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Time in Women's Lives: A Feminist Turning Point for Radical Care, Revisited

Brenda Moreira Marques

Time, in retrospect

Portuguese is my first language. This essay shares the journey I experienced while working on the first paper I wrote in English during my first semester of the Women's and Gender Studies master's degree program at UT Austin in the Fall semester of 2021. Writing the paper was my first attempt at getting familiar with a topic that I had never heard about but that triggered my intellectual curiosity in a special way. The title of the paper was *Time in Women's Lives: A Feminist Turning Point for Radical Care* and this essay offers reflections about what the process of writing looked like for me; I also selectively incorporate snapshots of powerful lessons I learned while working on that project.

Why time in women's lives? I have had a special curiosity about how women use their time, and about the differences between ciswomen and cismen regarding how they use their time. For instance, as a graduate student, I noticed that a lot of my friends, including international students, talked about how little time they had to do their activities. At the same time, I noticed that a lot of my male peers seemed to be having a lot of fun, they had time to engage in leisure activities—men seem to have all the time in the world. And for the first time, that made me think about the ways gender might be shaping the way people manage their time. So, time management might be shaped by gender, I thought.

Back then, I was also very interested in discussing experiences of women like me, Brazilian women living abroad, in Austin, Texas in particular. What called my attention in our graduate seminar was to write an essay about time, but I was also interested in studying time in a way that would speak to my experience, and the experience of others like me, Brazilians living in the United States. Unfortunately, I had a hard time finding literature and data that could examine how immigrants spend their time in the United States and why they choose to spend their time that way. Soon I learned that most research projects examine American families, but I found little on the topic looking closely at ethnicity or nationality. So, there was limited knowledge on how Brazilian families, Brazilian women in particular, were spending their time in the United States vis-à-vis their heterosexual partners, for example. So, the starting point of my feminist curiosity were the following questions: how do women spend their time? How is this different when we compare women and men? How does social class, and race and ethnicity shape those differences?

What I noticed was that, while there was a conversation along the different areas of research, some feminist economists were talking about time poverty among women of low socioeconomic status. Psychologists talked about how women envision and experience this time burden in their lives. Often, they have different journeys as mothers, workers, doing unpaid labor at home. I also noticed that this literature produced by feminist economists and feminist psychologists, as well as sociologists was not necessarily in conversation. This helped me think about different ways that we could move forward with those discussions, but also, talk about time in a way that could bring social transformation and social change in people's lives. I could see different contributions coming from different fields, but the lack of dialogue among disciplines and fields was interesting. I believe that needs attention.

I have learned important lessons while working on the project. First, while reading research across disciplines, I have noticed that feminist economists, feminist psychologists, and feminist sociologists use different methods. That is one of the reasons why I cited census statistics, demographic data, as well as qualitative methods (for example, interviews and ethnography). When we use different methods, that is when we get closer to see the full picture, or at very least try to understand the complexity of how women have been using their time, and not just using their time, but being in a disadvantaged position when it comes to having control over their time vis-à-vis men.

Women's disadvantaged position vis-à-vis men regarding time management in the household is supported by numerous empirical studies in the United States. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2008), Married Parents' Use of Time, 2003-06: "married mothers employed full time were more likely to do household activities and provide childcare on an average day than married fathers employed full time".



More than a decade earlier, in 1989, Arlie Hochschild with Anne Machung had already published *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*, an empirical study of American families. They focused on couples' perceptions of the "double shift" burden of paid labor and household work. In this groundbreaking study, they interviewed at least fifty couples and concluded that the women seemed to feel more pressure to balance and maintain the demands of work and family than their husbands. Moreover, most women from the study were also responsible for the domestic work at home, with many husbands vehemently refusing to share the domestic labor. When it comes to subjective aspects of time, their results have offered evidence to feminist studies of time and gender inequality. The 2003 edition of *The Second Shift* explains, "Women were more likely to think about their children while at work and to check in by phone with the babysitter. Partly because of this, more women felt torn between one sense of urgency and another" (Hochschild with Machung 2003, 8). Not only do women perform more childcare labor than their husbands, but they are more likely to multi-task. According to the analysis, men's time management was organized around the logic of doing this or that (cook or help with the kids, for example). In contrast, women's notions of time included juggling multiple job spheres: paid jobs, childcare and housework. In short, women more often juggle three spheres—job (paid), housework (unpaid) and children—while most men only juggle job and children (Hochschild with Machung 2003, 9).

Interestingly, it was hard to find literature on immigrants and time. And because I have been living in the United States, I was very interested in how immigrants are spending their time in this country, Texas in particular. Elders, queer people, and people of color represent a second group that was not present in the literature. And this is interesting because we have a body of research on time use that has been growing. It becomes a pressing issue if we think about how the use of time is directly, or at least strongly

related, to the well-being of specific social groups. Regardless, research on time in a capitalist society is revealing.

In capitalist cultures, time is often treated as a linear, task-oriented resource that individuals can "possess", "monetize", and "spend" (Wajcman and Dodd 2017). Additionally, international agencies report differences in time use and access to leisure time among groups, especially men and women across 85 countries.¹ One basic assumption underlying those reports is that gender, employment, and income statuses might impact how we allocate, use, and make sense of our time, given that time is constructed as a commodity in the 21st century.



Second, I have learned that feminist psychologists and sociologists engage in discussions on time and its different meanings. We are not talking about time in the sense of clock-based time, but we are talking about the subjective meanings that women attach to their time. The changes that women experience in their bodies are neither recognized by society, nor taken seriously. For example, menstrual cycles, pregnancy, hormonal changes, and menopause have a unique biological clock, each one of them is different than the conventional clock, and each one of them is also unique for each woman. Interestingly, these experiences have a special dimension that is attached to women's experience with time. That doesn't happen to cisgender men, right?

Based on what I have observed and learned, women often spend their day operating under the logic of doing multiple things at the same time and trying to tackle all the domains of their lives. This includes taking care of someone while doing their work or doing the domestic labor at home while paying attention to someone—a lot of multi-tasking. Interestingly, I noticed that men tend to do just one thing, this or the other, separately. So, when I think of women's contribution to society, the economic development in society, we might be missing the fact that women are doing a lot of labor backstage, which means women are working hard without being paid for it.

Unequal time distribution and time management between women and men occurs primarily due to the intersections of women's social locations within oppressive systems. Time inequities are sustained through a range of factors: (a) gender roles, expectations and responsibilities of care, emotional work and paid labor at the societal level, where "time tradeoff" takes place in the intrahousehold sphere through domestic labor; (b) men's supposedly "economically productive" time management and time allocation; and, (c) the capitalist time culture—immersed in patriarchy—is unable to value and recognize the multidimensionality of women's experiences with time in unpaid domestic care as well as household paid labor, which is often outside clockwise logistics of the markets (Bryson 2016).



Something that surprised me while working on the project was the idea of time poverty, that is, thinking of women being deprived of time. I understand "time poverty" as a minimum amount of disposable time, in addition to a minimum amount of disposable income. So, I learned that feminists were making that connection about women not just between being in an economically disadvantaged position in society, but also regarding their free time. Even if you have the income and if you consider yourself to be middle class, but you may not have the time or control and ownership over it, for example, your day. Being wealthy does not secure your well-being, and that taught me about the things that we still need to change in society. One of the feminist goals, I think, is to make sure that women's well-being and dignity are placed above social systems. We find ways to survive in precarious times, and precarious systems of power.

Time poverty is defined as "a minimum amount of disposable time in addition to a minimum amount of disposable income" within the household members (Connelly and Kongar 2017, 11). By considering time poverty as a capability deprivation, feminist economists assure that scholars and practitioners of public policy can make the hidden poor visible in terms of their time deficit.



Third, I learned something that didn't surprise me, but it was an interesting provocation. Feminist researchers have brought up the idea of what would happen if we could think about time outside of the capitalist clock. That is, if we could stop thinking about time in linear ways. For example, if we consider our memories, our feelings about what we've been experiencing and living, but not just as something that stays in the past. So, if we could see time as circular, we might be able to live our lives in different ways and we would explore different ways of caring for one another. The literature talks about the effects of violence beyond what we call a lifetime. For example, there is generational impact that happened in the past based on our political memory of what happened to our ancestors. This challenges the idea of time as a linear commodity perspective, or time as something that I need to spend, and that once it happens, it's done. When we relive a memory, we may experience intense emotions again. In the process, we may also have the need to keep caring for people who are no longer with us. This is also applied to events, some examples come to mind: the effects of nuclear weapons in New Mexico, the lives of people in Hiroshima, or the lives of people whose ancestors died, and then women have mourning ceremonies with their families up until this day. They engage in this process because they carry the political memory of the violence that was suffered by their families and their communities, and that has been expressed in literature, poetry, and rituals (Barad 2017). And that is a type of violence that is immeasurable. If we think about it, it is a violence that happened in the past, but it's a type of violence that persists through memory and oral history. The work doesn't stop as soon as the violence ends, it has an impact on people's bodies and memory. This is a powerful way we could consider challenging the capitalist clock-based time and bring back feminist aspects into our lives.

I would like to close with a reflection on time and radical care. Care is central to our feminist goals. So, if we are talking about time, what does it look like to care, or to practice radical care with one another and with ourselves? For me, one of the ways that we can practice radical care is to start looking at time closely and take time seriously. Now, this is not in the sense of attending our obligations efficiently and trying to reach our goals in a fast way. We do it in a way that does not follow the entrepreneurial style but engage with our everyday lives the same way we handle our time. And that means that we rest, and that we bring joy into our lives. Seriously, that is a central component of our well-being.

I think that if we could consider time as this precious thing that we can embrace in a meaningful way so we can try to live differently from the systems we are fighting against, I think that can improve the our life style. For example, *The Slow Professor* (Berg and Seeber 2016) book comes to mind. Also, we need to take rest very seriously, we need to sleep eight hours a day. And we need to bring small joys into our lives, for example, slow walking. Also, practice doing nothing, I think that is a Buddhist concept. It is like, you don't need to achieve anything, there are no goals, there are no rules. We need, of course, to attend to our basic needs, and because we live in a capitalist society, you need to have an income to survive. But beyond the things you need to survive, there are the things you need to survive as a human being and one of them, I think, is to take ownership of your time beyond capitalist lenses.

The well-being of women is central to feminist goals. Radical care and recognition of reproductive labor can act as feminist tools to many women who survive precarity without succumbing to neoliberal logics of individualized care. As Hobart and Kneese would argue, these are the reasons why we should claim "time" in our struggles and lives in resistance against sexism and oppression (2020, 13).



As feminists, we can still reclaim that right to rest, and that is radical care. There is also power in taking care of each other. You can rest, you don't need to be perfect, as in "let's take a nap" or "let's stop now and have tea." Those moments are not associated with achieving anything, from the capitalist perspective. We need to honor the fact that we are human beings who are extremely complex, full of emotions that come and go.

I would like to honor Alison Kafer's analysis of crip time as politically significant for feminist and queer activism. We must consider the realities of the standpoints that previous feminist studies of time management have not yet fully addressed: Black women; immigrant workers of numerous nationalities and backgrounds; same-sex couple household dynamics; non-binary people; queer and trans women and men; young and elderly single people's lives, to name a few.



In her groundbreaking book *Feminist Queer Crip*, Alison Kafer (2013) eloquently explains:

Crip time is flex time not just expanded but exploded; it requires reimagining our notions of what can and should happen in time, or recognizing how expectations of "how long things take" are based on very particular minds and bodies. We can then understand the flexibility of crip time as being not only an accommodation to those who need "more" time but also, and perhaps especially, a challenge to normative and normalizing expectations of pace and scheduling. Rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds. (27)

Time, women's lives and COVID-19

I worked on this project in Fall 2021, while we were struggling collectively and individually with the COVID-19 pandemic. In retrospect, I would like to reflect about time in women's lives, their well-being, and the deadly effects of the coronavirus pandemic worldwide. The COVID-19 pandemic meant sickness, death, mourning and exhaustion for most, but it had harsher effects for women and girls: the increasing time poverty for many who were already burdened by care for their family and paid employment. In a society where women's health and need for well-being in their own private homes is still a second-hand issue, COVID-19 led to skyrocketing rates of psychological distress caused by the triple burden of work: paid work, unpaid work (for example, household work and childcare), and taking care of the sick in the family. It also triggered alarming rates of domestic violence, sexual abuse,

and exploitation at home during lockdowns in my home country of Brazil, as well as many other locations. The emotional embodiment of loss, isolation and exhaustion, and gendered expectations of time distribution affected many women negatively. This exposed the current limitations of assistance in health care, absence of social services and social support networks. Though COVID-19 is not the subject of this essay, as we are still untangling its effects for women's well-being, I join in feminist solidarity for such difficult times and contend that time equality and time for collective well-being are some of the key puzzles for feminist liberation that we can no longer neglect in our work and lives.

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We are working hard together to dismantle the patriarchy, we are trying to transform systems, we are trying to help people to have their basic rights recognized. We are also doing all the above because of the well-being of our families and of our communities. Radical care is central here, bringing back what bell hooks (2000) stated about well-being as at the center of feminist praxis. In *All About Love*, she wrote: "Rarely, if ever, are any of us healed in isolation. Healing is an act of communion" (215). Feminism is for all.

Thank you for *your time* while reading this chapter, my modest contribution to this anthology. I hope it will inform and inspire our future feminist research on time under patriarchy, as we continue deciphering these challenging and volatile times—in community.

Notes

1. See UN Statistics Division. 2007. "Demographic and Social Statistics."
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