

From 'unified' to 'bargaining' households

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From agency to structure

- Economics is all about how people make choices. Sociology is all about how they don't have any choices to make.
(Duesenberry, 1960)

Rational choice decision-making

Individuals have unlimited desires but scarce means. They seek to maximize their tastes and preferences subject to their resource constraints. 'Preferences' are not directly observable but 'revealed' through choices made.

Thus labour supply decision-making....

- Individuals made decisions about their supply of labour to the market on the basis of their preferences for work, and the income that it brought, and leisure

- The purely economic man is indeed close to being a social moron. Economic theory has been much preoccupied with this rational fool decked in the glory of his one-purpose preference ordering.....Amartya Sen (1982)

New household economics ...

....shifted focus from individual to household decision-making, added time availability to the household resource constraint and recognised 'household production' as a third use of time

But side stepped questions of power and conflict within the household..

- through assumptions of fully interdependent preference functions or
- (in the case of 'rotten kids') the assumption of the 'benevolent dictator' household head.
- Either way, household decision-making governed by principle of joint welfare maximisation

Empirical reality proved difficult to accommodate within model.....

- Systematic evidence of inequalities in basic well-being within the household by age, by marital status and by gender could not be explained away by reference to differentials in productivity or preferences (cf. Rosenzweig and Schultz)
- So the shift to more genuinely 'collective' models of the household

Households as sites of 'co-operative conflict'

- Household relationships as implicit contracts
- Individuals members co-operate because the gains from co-operation outweigh what they could achieve on their own
- But there may be a range of such co-operative solutions with differing distributive implications
- Conflict can arise over which co-operative solution should be pursued
- Bargaining comes into play to resolve conflict

Conceptualising bargaining power: individual resources

- 'Fall back' position which will determine the credibility of threat to withdraw co-operation or exit the household will depend on resources that individuals have access to in their own right (wages, own assets etc.)

Conceptualising bargaining power: ideology and perceptions

Perceived value of contributions of different
members

Sense of self worth (adapted preferences)

Conceptualising bargaining power: implicit contracts and social norms

- Norms set limits on what can be bargaining about
- Norms are a constraint in the bargaining process
- Norms influence the nature of the bargaining process (covert/overt; aggressive/conciliatory)
- Norms may be endogenous to bargaining process: norms are bargained over

Conceptualising bargaining power: beyond the household

Extra-environmental parameters (EEPs): gender balance in marriage market, alimony/child custody rules and norms/ability to return to natal home in event of marital breakdown/social conventions regarding women's work

Structures of constraint: cultural norms, political rules, asset distributions and individual preferences (coalescing inequalities)

From structure to agency: culturalist paradigms

- Individual actors have so completely internalised the norms and values of their society that individual behaviour is a mere re-enactment of social norms:
- Voluntarism here ..becomes largely reduced to making a space in social theory for account of motivation, connected via norms to the characteristics of the social system. ..Parson's actors are cultural dopes (Giddens, 1979)

Purdah as cultural paradigm

- Religion: widespread tendency to treat Islam as a unitary ideology from which practices relating to women can be automatically read off in any Islamic society (Kandiyoti)
- Culture: Village women in Bangladesh feel no urge to view themselves with detachment in relation to their culture...They do not explain the reasons for doing what they do, behaving as they behave. They simply perform their 'duty' and behave according to custom (Begum)

Accommodating agency: Invention within limits (Bourdieu)

- Social hierarchies contain conceptual schema which represent the community's official account of itself.
- Habitus denotes the socially structured aspect of subjectivity in social practice. Delineates the sense of limits.
- Membership of social order provides access to resources and opportunities to exercise agency but within these limits

- Strategies refer to diverse ways in which interests are addressed and meanings negotiated by social actors
- In the nature of enduring social hierarchies that dominant actors can pursue officializing strategies in which private advantage can be presented as the interests of the wider community

Agency and social change come about as a result of

- The shift from unquestioning acceptance of the social order as natural (doxa) to a more critical stance as the possibility of alternatives emerges (discourse)
- The creative interpretation of rules rather than their mechanical enactment

Household relations as implicit contracts

- Conjugal contract which expresses societal views about marriage, sexuality and reproduction (Whitehead)
- The patriarchal bargain which spells out the form that bargaining takes (Kandiyoti)
- Struggles over meaning as the focus of bargaining

- ...inequalities of power are made manifest in the interpretation of the terms of the contract and ...these give rise to material conflicts of interest between women and men. The ability to provide an interpretation of the terms of the marital contract, or indeed any other set of normative practices and understandings is a political ability. It is political because the definitions of terms and interpretations of normative practices and understandings can, in principle, be redefined and contested and these processes of definition, redefinition and contestation will always have material consequences (Henrietta Moore, 1994)