1). We can refer to the first of these inequalities as the *gender income gap* and to the second as the *gender power gap*.<sup>1</sup> Historically, the main cause of these inequalities was a ‘breadwinner-homemaker’ division of labour between men and women in heterosexual couples, whereby men dedicated most of their time to paid employment in the formal labour market and women dedicated most of their time to unpaid work in the home.

Today, these traditional ‘breadwinner-homemaker’ arrangements are much less common, but the income gap and the power gap still exist. Their continued existence is explained by a new, more subtle mechanism. Women tend to pursue a different *kind* of paid employment than men. Men are more likely to work on jobs that require a high degree of commitment and a willingness to prioritise the employer’s demands over other commitments (Rakoff 2009: 76). These jobs offer high salaries and swift career progress in return for long hours and a willingness to work ‘on call’ with unforeseeable schedules. We can refer to this kind of employment as *greedy work*. Women are more likely to work on jobs with foreseeable schedules, greater employee flexibility, fewer work hours, and lower pay. These ‘non-greedy jobs’ are more compatible with unpaid work in the home, where women often work a second shift to meet the needs of children or other dependants. We can refer to this division of greedy and non-greedy work between men and women as the *new gendered division of labour*.

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term power-gap to refer to inequalities in the occupation of positions of power in the formal labour market. This is not to deny that other kinds of inequalities in power between genders exist as well. My focus in this article is on the income gap and the power gap because the effects of these two inequalities are particularly profound and pervasive. I do not wish to imply that the power and the income gap are the only, or the most important kinds of inequalities between men and women.

The emergence of this new division of labour raises three important challenges for liberal feminism.<sup>2</sup> First, a greater range of policies than is currently implemented in most countries is needed to achieve an equitable distribution of greedy and non-greedy work between men and women. But not all of these policies are justified by arguments that liberal feminists have recently advanced (Schouten 2019; Gheaus 2012; Olson 2020 chap. 8). Existing arguments can justify *some* of the coercive policies that are necessary to overcome the new gendered division of labour but not *all* policies that are necessary to do that. Second, decisions to adopt a gendered division of labour are influenced by social norms, but they are not normally forced, or unfree. This means that liberal feminists can't appeal to freedom, one of the values they care most deeply about, to justify abolishing the gendered division of labour. Third, the fact that decisions to adopt gendered divisions of labour are influenced by social norms raises a challenge to liberal feminism because according to some critics, liberal feminism can evaluate as unjust only existing *institutions*, and not also *culture and social norms*. In other words, liberal feminists are said to be insufficiently attuned to patriarchal ideology (Haslanger 2021). As a result of this, liberal feminism might suffer from a status-quo bias, because it can't endorse both core liberal values and radical demands for a gender-egalitarian society (Chambers 2020).

My argument shows that liberal feminism has the resources to respond to these three challenges. It does so by laying out a novel way of objecting to gendered divisions of labour that emphasises the harmful external effects of decisions to adopt gendered divisions of labour. I defend the claim that decisions of heterosexual couples to allocate greedy work to men and non-greedy work to women generate a morally objectionable externality. This is because they perpetuate patriarchal norms that raise the costs for other couples to adopt gender-egalitarian divisions of labour. Furthermore, I contend that in the absence of regulation to address these externalities, men have a moral duty to moderate their career ambitions. My argument shows that liberal feminism can

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<sup>2</sup> Liberal feminism, as I understand it, emphasises the value of women's personal autonomy to live a life of their own choosing, as well as the value of women's political autonomy to co-determine the conditions under which they live.

evaluate and condemn patriarchal ideology and that it can justify radical steps that are necessary to overcome patriarchy.

The article is structured as follows. Section 1 explains the concept of greedy work and its relation to the new gendered division of labour. Section 2 describes the mechanism that generates this new division of labour. It highlights the role of social norms in this process and explains why this poses a challenge to the liberal feminism. Section 3 explains why we can't object to gendered divisions of labour by pointing out that they result from unfree choices. Section 4 lays out a novel objection to gendered divisions of labour. It shows that decisions to adopt gendered divisions of labour are morally objectionable because they perpetuate harmful patriarchal norms. States wrong their citizens when they fail to provide assistance to those who would prefer to divide greedy and non-greedy work in a gender-egalitarian fashion. Section 5 explains why the argument from harmful external effects is acceptable to all reasonable citizens, including conservatives who endorse and celebrate 'traditional' divisions of labour. Section 6 concludes.

## 1. Greedy Work

Until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, gendered divisions of labour were largely caused by three mechanisms, whose effect was to exclude women from accessing influential and well-paid jobs.<sup>3</sup> First, legal prohibitions prevented women to work in various fields. For example, so called 'marriage bar' laws made it illegal for women in most western countries to continue to work once they got married (Goldin 1988). Second, access to attractive jobs was long restricted by laws that denied women access to higher education. In the United States for example, many Ivy League universities refused to enrol women as students until the 1970s (Genevieve 2021). Third, women's career aspirations were often stunted by sexist discrimination of employers, who give preferential treatment to male candidates in hiring and promotion decisions. Together, these mechanisms gave

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<sup>3</sup> I don't deny that mechanisms other than those listed here also contribute to the perpetuation of the income gap and the power-gap. I focus on these three because they are particularly widespread and because their effects are particularly profound.

rise to a division of labour among heterosexual couples, whereby men worked mostly as full-time ‘breadwinners’, pursuing paid employment in the labour market, while most women worked exclusively at home, caring for children and relatives, and carrying out house chores. As a result of this, men earned more income and occupied more positions of power than women.

Much has changed over the course of the last five decades, however. Today, *legal* barriers that prevent women from accessing attractive jobs have largely been dismantled. Women were also successful in their fight against legal barriers to access higher education. As a result of that, women now outnumber and outperform men in many educational fields. Sexist discrimination by employers is still a very significant problem (Ahmed, Granberg, and Khanna 2021). But according to Claudia Goldin, as well as other feminist economists, it no longer provides the principal explanation for the persisting income- and power-gap (Goldin 2021: 4; Scott 2021, chap. 7; US Department of Labor 2009: 2; Olson 2020: 135). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, gendered divisions of labour and their resultant income- and power gap, are perpetuated by a more subtle mechanism (Goldin 2021, chap. 10).

In contemporary industrialized societies, gender inequalities in power and income result to a large extent from inequities in the distribution of greedy and non-greedy employment among heterosexual couples.<sup>4</sup> Many women derive *some* income from paid employment in the labour market and many men take up *some* of the unpaid tasks at home. But the kind of jobs typically taken up by men differs from the kind of jobs typically taken up by women. Men are more likely than women to take up jobs that require long work hours and a high degree of commitment. These jobs require employees to work long hours and to be available ‘on call’ for their employer. In return, these jobs offer higher hourly wages and faster career progression than part-time jobs. The reason

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<sup>4</sup> Among same-sex couples unequal divisions of greedy and non-greedy work also generate inequity between partners, but they don’t increase inequality between genders.

why hourly wages are higher on greedy jobs is that the additional hours and the flexibility put in by the employee are often highly valuable to employers.

To better understand this, consider the work of a consultant at a law firm who has intimate knowledge of a particular client for whom he is responsible. None of his colleagues can replace him while he is off work because they lack the in-depth knowledge that is necessary to respond to the client's needs. The client wants to be attended by someone who flexibly responds to their demands, as they arise. This means the client can be attended only by workers who commit themselves to work flexibly 'on-call' and to work overtime, if needed. The workers' willingness to work long shifts and prioritise the clients' needs is highly valuable to the client. For that reason, hourly wages are much higher on greedy than on non-greedy jobs. According to Claudia Goldin, "The worker who jumps the highest gets an ever-bigger reward. The jobs with the greatest demands for long hours and the least flexibility have paid disproportionately more, while earnings in other employments have stagnated" (Goldin 2021: 10).

Women are more likely than men to occupy non-greedy jobs with predictable schedules and without overtime work requirements. The predictability and the smaller workload of a non-greedy job enables them to work 'on-call' at home, to cater to the demands of children, relatives, or other dependants. This gives rise to a new gendered division of labour, with men occupying jobs that are instrumental to advancing their careers, and women occupying jobs that are compatible with meeting obligations of care and housework.

For women, the choice to occupy non-greedy jobs is highly consequential. There is thus far no systematic empirical study of the effects of greedy and non-greedy work. But we can get a sense of the differential rewards of these two kinds of employment by looking at differences that exist between full-time and part-time employment. Hourly wages are lower for those who work few hours, training is less often granted to part-time workers, and the probability of getting tenure is much lower for part-time workers (Evans et al 2001: 13). Part-time workers experience much less

wage progression over the years than full-time workers and many social security benefits are attainable only through full-time employment. As a consequence, women are less economically independent, earn lower wages, have less employment stability, and occupy fewer positions of power than men (Davaki 2016: 19; Smith 2013). When couples split up, these disadvantages often persist (Arneson 1997: 314).

Some couples still opt for 'old-fashioned' breadwinner-homemaker arrangements whereby women engage exclusively in unpaid work and men engage exclusively in paid work. The effect of these breadwinner-homemaker arrangements is that the share of employed women (as opposed to those who do not engage in paid work at all) is significantly smaller than the share of employed men. In the EU28 for example, the share of employed women lay at 64% in 2014, while the share of employed men lay at 75% (Davaki 2016: 16; Messenger, Lee, and McCann 2011, chap. 4). What is more, men also devote more years of their life to paid work than women. On average, men spend 37.4 years of their life on paid work, while women do so only during 29 years of their life (Davaki 2016: 16.) What makes this fact even more remarkable is that men have lower life expectancies than women, which means that in proportion to an individual's lifetime, this inequality is even greater.

As a result, "women's share of total incomes from work (labor income) [...] stands at less than 35% today [...] in a gender equal world, women would earn 50% of all labor income" (Chancel et al 2022, chap.5). Another way of putting this is that on average women around the world derive about half as much income from labour than men. Not only do women earn less income but they also occupy a much smaller share of influential positions. In the UK for example, 92 of the top 100 companies have male CEOs, two thirds of UK Members of Parliament are men, and out of 12 judges at the Supreme Court, 10 are men (LSE Commission on Gender 2015: 13). Despite large differences between countries, this pattern generalizes: Men are much more likely than women to occupy supervisory positions (Scott 2020, chap. 1).

Many states have implemented policies whose goal it is to close the income gap and the power-gap. An example of this is legislation that requires equal pay for equal work. However, thus far these efforts have not been very successful. The income gap and the power gap persist in many countries despite legislation to combat it (Scott 2020, chap. 9). Analysing the new gendered division of labour helps understand why the income gap and the power-gap have not been closed by these recent efforts. Paying men and women equal wages when they carry out the same kind of work is not enough because jobs that offer high wages and swift career progress are disproportionately taken up by men.

One way of closing the income gap and the power gap is to introduce policies that increase the number of women who take up greedy jobs and that increase the number of men who take up non-greedy jobs that enable them to carry out more unpaid work. Alternatively, states can introduce taxes and regulations that make non-greedy work more attractive and greedy work less attractive. I will say something about the kinds of policies that would have this effect in section 4. However, my goal in this article is not to determine which of these policies is most effective in tackling the gendered division of greedy work. Rather, my goal is to defend the justifiability of these policies in a way that is consistent with the values endorsed by liberal feminism.

## 2. Social Norms and the Challenge of Liberal Neutrality

To understand why policies to erode gendered divisions of labour are difficult to justify, we must look more closely at the mechanisms that generate gendered divisions of labour. Consider the following example.

*Leila and Rob* meet in graduate school and become a couple. After graduating, both begin to work on greedy jobs. Few years later, they decide to have children. This means they must reduce work hours to cater to their children's needs. Since their greedy jobs aren't available on a part-time basis, they must choose between three options. (a) Both quit their greedy job to take up more flexible part-time employment (*equal split*); (b) Leila takes up part-time



employment and Rob continues to work on his greedy job (*greedy conservative*); (c) Rob takes up part-time employment and Leila continues to work on her greedy job (*greedy progressive*).

It is rational for Leila and Rob to choose either *greedy conservative* or *greedy progressive* because choosing *equal split* is economically costly. Choosing *equal split* means foregoing the superior wage of a greedy job. Couples with low income earning capacity sometimes see themselves forced to choose between *greedy conservative* and *greedy progressive* because their household income under *equal split* would be too small to make ends meet. Couples with higher income earning capacity often avoid *equal split*, not because they cannot afford this option, but because of its opportunity cost: They can afford a higher standard of living when one of them works on a greedy job.

Faced with a choice between *greedy conservative* and *greedy progressive*, many couples opt for *greedy conservative*. This is because of two reasons. The first reason has to do with social costs that make *greedy progressive* costlier than *greedy conservative*. Men are often stigmatised when they don't conform with the expectation to act as 'breadwinner' that economically provides for the family. Women are stigmatised when they dedicate little time to the upbringing of their children. A prominent example of this is the case of former French Minister of Justice, Rachida Dati, who was attacked in the press when she resumed work few days after the birth of her child (Ramdani 2012). Working women who spend little time on the upbringing of their children are often regarded as selfish or negligent. The same is not true for men who work long hours and have children. To be effective in policing individuals' behaviour, these judgements need not be made explicitly. Judgement can influence behaviour when it is expressed implicitly, for example when family, friends, colleagues, and employers respond more positively and in a more accommodating fashion to *greedy conservative* than to *greedy progressive* (Gerson 2010, chap. 6).

The second reason why many couples choose *greedy conservative* has to do with a path dependency that is introduced by pregnancy and breastfeeding. Most mothers decide to breastfeed their children during several months after birth. This makes it likely that women spend more time in

intimate contact with a child.<sup>5</sup> As a result of that, a tighter emotional bond may develop between mothers and their children than between fathers and their children. This initial inequality in emotional bonding can introduce a path dependency. At each turn, it is convenient for parents to make decisions that get them closer to *greedy conservative* than to *greedy progressive*, because they would otherwise have to spend time and energy to reverse the initially introduced path dependency that establishes mothers as primary caregiver (Henriksson and Rubertsson 2022).

The fact that social norms and path dependency play an important role in perpetuating gendered divisions of labour raises an important challenge for liberal feminists. According to political liberalism, justifications for coercive policies must be acceptable to *all* reasonable citizens. An implication of this is that justifications for policies to erode gendered divisions of labour must be reasonably acceptable to everyone, including those heterosexual couples who endorse and celebrate *greedy conservative*. At least some couples endorse social norms that assign to women the role of homemaker and to men the role of breadwinner. These couples might have a complaint against policies that erode patriarchal social norms because this raises the costs of their preferred lifestyle.<sup>6</sup> This is because patriarchal norms would be weaker in a society where *equal split* and *greedy progressive* are more widespread. As a result, people react less positively and less accommodating to conservative lifestyles. Indeed, the choice to enact *greedy conservative* might even be stigmatised in a society with more gender egalitarian norms. This raises a difficult question: How can those committed to the liberal principle of neutrality justify policies whose effect it is to make conservative couples worse off than they currently are?

Before I answer this question, I must address an objection according to which it is not necessary for states to issue policies to erode gendered divisions of labour. This is because we might expect these divisions of labour to disappear ‘by themselves’, as a side-effect of an ongoing trend in the

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<sup>5</sup> I’m not suggesting that it is necessary and inevitable that mothers breastfeed their children. Rather, what I’m observing is that this is a convenient and thus widespread form of feeding new-born children.

<sup>6</sup> For an excellent discussion of this problem see Schouten 2019, chap. 2.

labour market. In particular, one might expect that the recent uptake in remote work and part-time work, that was triggered by the response to the Covid-19 pandemic, helps overcome the gendered division of labour because it generates incentives for men to take up more housework. There are two reasons to think that this might be the case.

First, lockdowns and other restrictions have forced many men to work from home. As a result, men were more frequently exposed to pending housework. Being exposed to pending housework might cause men to take up tasks whose existence they had previously overlooked or ignored. On the one hand, this is because men might become more aware of tasks they previously 'overlooked'. On the other hand, men might find it harder to justify their refusal to participate in house chores to their partners when these pending chores are right in front of them. Second, remote work makes it easier for men to adjust their work schedules to accommodate housework. While working from home, men can interrupt their work more easily in order to carry out housework tasks.

Unfortunately, the expectation that the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic will help erode the gendered division of labour is unfounded. Recent studies show that the gendered division of labour not only persisted but *deepened* during the pandemic (Cohen and Hsu 2020; Sullivan and Lewis 2001; Kashen, Glynn, and Novello 2020). Among couples with children, mothers reduced their paid work to a greater extent than fathers, and mothers spent more time on housework and childcare than fathers (Sevilla et al. 2021). During lockdowns, fathers did in fact carry out more housework than before the pandemic but after lockdowns, when paid employment recovered, men returned to their jobs sooner than women and women are more likely than men to remain unemployed after the lifting of lockdowns (Waddell et al. 2021; Craig and Churchill 2021; Deshpande 2021). This reinforces inequalities in income and in career prospects because "The worker who goes to the office will probably learn more, be able to get the more lucrative clients, and be assigned the more interesting projects. That person will be able to interact with colleagues in person and to work more

effectively, without interruption, away from children trying to learn their multiplication tables” (Goldin 2021: 229).

Observing these effects of Covid-19-lockdowns is significant for two reasons. First, it draws attention to the fact that men are not entirely intransigent. During lockdowns, when men were forced to work from home, they *did* increase their participation in house chores. This highlights the possibility of getting men to carry out more housework, for example by restricting the time they can spend on paid employment. Second, these findings draw attention to the ‘stickiness’ of traditional lifestyles. The gendered division of labour persists despite some initial efforts of policymakers to erode it and despite changes in the labour market induced by the Covid-19 pandemic that appeared to have the potential to rearrange gender relations. It persists because it is sustained by entrenched social norms that influence individuals’ choices by making deviations from the norm socially costly.

### 3. Freedom of Choice

My aim in this article is to show that liberal feminism can condemn these entrenched social norms and the gendered divisions of labour that result from them. In this section, I show that patriarchal social norms don’t undermine individuals’ freedom to choose between conservative and progressive lifestyles. This means that liberal feminists can’t appeal to the core liberal value ‘freedom’ to condemn gendered divisions of labour.

To understand why it is tempting to think that patriarchal norms are objectionable because they undermine individuals’ freedom of choice, recall the case of Leila and Rob. Leila’s and Rob’s decision to choose *greedy conservative*, rather than *greedy progressive*, is influenced by deeply internalised social norms, so that these decisions might not be authentic choices of their own (Chambers 2019). And, so the argument goes, individuals ought to be able to take important decisions freely. The idea is that, even if we should tolerate economic inequalities between individuals when these are the product of free choices, we lack the same reasons to tolerate such inequalities when they are

the product of unfree choices. To illustrate this concern, consider the following case of unfree behaviour.

*Hypnosis:* Leila wants to work as economist. Someone successfully hypnotises her to replace her wish to become an economist with the wish to become a waitress.

Leila has a complaint against the hypnosis because it undermines her capacity for independent reasoning. Arguably, our decisions can be assumed to be free only if our capacity to reason is sufficiently great to recognise different options and assess their value (Raz 1988: 372). The hypnosis makes Leila unable to see options other than to become a waitress and because of that her choice to become a waitress is not free. If women's decision to specialize as a caregiver were like Leila's decision to become a waitress, then we could object to them on the grounds that they are unfree.

However, choices to comply with patriarchal social norms are often not similar enough to *hypnosis* to establish that they are unfree. Most people have access to information regarding different lifestyle choices and while social norms may provide strong incentives to prefer one lifestyle over another, they can't be said to completely undermine individuals' capacity to reason. To be sure, not too long ago, the grip of patriarchal norms on citizens' imagination was much stronger than it is today, and its' effects might have been similar to those of *hypnosis*. But most contemporary societies are somewhat diverse and allow citizens to reflect on lifestyle choices to a reasonable degree.<sup>7</sup> The upshot of this is that decisions to lead gendered lifestyles should normally be considered free if we understand freedom of choice to mean the absence of brainwashing or other factors that undermine our ability to reflect on our decisions. It would be odd and perhaps disrespectful to dismiss someone who chooses to lead a traditional lifestyle as brainwashed.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> There are important differences between countries and between social classes. For example, individuals from disadvantaged social backgrounds and with restricted access to education might find it more difficult to evaluate and resist patriarchal social norms.

<sup>8</sup> As Andrew Mason (2000: 239) puts it: "Many women with childcare commitments who decide to look after their children personally regard themselves as having the option to act otherwise [...]. If we deny that this is so, don't we come dangerously close to failing to respect them as persons [...]?" A very similar concern is expressed by Gina Schouten (2019: 96).

In reply to this, proponents of the freedom objection against the gendered division of labour might point out that our decisions can be said to be unfree not only when our capacity to reason is undermined but also when we choose one option only in order to avoid unreasonable costs that would be associated with all alternative options (Olsaretti 1998; 2016). For example, the choice of a person without savings to pursue gainful employment is unfree, not because she is unable to reason but because the cost associated with the alternative of not selling her labour (poverty, homelessness, starvation) is unreasonable.

Is it possible that Leila's and Rob's decision to choose *greedy conservative* is unfree in the sense that the options *equal split* and *greedy progressive* entail unreasonable costs? For couples with low income earning capacity the economic costs attached to *equal split* can be prohibitive. The income derived from two non-greedy jobs can sometimes be insufficient to make ends meet.<sup>9</sup> In these cases, a choice in favour of *greedy conservative* and *greedy progressive* over *equal split* should indeed be regarded as unfree. However, this doesn't establish that couples with low income are forced to enact a gendered division of labour because they can still choose between *greedy progressive* and *greedy conservative*. *Greedy conservative* is admittedly less costly than *greedy progressive* because society reacts more positively and more accommodating to lifestyles that are in line with established patriarchal norms. But the social cost attached to *greedy progressive* cannot plausibly be regarded as prohibitive. Consider the following analogy.

*Religious belief:* Stephen acquires faith in Christianity. He perceives his faith as his own choice although his upbringing and the culture that surrounds him encouraged the choice to become Christian. His religion imposes certain costs on him. For example, he must regularly travel to the nearest church to attend mass.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The same is not true for couples with higher income earning capacity. These couples are not forced to adopt a gendered division of labour because they can afford *equal split*, even though this is the costlier option.

<sup>10</sup> A very similar example is offered by Gina Schouten (2016: 198).

The acquiring of a religion is similar to the adoption of gendered lifestyles in that it is often influenced by social norms and a culture that makes the choice of alternative lifestyles more costly. Yet, we insist that many costs associated with a religious lifestyle ought to be internalised by the individuals in question.<sup>11</sup> We are reluctant to judge compliance with entrenched social norms as unfree in this case and therefore we should also be wary about objections to the gendered division of labour that deny the freedom of these lifestyle choices.

As I explain in the subsequent section, I think that the most plausible account of why the new gendered division of labour is morally objectionable is not a freedom-based account but an account that emphasises the external effects of choices to enact *greedy conservative*.

#### 4. Harmful Externalities

If decisions to enact gendered divisions of labour are free, how then can we justify interventions whose effect it is to erode these divisions of labour? In this section I argue that it is morally objectionable for individuals to externally impose costs on others when the aggregate effect of this imposing of costs is a) severely harmful and b) affects a socially disadvantaged group. My argument has three main steps. First, I claim that the effect of decisions to enact *greedy conservative* perpetuates patriarchal social norms. Second, I explain what the harmful effects of these norms are. Third, I explain that these harms are sufficiently severe to class contributions to them as morally objectionable. Subsequently, I show that everyone, including those who endorse patriarchal norms, has reason to object to these harms.

We can begin by noting that choices to enact *greedy conservative* contribute to the perpetuation of patriarchal norms. Choosing *greedy conservative* has this effect because compliance with social norms

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<sup>11</sup> To be sure, there are reasons to believe that *some* costs associated with religious lifestyles should be socialised. For example, there is an interesting question as to whether members of the Sikh-community should be allowed to ride motorcycles without helmets so that they don't have to take off their turban. In countries with universal health care coverage, allowing this practice amounts to socialising some of the increased healthcare costs that result from the risky practice of riding motorcycles without helmets. But most costs associated with religious lifestyles, such as the travelling to nearby churches, shouldn't be socialized.

normally reinforces these norms (Battigalli and Dufwenberg 2009; Bicchieri 2002; Brennan et al. 2013, chap. 5). An example of this is that most men in western societies don't wear dresses. Presumably this is because of social norms that stigmatize men when they wear dresses. We can speculate that these norms would be much weaker, or indeed non-existent, if there was a sizable number of men who didn't comply with this norm. By complying with this norm, men do something that perpetuates its existence, and in turn increases the social cost to other men of wearing dresses.

Similarly, traditional couples that choose *greedy conservative* perpetuate social norms that assign to men the role of breadwinner and to women the role of homemaker because they act as role models for a conservative lifestyle (Cudd 2006). We can expect patriarchal norms to be stronger in societies where almost everyone chooses *greedy conservative* and to be weaker or non-existent in societies where a sizeable number of couples choose *equal split* or *greedy progressive*. The role model effect of any couple's decision to choose *equal split* is very weak but the aggregate effect of many persons who all decide to do this can be powerful. Imagine a world where only one person believes that men should be breadwinners and women should be homemakers. This wouldn't be enough to establish an effective social norm that affects other person's behaviour. By contrast, in a society where a majority believes in the breadwinner-homemaker norm, the effects of this norm can be very strong.

So far, I have established that choices to comply with social norms have the effect of perpetuating these norms. I now turn to the harmful external effects of patriarchal norms. In particular, I am interested in the costs of choice to others that the existence of these norms creates. An example of this is the cost for heterosexual women to exit a relation. Women who occupy non-greedy jobs face a disadvantage when they exit a relation because their competitiveness and employability in the labour market is lower than it would be if they had previously worked on a greedy job. This can make women economically dependent on their partners and thus vulnerable to domination (Okin 1998, chap. 7; Waldron 1988).



Patriarchal norms impose costs not only on women with male partners that occupy greedy jobs but also more generally, on women as a group. To understand this, recall that patriarchal norms give rise to the income gap and the power-gap. On average, men are wealthier than women and occupy more influential positions than women. This difference in power makes women as a group vulnerable to various forms of aggression and discrimination. For example, it enables men to harm women with sexist remarks. Women are more vulnerable to sexist remarks by men than men to sexist remarks by women. This is because demeaning remarks are more effective when there is a difference in power between those who demean and those who are demeaned. For example, one and the same disrespectful comment might effectively demean a homeless person but not the CEO of a company. People are more vulnerable to demeaning treatment when they occupy a disadvantaged position in the social hierarchy (Hellman 2011, chap. 2). In contemporary societies, where an income gap and a power-gap, as well as a history of oppression exist, women are more vulnerable to sexist offences than they would be in a society without these inequalities.

Patriarchal norms are particularly harmful to women, but they also impose costs on society as a whole. An example of this is economic efficiency. To be efficient, economies must allocate jobs to the most talented individuals. When social norms make it costly for talented women to compete for jobs, they make an economy less efficient because they make it less likely that the most talented worker occupies a job (Goldin 2021: 22). As a result, we should expect societies without patriarchal norms to be productively more efficient than currently existing societies. There is also evidence that societies where patriarchal norms are stronger are more violent and promote human flourishing to a lesser extent than societies where these norms are weaker (Scott 2022 chap. 1; Hudson et al. 2014).

So far, I have established that compliance with patriarchal norms perpetuates these norms and that these norms have harmful effects. I now turn to the question of whether it is morally objectionable to contribute to these harms by perpetuating patriarchal norms. Sometimes, it can be morally

objectionable to act in ways that help bring about a harmful outcome. An example of this is climate change. Contributing to climate change by emitting greenhouse gases is morally objectionable because it helps bring about circumstances that make others worse off than they would otherwise be.<sup>12</sup> At first sight, contributing to climate change and perpetuating patriarchal norms appear to be two very different kinds of harmful activities. But there are two important morally relevant similarities.

First, decisions to contribute to climate change are morally objectionable even though they are normally not motivated by an intention to harm others. One of the main reasons why many individuals contribute to climate change is that carbon-intensive lifestyles are less costly than carbon-neutral lifestyle. For example, more people would be willing to travel by train if airplane travel was more expensive, or if travelling by train was cheaper. The costs attached to our consumption choices don't reflect the costs of these choices to others. This makes it *individually rational* to engage in activities that contribute to climate change, although it is *collectively self-defeating* when many people do so. We can assume that most people would prefer to avoid catastrophic climate change, even if this comes at the cost of adopting a different, possibly less convenient lifestyle. The main obstacle to changing our lifestyle is a problem of collective action that arises in the absence of regulation and taxation that help citizens coordinate their behaviour.

A similar problem exists for couples that must choose between *equal split*, *greedy conservative*, and *greedy progressive*. Many of those who choose *greedy conservative* do so not because they endorse and celebrate patriarchal norms but because they find it financially and socially costly to deviate from these norms.<sup>13</sup> These individuals face a collective action problem where it is individually rational

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<sup>12</sup> To set aside discussion of the 'non-identity problem', I assume that contributing to climate change is harmful to individuals who already exist.

<sup>13</sup> Recent studies suggest that in western societies the number of those who would like to enact *equal split* is much higher than the number of those who prefer *greedy conservative*. According to Kathleen Gerson (2010, 200), in the United States "most want to create a flexible, egalitarian partnership with considerable room for personal autonomy. Whether reared by homemaker-breadwinning, dual-earner, or single parents, most women and men want a committed bond where they share both paid work and family caretaking. Three-fourths of those reared in dual-earner homes want their spouses to share breadwinning and caretaking, but so do more than two-thirds of those from traditional homes and close to nine-tenths of those with single parents. Four-fifth of the women want egalitarian relationships, but so do

for each person to comply with a norm, but the group as a whole would be better off if everyone jointly decided to deviate from this norm. In the presence of social norms that stigmatise men when they act as homemakers and that stigmatise women when they act as breadwinners, it is rational – because less costly – for each individual to comply with the social norm. Patriarchal norms would lose their force if non-compliance with these norms became normalised. But in the absence of a mechanism that helps individuals coordinate their behaviour, each person finds it costly to act in ways that go against the grain of established social norms.

A second similarity between patriarchal norms and climate change is that both disproportionately affect socially disadvantaged groups. Climate change affects everyone. But it disproportionately affects the poor, who are less able to insulate themselves from its harmful effects. Patriarchal norms affect both men and women. But they disproportionately affect women, who are historically disadvantaged, and who are at the losing end of inequalities in income and power that are caused by patriarchal norms.

Observing these two similarities between the external effects of *greedy conservative* and greenhouse gas emissions is significant because it helps us understand why states have a duty to help those affected by patriarchal norms. States must assist victims of harmful externalities in cases where the externality is a) severely harmful and b) disproportionately affects a socially disadvantaged group. The ideas that we should avoid severe harms when this can be done at acceptable cost and that we should prioritise the interests of the disadvantaged flow from various plausible approaches to social justice and I will not defend them here but take their appeal to be self-evident. My point is that perpetuating patriarchal norms by choosing *greedy conservative* falls within the category of behaviour that is morally objectionable because it contributes to a severe harm that disproportionately affects the disadvantaged. States have additional reasons to assist the victims of harmful externalities when those who contribute to these externalities do so mainly because they are trapped in a collective

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over two-thirds of the men. [...] if social arrangements allowed men and women to enact their values, most would prefer to A market and nonmarket work rather than specializing in one at the expense of the other.”.

action problem that makes it individually rational but collectively self-defeating to contribute to the externality.

So far, I have argued that enacting *greedy conservative* is morally objectionable because it perpetuates patriarchal norms and thereby imposes unjustifiable costs on those with preferences for a gender-egalitarian sharing of paid and unpaid work. To complete this argument, I must engage with two important complications.<sup>14</sup>

The first complication has to do with the fact that harmful patriarchal norms are the product of decisions taken by a very large number individuals, each of whom makes an imperceptibly weak contribution to the aggregate outcome. The effect of any individual's decision to adopt *greedy progressive*, instead of *greedy conservative*, is imperceptibly weak, in the sense that it hardly affects the strength of prevalent social norms. If just one person, or one couple, deviates from an established norm, then this does almost nothing to weaken the norm. Observing this is important because it casts doubt on the claim that individuals have an obligation to refrain from contributing to harmful social norms. If the effect of the choice of any given individual to contribute to a harmful outcome is imperceptibly weak, then how can the individual have a duty to not contribute to the harmful outcome? This problem is familiar from a variety of contexts, such as meat consumption, voting, or greenhouse gas emissions. The existence of imperceptible effects is not troubling for deontological moral principles because such principles can condemn actions without appealing to their effects. Consequentialist principles, such as the one I am invoking in this section, *are* challenged by the existence of imperceptible effects.

One way of answering this challenge is to observe that effects need not be perceptible to be morally significant. Hedonistic utilitarians are committed to the idea that only those benefits and harms that can be consciously experienced are morally significant. If this were true, then it would indeed

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<sup>14</sup> I am grateful to two anonymous reviewers for pressing me on these complications.

be hard to see why individuals should refrain from making imperceptible contributions to harmful outcomes. But we *can* be harmed in morally objectionable ways by things that we don't consciously experience. Small amounts of environmental toxins can cause damage to our organs, even though we don't notice these damages. Our self-esteem can be harmed when people on the street frequently give us scrutinizing looks, even if these looks don't reach our conscious awareness. Similarly, role models for *greedy-conservative* can make those who would like to adopt progressive divisions of labour reluctant to do so, and thus worse off than they would otherwise be, even if the role-modelling effect of any individual that enacts *greedy-conservative* is not consciously noticed by those whom it affects.

What complicates this issue further is that some contributions to harmful outcomes might have no effect at all – not even an imperceptibly small one. To understand why such contributions can be morally objectionable, we need a different explanation. In many cases, this explanation can be that individual actions have a certain *probability* of triggering a harmful outcome. The possibility of making a contribution that triggers a harmful outcome can make it morally impermissible to make that contribution (Kagan 2011).

Observing this is still not enough to address all variations of the 'imperceptible effects problem'. Philosophers have dedicated a lot of attention to several types of this problem and several solutions have been proposed (Carlson, Jedenheim Edling, and Johansson 2021; Barnett 2018; Norcross 1997). I lack the space to describe these solutions and will thus set further complications to one side to focus on a second complication that my account faces.

The second complication casts doubt on my claim that individuals have a duty to refrain from contributing to patriarchal social norms. The reason why individuals might not have a duty to refrain from contributing to these norms is that they might merely be required to play a part in reforming unjust institutions – not to refrain from contributing to injustice (Rawls 1999, 99; Klosko 1994). Playing a part in reforming unjust institutions and refraining from contributing to injustice

are not always the same thing. To illustrate this, consider again the example of climate change. Individuals can contribute directly to addressing the injustice of climate change, for example by reducing their greenhouse gas emissions. Individuals can also help address climate change more indirectly, by contributing to the reform of unjust institutions. An example of this is to vote for political parties that promise to pass legislation to tackle climate change. One might think that the existence of patriarchal norms merely calls for the latter, indirect contribution to reform. If this were true, it would undermine my claim that individuals have a duty refrain from *greedy conservative* lifestyles.

The crucial question is thus how we can distinguish between injustices that ‘merely’ require individuals to do their part in reforming unjust institutions and injustices that require individuals to refrain from contributing to them. This question is difficult to answer, among other things, because one way of contributing to reform unjust institutions is often to refrain from contributing to injustice. In many cases, individuals are required to refrain from contributing to injustice because this is the main way in which they can discharge their duty to play a part in reforming unjust institutions. However, for the sake of argument, let us assume that there are meaningful ways in which individuals can contribute to reforming unjust patriarchal institutions that don’t involve refraining from contributing to patriarchal norms.

A promising strategy to distinguish between injustices that require individuals to do their part in reforming unjust institutions and injustices that require individuals to refrain from contributing to them is to ask whether it would be disproportionately burdensome to require individuals to refrain from contributing to injustice. This strategy asks a) how burdensome it is for individuals to refrain from contributing to injustice and b) how much is gained by requiring individuals to refrain from contributing to injustice. Injustices that are very severe can justify imposing greater burdens on individuals than less severe injustices. The idea is that if something of great moral significance is gained by refraining from contributing to injustice, and if refraining from contributing to injustice

is not unduly burdensome, then it is morally required to refrain from contributing to injustice. I don't have enough space here to defend this principle but I submit that it is less demanding than other plausible moral principles, such as for example Peter Singer's rescue principle (Singer 1972: 231).

Patriarchal norms arguably belong to the category injustices that require individuals to refrain from contributing to them. This is because, as I explain above, patriarchal norms are severely harmful and because adopting *greedy progressive* or *equal split* does not involve a great sacrifice on the side of those who adopt these lifestyles. Requiring individuals to refrain from contributing to patriarchal norms does not impose a disproportionate burden on those who would prefer to enact *greedy conservative*.

Taking stock, I have now completed my argument by engaging with complications around imperceptible effects and duties to refrain from contributing to injustice. In a next step, I address the question of what states can do to overcome or mitigate unjust inequalities in income and power between men and women.

There is a variety of policies that can help erode patriarchal norms by reducing the prevalence of *greedy conservative*. Some of them promote *equal split*, others promote *greedy progressive*, and yet others promote both *equal split* and *greedy progressive*. Consider first policies that promote *equal split*. These policies reduce the cost faced by couples who want to share the tasks of paid and unpaid work in an egalitarian fashion. For example, states can subsidise part-time work to make it more attractive and to make it more widely available. If part-time work was better paid and easier to access, couples would find it more attractive to each work part-time, whilst sharing equally the tasks housework and care work (LSE Commission on Gender 2015). States can 'directly' subsidize the availability and quality of part-time work, for example by financially rewarding firms that offer high-quality part-time work. States can also improve the quality and availability of part-time work *indirectly* by subsidising the development of technologies that increase the productivity of part-time work.

When part-time work is more productive, employers will offer it more frequently and on better conditions.<sup>15</sup> Another strategy of promoting *equal split* is to make *greedy conservative* and *greedy progressive* more costly. States could make greedy work less attractive, for example by imposing taxes on long work hours or by introducing maximum work hours legislation, so that the trade-off between greedy and non-greedy work becomes smaller.

A second group of policies promotes *greedy progressive* by making it less costly and less difficult for women to occupy greedy jobs. An example of policies that promote *greedy progressive* are quotas that help break glass ceilings for women who apply for influential and well-paid positions.

Finally, there are policies whose effect it is to promote both *equal split* and *greedy progressive*. For example, states can reduce the cost of childrearing by subsidising services and institutions that facilitate childcare. When childcare is more accessible, parents can dedicate more time to paid employment. This makes it less costly for women who prefer *greedy progressive* over *equal split* to occupy greedy jobs and less costly for couples who prefer *equal split* over *greedy conservative* and *greedy progressive* to each work part-time.<sup>16</sup> Another illustration of a policy that promotes both *equal split* and *greedy progressive* is ‘use-it-or-lose-it’ paternal leave. This policy promotes *equal split* and *greedy conservative* by providing men with a non-transferable entitlement to paid paternity leave (Brighthouse and Olin Wright 2008). Men who don’t take up their entitlement to paternity leave lose it because they can’t transfer it to their partners.

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<sup>15</sup> For example, states can subsidise the development of technologies that make it possible for workers to complement each other when they work on one and the same task. For an illustration of how this can be done see Goldin 2021, chap. 9.

<sup>16</sup> Some might worry that such policies set back the interests of childless persons in an objectionable way. What motivates this worry is that, in an ideal world, the cost of having children might have to be borne exclusively by parents. According to some philosophers, it would be unfair (in an ideal world) for parents to make others pay for the decision to have children. Subsidies for childcare are one example of a policy that socializes the cost of having children. In reply to this, we can observe that the justification for policies such as childcare subsidies can be reasonably accepted by everyone, including those who decide not to have children. The effect of childcare subsidies is to benefit those who decide to have children. But this need not bother us, so long as these policies are supported by considerations that are neutral at the level of justification.



Recall that in the absence of such policies, individuals still have a duty to adjust their behaviour so that it doesn't contribute to harmful patriarchal norms. Men can't justify decisions to occupy greedy jobs by pointing at an absence of regulations that would make it more attractive to choose *equal split* or *greedy progressive*. Men in heterosexual couples who can economically afford to occupy a non-greedy job have a justice-based reason to do so, even when there are no policies in place to incentivise this choice.

At the same time, we should regard the absence of such policies itself as an injustice. States must offer good reasons to refrain from helping individuals overcome harmful externalities. States commit an injustice when they refuse to implement policies that help individuals avoid contributing to harmful outcomes for no good reason, because their inaction leaves individuals worse off than they could otherwise be. To illustrate, a person who wants to travel from A to B has a complaint against a situation where airplane tickets are much cheaper than train tickets. This is because it is costly for her to do what climate justice requires her to do – which is to buy a train ticket. Similarly, individuals have a complaint against situations where *greedy conservative* is cheaper than *equal split* and *greedy progressive*, because this makes it costly for them to do what justice requires – which is to choose *equal split* or *greedy progressive*.

## 5. The Neutrality Objection

One concern about the argument I have laid out is that it is illiberal. To understand this, we must recall that some couples endorse traditional lifestyles, of which *greedy conservative* is a fundamental part. These couples are better off in the presence of patriarchal norms than in the absence of these norms. This is because the social cost of adopting *greedy conservative* is lower in a society where patriarchal norms are widespread than in a society where these norms are absent. In a society with patriarchal norms, people will generally react positively and in an accommodating fashion to *greedy conservative*. In a society where *equal split* prevails, people would have less favourable attitudes towards *greedy conservative*. Indeed, *greedy conservative* might even be stigmatised in a society without

patriarchal norms. This means that states harm traditional couples when they implement policies whose aim it is to promote *equal split* or *greedy progressive*.

As I explained earlier, political liberals are committed to justifications of coercive state action that are neutral between the various conceptions of the good that citizens in contemporary societies hold (Quong 2010; Rawls 2005). Policies that promote *equal split* or *greedy progressive* might appear to violate this requirement because they improve the lives of those with preferences for gender-egalitarian lifestyles at the expense of those with preferences for conservative lifestyles. What's more, the improvement of the lives of those with gender-egalitarian preferences is not merely an unforeseen by-product of these policies. Instead, it is the *intention* of these policies to promote gender egalitarianism. This appears to violate the liberal requirement of justificatory neutrality because it treats the interests of progressive citizens as more important than the interests of conservative citizens.

In reply to this objection, we must look more closely at the kind of justification that can be offered in favour of policies that erode *greedy conservative*. In particular, we must pay attention to two kinds of harms that women experience when *greedy conservative* is widespread. First, women in heterosexual relations are vulnerable to unfair treatment and domination when *greedy conservative* is widespread. This is because they are less economically independent and therefore face higher costs when they exit a relation. The fact that women in *greedy conservative* relations are less economically independent is unproblematic for well-functioning conservative couples. Indeed, we might expect that conservative couples attach value to this kind of economic dependency because it is an integral part of their preferred lifestyle. However, even conservative couples must be alive to the possibility that fundamental commitments can change and that relations can break down. Consider the following scenario.

*Revised Convictions:* Leila and Rob are a conservative couple. They enact a *greedy conservative* division of labour and attach great value to this lifestyle. One day, Rob reads a book that

persuades him to abandon his conservative convictions and become a feminist. Leila's convictions remain conservative, but she now faces an unacceptable situation. Her partner no longer endorses conservatism and is thus unattractive to her. At the same time, leaving Rob is very costly for Leila because she depends on him for her economic subsistence.

What this example illustrates is that everyone, including conservatives, has reason to value their autonomy and their ability to exit a relation at acceptable cost.

Moreover, everyone, including conservatives, has reason to protect their ability to revise their life plans. Consider a variation of the above scenario where Rob remains conservative, and Leila becomes persuaded by feminism. As a result, Leila wants to abandon Rob but finds it costly to do so because she depends on Rob for her economic subsistence. What this illustrates is that all citizens have an interest in protecting their ability to revise their conception of the good and to adjust their life plans accordingly. Leila must be alive to the possibility that her conception of the good can change and should therefore value her ability to exit a relation if it comes into conflict with her revised life plans. The upshot of this is that policies whose aim it is to erode *greedy conservative* are justified by reasons that are neutral between various conceptions of the good. We don't have to rely on assumptions about the superior value of gender-egalitarian lifestyles to justify policies that promote this lifestyle.

To further strengthen this point, let's look at a second kind of harm that women experience when *greedy conservative* is widespread. Inequitable distributions of paid and unpaid work give rise to the income and power-gap. As I explained above, these inequalities make women vulnerable to various forms of misogynist aggression and discrimination. For example, women are more vulnerable to sexist offences than they would be in a society without these inequalities.

To understand why this is important in the context of liberal neutrality, we must emphasize a distinction between conservatism and misogyny. Conservative couples endorse the idea that men's

‘natural’ role is to work as breadwinner and women’s ‘natural’ role is to work as homemaker. This conception of people’s role in society is controversial but it is not necessarily misogynist. We can assume that everyone, including conservatives, attaches value to being treated with respect. Because of that, conservatives must condemn circumstances such as the income and power gap that enable misogyny. This provides us with another reason to object to the harms of patriarchal norms that is consistent with liberal neutrality: no reasonable conception of the good can value circumstances that enable harmful disrespect.

## 6. Conclusion

Inequalities in income and power between men and women persist, even though legal barriers for women to access education and employment have been dismantled in many countries. One of the main reasons for this is that men and women occupy different kinds of jobs. Men are more likely to occupy greedy jobs that are characterised by long work hours and unpredictable schedules, in return for high wages and swift career progress. Women are more likely to occupy jobs with foreseeable schedules, fewer work hours, and lower pay. The result of this is a new gendered division of labour. I have argued that decisions of heterosexual couples to adopt this new division of labour should be regarded as free. This means that we can’t appeal to the core liberal value freedom to object to the new division of labour. A plausible account of the wrongness of this division of labour focuses on harmful external effects that result from the perpetuating of patriarchal norms. States act unjustly when they fail to provide citizens with assistance to overcome these norms. In the absence of such assistance, men nevertheless have duties to moderate their professional ambitions, so that their behaviour doesn’t contribute to harmful inequalities in power and pay between men and women.

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