

Between Career And Feelings: A Theoretical Reflection On Gender In The Dynamics Of Care, Work And Emotions

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Abstract:

Background: The relationship between work, career and the anthropology of emotions with a focus on gender inequality, especially in the scientific world, still requires extensive discussion to promote a more equitable, inclusive society that is attentive to everyone's care needs.

Objective: This theoretical essay aims to analyze the intersection between the economy of care and the anthropological study of emotions by relating theory to a reflection on gender inequality.

Results: It is a bibliographic text divided into three main sections: economic value of emotional and care work, anthropology of emotions and gender inequality in science. Emotions are shown to play a key role in the care economy, especially for women, who have a central role in this domain.

Conclusion: Social constructions and norms of gender along with cultural expectations influence how emotions shape the care practices carried out by women.

Key Word: Work; Anthropology of emotions; Gender inequality; Economics of care.

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I. Introduction

This study seeks to address the intersection between work, career, and the anthropology of emotions, analyzing how care practices are shaped by emotional constructions over time, how emotions play a key role in the care economy and aspects of labor, and the relationship of gender inequality in the scientific field. Through a critical and interdisciplinary analysis, this theoretical essay aims to provide elements for a more comprehensive understanding of the care economy, the anthropological study of emotions, career, and gender, with a focus on the role of women in promoting a more equitable, inclusive society attentive to global care needs.

Historically, gender norms and social expectations have affected the emotions associated with care, reflecting in repressed identities and gender stereotypes. In many situations, women are expected to play a predominant role in caregiving, often linked to emotional constructions of motherhood, altruism, and responsibility. Furthermore, emotions are shaped by cultural values and beliefs. However, due to these norms and socially imposed expectations, gender-based discrimination and inequalities occur, including in scientific contexts.

These emotional constructions not only influence the way in which different roles are performed by women but may also have a broader orientation in public policy, labor division, gender relations, and social dynamics. Therefore, recognizing and understanding these emotions and their intersection with career and care dynamics becomes essential for the development of more sensitive, inclusive, and effective practices, as well as for the establishment of policies and actions that meet emotional needs and constitute equal conditions for building a solid career.

This theoretical essay aims to analyze the intersection between the care economy and the anthropological study of emotions, relating theory to a critical reflection on gender inequality. The first section examines the literature on the care economy and aspects of caregiving in relation to gender. The second addresses the anthropological aspects of emotions with a feminist perspective. The final section presents a critical stance on gender inequalities in science, as well as a reference to the need for change in this field as a way to contribute to advancing the theoretical intersection discussed.

The anthropological study of emotions plays a key role in understanding the intersection between social gender relations and the care economy. From this perspective, it becomes possible to analyze how emotions shape and are shaped by gender dynamics, especially in contexts where caregiving is central, such as in domestic, assistance, and research spheres.

II. Economic Value Of Emotional And Care Work

The economic value of emotional and care work is a recurring topic in scientific debates, intertwining gender equity, economics, and social well-being. Since the 1980s, theorists and researchers from the fields of economics, political science, sociology, anthropology, among others, have stood out with scientific discussions on caregiving and attention-related tasks. Such activities encompass both people and the maintenance of households and other environments of social life as essential work for biological social reproduction and well-being¹.

Although 'care' has recently become a slogan in analyzing the causes and consequences of the sexual division of labor, the term is often used in different ways. As an example, she mentions that most research on developing countries focuses on unpaid care work because it absorbs most of women's working time while their participation in formal employment remains relatively low. However, it is important to broaden the context of unpaid care work, including a care economy that encompasses expenditures on children and other dependents, paid care work, unpaid care of family, friends, and neighbors, etc., thus expanding discussions to a broader frontier².

The concept of care encompasses a diversity of physical and psychological conditions, as well as labor tasks related to pregnancy, parenting, child-rearing and education, assistance to individuals, household chores and, more broadly, any type of activity in which concerns others implies work³. Complementarily, emotional labor as activities that promote a positive emotional state or efforts aimed at improving the well-being of others⁴.

Thus, the lens of the care economy reveals a complex dynamic, where unpaid work, often carried out by women, such as childcare, elder care, and household chores, is fundamental for sustaining the family's formal economy. However, this essential contribution is frequently underestimated and rendered invisible, perpetuating ingrained gender inequalities.

The persistent devaluation of care work intensifies gender disparity, limiting development and progress opportunities for women. In this regard, it is highlighted that women's unpaid care for their families and communities shapes both gender inequality and the broader process of economic development².

Emotional labor, more than household work and childcare, is closely tied to gender constructions¹². Many studies support the idea that "doing gender" is social rather than biological^{13,14}, which provides insights into women's emotional labor overload. However, in most debates about emotional labor or the care economy, the economic cost and the best way to assess it are underestimated, in addition to raising questions about who should actually perform it and how it should be valued—whether or not it should be remunerated when involving blood ties, among other aspects.

In this context, Nancy Folbre, a feminist economics researcher, argues that care work contributes to well-being and has an added economic value. Furthermore, she believes that altruism, enduring reciprocity, and the fulfillment of an obligation or responsibility are factors that lead people to dedicate themselves to care professions⁵. In her research, Folbre^{6,7} presents and discusses the similarity between women's responsibilities when caring for their families and those in paid jobs, such as teaching and nursing. Beyond this, the concept of care work highlights the discriminatory nature of gender norms that shape the division of labor between men and women, both in the family and in the labor market, since it is usually assumed—and even demanded—that women devote more time to domestic tasks than men⁸.

Similarly, in academic and scientific environments, in most fields, women still face challenges related to harassment and gender discrimination. This not only creates a hostile environment but can also lead some women to abandon research or refrain from seeking higher positions for fear of retaliation. Moreover, women's contributions to research are often underestimated or fail to receive due recognition, which is reflected in awards, research grants, and other indicators of prestige in the academic field.

Nevertheless, socioemotional behavior—or activities that maintain relationships among family members—has been considered an essential component of marriage and family life since at least the mid-twentieth century⁹. Although the functionalist role theory that produced the gender symbolism of "instrumental" and "expressive" tasks has been widely criticized¹⁰, family and emotional labor scholars continue to confront the legacy of inequality represented by this early characterization.

This legacy remains evident in the well-established finding that women, even when working full time, perform most of the routine housework and childcare^{11,12,15}. However, Erickson¹⁶, when analyzing the relationship between the division of labor in the family and perceptions of marital quality, concluded that emotional labor is negatively related to feelings of marital exhaustion.

Therefore, compulsory care policies can perpetuate gender stereotypes and contribute to maintaining inequalities, as well as cause strain in family relationships. Furthermore, the lack of recognition of care work can reinforce the idea that it is women's sole responsibility, which in turn hinders changes in perceptions and behaviors regarding gender roles. This unequal structure also contributes to occupational segregation, with women predominantly concentrated in low-paying sectors and remaining under-recognized.

Care is different from other services because it involves labor that was once primarily provided within families and kinship networks, rather than through market exchange. Care usually requires more relational and interactive skills, which are highly associated with women's work. These characteristics distinguish care work from other jobs, including other services, which may be related to the fact that the historical development of care work is tied to changes in gender relations¹⁷.

Although social relations regarding gender values and conventions have evolved over time, reflecting changes in how women engage in society, it is still necessary for economics to consider emotional dimensions to truly understand the value and complexity of care work. In this sense, the anthropological study of emotions offers a valuable perspective to understand the intersection between gender social relations and the care economy.

III. Anthropology Of Emotions

The anthropology of emotions is a field of study that focuses on investigating human emotions in different cultural, social, and historical contexts. This approach seeks to understand how emotions are perceived, expressed, experienced, and interpreted in different societies, and how cultural influences shape emotional experience. According to Vitoria and Coelho¹⁸ (p. 8), "attention to the emotional dimension of human experience is present at various moments in anthropological thought".

In the historical framework of the anthropological study of emotions, Michele Rosaldo¹⁹, a renowned anthropologist, made significant contributions to the study of emotions in anthropology. Her influential work on the subject appears in several of her writings and scientific publications, including her book *Knowledge and Passion: Ilongot Notions of Self and Social Life*¹⁹ and the article *Toward an Anthropology of Self and Feeling*²⁰.

In the book published in 1980, it explores the emotions and social life of the Ilongot, a community in the Philippines¹⁹. She analyzes notions of self, gender dynamics, and emotions in Ilongot society, demonstrating how emotions are an integral part of the construction of the self and of social constructs. In another study, Rosaldo²⁰ addresses the connection between emotions and personal experience, emphasizing the importance of considering emotions as fundamental components of human life. She argues that emotions are not mere internal states, but embodied manifestations expressed through our emotions and social experiences. The author describes emotions as thoughts that are somehow "felt" through blushing, "movements" in our livers, minds, hearts, stomachs, and skin, incorporated and permeated by the perception of human involvement.

The contribution of anthropology to the understanding of emotion has been both descriptive and critical. In the works of Levy²¹, Lutz²², White²³, and Shweder²⁴, the implicit comparison in any ethnographic account is raised to a theoretical level, and in different ways, these authors have shown that emotions are inextricable elements of thinking, speaking, and acting—often ignored at our own risk. Emotions are manipulated in speech, represented to the audience, and used to persuade, evade, and dominate²⁵.

A long tradition in cultural anthropology asserts that emotion must be carefully examined to understand how local expressions of power are refracted through it²⁶. The authors also point out that emotional discourses are implicated in constantly shifting systems of social hierarchy and in the emergence of new forms of power.

Such insights, and the way emotions are perceived, valued, and expressed in systems of social hierarchy, as well as in professional environments, can reinforce and perpetuate gender inequalities, affecting women's career trajectories, opportunities, and advancement compared to men. Regarding the gender issue, ²⁷had already stated that women were excluded from certain crucial economic or political activities, and their roles as wives and mothers were associated with fewer powers and prerogatives than those of men. Analyzing today's scenario, although some significant changes have taken place, in many situations this same positioning in society can still be observed.

Overall, although gender norms have gradually evolved, reflecting changes in women's roles in society, it is still imperative to recognize that care work goes beyond practical tasks, incorporating fundamental emotional elements. In this regard, the anthropological analysis of emotions helps us unravel the complexity of these dynamics, showing how gender expectations influence the way care work is perceived and distributed. Therefore, to truly understand the full value and importance of care work in the economy and society, it is crucial to address the emotional dimensions intrinsic to this work.

Nevertheless, the economy of emotions often neglects the emotional contributions of women scientists. Persistent gender inequality in science is evident not only in disparities of representation but also in how women's emotions are perceived—often pejoratively labeled as "fragile and emotional"—while men's emotional expressions are interpreted more positively. In light of this, the discussion that follows briefly addresses gender inequality in the scientific world.

IV. Gender Inequality In Science

Gender inequality is a persistent problem in various areas of society, including academia, the labor market, politics, and other spheres. It manifests itself through disparities between men and women, caused by unequal access to resources, opportunities, and power. In academia, gender inequality can be observed in multiple

dimensions, as even with the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions, such as full professors or management roles in higher education institutions, male dominance still persists. This disparity is also reflected in research fields, with women being less represented across different areas of knowledge.

Similarly, women's participation in graduate programs and academic publications has become an issue of great importance and prominence in recent years. Despite progress toward gender equality, women still face challenges and obstacles in these contexts. Growing efforts have been made to promote women's equitable participation in graduate programs and to encourage them to publish their research, with many institutions and funding agencies implementing policies and incentive programs to increase women's representation in these spaces.

In addition, studies and debates on gender disparities in academia have been carried out, aiming at raising awareness and implementing affirmative actions. However, changes remain modest, and unfortunately, the current scenario still reflects gender inequalities in academia, where women continue to face challenges in achieving equity in terms of representation and recognition.

Disparities between men and women occur due to a variety of factors, including gender stereotypes, unconscious biases, and the lack of female role models, among others. Furthermore, there is a preconception that women may struggle to reconcile their academic responsibilities with social expectations related to motherhood and family care. In line with this, most of the time, work is organized around the image of an unencumbered worker—fully dedicated to work and without responsibilities for children or family demands beyond earning a living²⁸.

Moreover, the use of surnames in academic citations also reflects gender inequalities. Traditionally, academic practice has been to cite authors by their last name, which may lead to a predominance of male references. This practice can have different impacts. In some cultures, surnames are interpreted in a patrilineal way, which results in greater visibility and recognition for men in citations. Furthermore, when women marry and adopt their husband's surname, this can lead to a loss of traceability of their earlier academic contributions. Additionally, the perception of citation by surname alone can lead to the mistaken assumption that the authors are men. This occurs because, historically, academic norms have privileged male voices and perpetuated the view that knowledge production is predominantly male.

It is important to highlight that these disparities are also exacerbated when other intersectionalities are considered, such as race, social class, sexual orientation, and disabilities. Women belonging to ethnic minorities or groups facing systems of exclusion and social marginalization in different contexts may encounter additional barriers, making the pursuit of gender equity in academia a complex challenge.

Therefore, it becomes essential to recognize and address these intersectionalities, ensuring that the measures and policies adopted are inclusive and take into account the multiple forms of oppression and inequality faced by different groups of women. This implies promoting diversity, equal opportunities, and social justice for all women, regardless of race, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation, or disabilities.

Furthermore, promoting diversity and inclusion in academia, as well as implementing policies and programs aimed at eliminating gender biases and stereotypes, helps provide support for women in their academic careers and expand their opportunities for leadership and participation in scientific publications. Such actions are essential for creating a more equitable academic environment, in which all voices and perspectives are valued and represented.

Moreover, it is encouraging to observe that more and more researchers are recognizing and questioning the hegemony of masculinity in academia, with efforts to promote inclusion, diversity, and gender equity through policies, programs, support networks, and initiatives aimed at deconstructing gender stereotypes. By incorporating female perspectives and those of other gender identities, academic research can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of social phenomena, addressing issues of power, inequality, and inclusion more adequately.

At present, there is already a growing integration of research areas on gender diversity in various academic fields, in addition to their inclusion as thematic areas in scientific events in the humanities and social sciences. Thus, it is expected that as academic norms evolve and awareness of gender representation increases, scientific citations will become more inclusive and reflect gender diversity in knowledge production.

V. Care, Anthropology Of Emotions, Career And Gender Inequality

The relationship between care and the anthropology of emotions is a topic of great relevance for understanding social and cultural dynamics. Moreover, it also has significant repercussions on professional careers, permeating gender inequality. As previously defined, the anthropology of emotions seeks to investigate how emotions are experienced, expressed, and interpreted in different cultural contexts, taking into account aspects such as norms, values, and social practices. In this sense, care emerges as an intrinsic element of human relationships, being closely linked to emotions.

Nevertheless, care can be understood as a set of practices and attitudes aimed at ensuring well-being and the sustainability of social relationships. Historically, within the anthropology of emotions, care has been developed both from an individual perspective, as an expression of affection and concern for others, and from a collective perspective, as a way to maintain social cohesion and the emotional balance of communities.

However, when we intersect this discussion with gender inequality in the scientific and academic context, it becomes clear that there is a significant disparity with regard to care, career, and emotions. Women have historically been overburdened with the responsibility of care - whether in the family sphere or in the professional one - and this overload directly impacts their trajectories. In scientific and academic contexts, this results in lower participation in research activities, reduced visibility, and difficulties in reconciling work and personal life demands, for example.

Gender inequality in academia is also reflected in norms and expectations regarding emotional expression. Women are often stereotyped as emotional and sensitive, which can be seen as an obstacle to their appreciation and recognition in this environment and in society. In addition, the lack of policies and support structures that consider women's specific needs contributes to perpetuating this inequality.

Therefore, it is emphasized as fundamental to reshape academic and scientific structures and practices, promoting greater gender equity in the dynamics of care, career, and emotions. This implies the implementation of equality policies, the valorization of care-related actions as a shared responsibility, and the creation of a more inclusive academic environment, where emotions are acknowledged and respected as an integral part of human experience. Only through such changes will it be possible to overcome gender inequalities and foster a fairer and more welcoming environment for all.

VI. Conclusion

The relationship between work, career, and the anthropology of emotions, with a focus on gender inequality - especially in the scientific field - is deeply tied to the understanding of social, cultural, and emotional practices related to care and the role of emotions. Based on the theoretical reflection presented, it is evident that in recent decades there has been a continuous movement toward greater gender equality and the breaking of social conventions imposed on women, who are challenging themselves and entering a variety of professional sectors, pursuing higher education, and taking on leadership and prominent positions in organizations.

Specifically, the care economy emphasizes activities that are essential for maintaining the well-being of individuals and society as a whole. Moreover, care practices are deeply rooted in emotional relations such as love, compassion, empathy, and concern. When these emotions are expressed through care, they have a significant impact on social and cultural dynamics. In addition, they are also reflected in the conduct of work and in the building of an egalitarian career, free from gender stereotypes and societal impositions.

Anthropological studies of emotions, in turn, have explored how emotions are constructed, experienced, and expressed in different cultures and societies. They highlight that emotions are not universal, but are shaped by the cultural norms, values, and social structures of a given community. In connection with this, emotions are also fundamental for understanding interpersonal relationships, care practices, and the dynamics of social groups, with significant consequences for the labor market.

Therefore, by drawing an intersection between the care economy and the anthropological study of emotions, alongside a reflection on gender inequality, the study offers a valuable perspective for understanding the complex social and cultural relationships involved from a female perspective. The recognition and understanding of emotions within this context can shed light on more sensitive and inclusive policies, promoting a society that values and respects care activities and the emotions that sustain these practices.

Overall, emotions play a fundamental role in the care economy, in work relations, and in the building of a solid career, especially with regard to women. However, social constructions of gender, cultural expectations, and social norms still influence the way emotions shape care practices carried out by women.

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