

## Unweaving Family Welfare: Diverse Families as “Needs Mixes”

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### Dilemmas within “Welfare to” “Diverse Families”

Over the most recent two decades, family research in Japan has been characterized as two kind of shifts in both family welfare studies and family sociology; from “welfare *by* the family” to “welfare *to* the family” and from “*traditional* families” to “*diverse* families”. These shifts have several epistemological turns from a couple of myths of family as their backdrop. On one hand, under the influences of the *École des Annales* such as the famous work by Philippe Ariès (1960), and of the second wave of feminism connected to the U.S. women’s liberation movement, Japanese family sociology had imported and cultivated the concept of the “modern family” in order to show there is no “THE” family in a universal and super-historical sense. Rather, it turned out that the family that we think we know well, that includes a married couple, their biological children, and the male breadwinner and housewife combination, has appeared in history at most around the late eighteenth century (Areas 1960, Shorter 1975, Badinter 1980), which can be called de-mythification of the “catholicity of family”. On the other hand, as a series of studies on household poverty in the U.K. from the 1970s to the 1980s has shown, the family is not like an integrated and complete oneness which has no interest opposition within it; it is not like an atomic nuclear which cannot be divided any further, but it is like a fruit basket in that there are multiple individuals and interests packed in it (Pahl 2001). This can be called de-mythification of the “monolithity of family”.

Against this backdrop, social welfare shifts its emphasis from “welfare by the family” to “welfare to the family”. If families can no longer be assumed to make it by managing itself independently and autonomously, then families are in need of subsidiaries. Families with children might be in need of support for child rising, daycare, or parental leave. Families in danger of divorce may be in need of counseling, seminars or workshops to maintain their mental and relational health. For those who want their own family but have no chance to date or even meet someone special, they may in need of date counseling or a marriage arrangement system.<sup>1)</sup>

At the same time, the concept of family that was supposed to be a policy target also changed its appearance quickly and dramatically during this period. From the late 1970s, the traditional nuclear family as a married couple with kids decreased to less

than 30% of all household in Japan, while single person households increased to 29.5% in the 2005 national census. The Equal Employment Opportunity Act was launched in 1985 and revised in 1999, so having no kids is no longer a stigma but is considered to be a free and equal lifestyle between two-income couples, regardless of their marital status. As the appearance of queer people, including lesbian, gay and transgender has also been recognized in public, non-heterosexual couples and families challenge Japanese policies on the treatment of family with its strict definition. Especially among researchers, the family cannot and should not be defined by arbitrary researchers, partly because of its negative effects of including various lifestyles such as lesbian-gay families and one-parent families into “New Families” or “Alternative Families”. Family is no longer a fated or survival unit, but something people choose at will from diverse lifestyles (Weston 1991).

This marriage between “welfare to the family” and “diverse families” is, however, designated to be seriously problematic or even mutually contradictory. Before it is set as a welfare beneficiary, the concept of family must be defined as strictly as possible. For, in any liberal democratic society, welfare must be supposedly minimum and restrictive, even in north European countries, because welfare policies are no more than an exceptional measure of a liberal capitalist society, in which people must help themselves in order to avoid paternalistic intervention from their government. However, while the “traditional” family can be strictly defined in its legally marital status and blood ties, diverse families are far more difficult to define. Now, what is a family deserving of family welfare, and how to define its scope? If a certain definition of family is adapted using some form of standard, it will inevitably exclude other lifestyles from the concept of family and family welfare. On the other hand, if whatever people think of as a family is a family deserving welfare, then family welfare means nothing at all. Furthermore, if every lifestyle needs to be treated as equal, how can we justify redistribution from those who chose to live as singles or couples with no child, to those who chose to have kids? As a result, the idea of “welfare to diverse families” can mean nothing at best, or can undermine the reasons and justifications of family welfare at worst.<sup>2)</sup>

Interdisciplinary feminist literature from the late 1990s helps to address the controversy over “welfare to diverse families”. According to Robin West (2002), “over the last twenty years, a number of feminists in a range of disciplines, including Martha Fineman in law and Eva Kittay in philosophy, have argued that the incompatibility of caregiving labor on the one hand, and liberal rights on the other, implies neither the peculiar illiberalism of women’s nature, nor even (or only) the need for grater reproductive choice, but rather, the inadequacies of liberal theory itself” (West 2002:94).

As West stated, these discussions focusing on dependency proposed by Fineman and Kittay are called “dependency critiques” (Kittay 1999).<sup>3</sup>

This paper, then, will argue that it is necessary to ramify and articulate the concept of family welfare into some basic needs, and reconsider them in order to reconcile the controversy, borrowing some of the key conceptions and theoretical framework of the “dependency critique”. Family welfare as a historical packet of needs has now become too thick to cover various lifestyles. Instead of expanding and obscuring the concept of family and family welfare, it is rational and reasonable to discuss each articulated basic need, such as the need of care, of education, of collaboration, and of maintaining intimate relationships. Otherwise there would be some serious danger in continuing to privilege the traditional family over alternative families or to construct a hierarchical order among diverse families with the “traditional” family on its top at best. And at worst it will jeopardize dependent/care-taker relationship within and without families.

#### **From Welfare to “Sexual Ties” to Welfare to “Ties of Care”**

Martha Albertson Fineman argues strongly in her sensational work “The Neutered Mother, the Sexual Family” (1995) against contemporary social and especially legal policy discussions about the family, because they do not have at their core the crucial concepts of care-giving and dependency, as well as the best interests of women and children.

Firstly, she alerts that feminist jurisprudence often overlooked the importance of the institution called family, especially the motherhood at its center (Chapter 2). This is as most feminist legal theories have focused on and been developed in the discussions on sexual equality in the workplace. This has resulted in a lower priority to the consideration of the family as an institution needing to be challenged and reformed. These theories might be effective when applied to the case between equal and autonomous individuals; however, it will soon face many difficulties when applied to cases between the dependents and care workers. This sort of ignorance or poor evaluation of the family has affected discussions on “difference or equality”. Emphasis on equal treatment as formal equality, not on special treatment depending on differences, has been dominant in feminist jurisprudence in the U.S., which makes it nearly impossible to take into considerations women’s gendered life and role within families. This apparent equality does not do good to mothers, but rather does harm.

Secondly, in the pursuit of formal equality, legal discourse in U.S. has deprived motherhood of many traditional and positive aspects, and neutered “mothering” into

“parenting” by de-contextualizing motherhood (Chapter 4). In this process of neutralization of motherhood and mothering, non-traditional ways of child rearing have been stigmatized as pathological and deviant, which means non-traditional mothers can and should be monitored and controlled by the government (Chapter 5). Fineman argues this neutralization of motherhood indicates that society places little significance on children and childrearing, averting our attention towards sexual intimacy within families.

Thirdly, Fineman defines the “sexual family” as a basic unit of current society with heterosexual legitimate marital ties in its core, the so-called “traditional” or nuclear family (Fineman 1995: Chapter 6). She emphasizes this by calling this family “sexual”, so when we mention families in this society we cannot go without implying there need to be sexual ties at its center. The sexual family is also considered as a basic, natural and sacred unit, the only one which can enjoy the right to privacy. Against this backdrop, liberal discourse tries to expand the concept of the heterosexual family to include homosexual couples in its definition. However, Fineman criticizes these kinds of reforms like gay marriage and domestic partnerships legislation as merely strengthening the concept of the sexual family.

Fourthly, Fineman distinguishes two separate kind of dependency: inevitable dependency and secondary dependency. Inevitable dependency is conceptualized as human dependency for care such in infancy, by the elderly, or through disability and illness, while secondary dependency is the economic dependency for support caused by taking care of the inevitable dependency. When we come to realize these inevitable dependencies are indispensable conditions of human beings, taking care of the dependent means far more than jobs based on individuals’ choices. They are key contributions to maintaining society even if they are chosen by will or not, and should not drive her into secondary dependency by leaving her unpaid or underpaid.

Finally, Fineman concludes that it is important to recenter legal and social concepts of family around care-giving and dependency, rather than around the sexual ties between men and women. She uses the metaphor of the “mother/child” relationship to indicate the dependent / caretaker relationship as a beneficiary of protection and privacy, instead of the (hetero)sexual relationship within a family. If you take care of someone in dependency, you will be protected, supported, and given some degree of privacy regardless of your marital status, sexuality, or blood ties. If you do not take care of someone, your relationships are treated as an interpersonal contract free from legal protections.

These discussions above sounds quite rational and reasonable; however, it could

be argued that Fineman overlooks other essential needs traditionally fulfilled within families, partly because she tries to show a sharp contrast between sexual and dependent relationships within families, and partly because she discusses family functions from a chiefly legal perspective with a U.S. background. From the perspective of the history and sociology of the family, its functions cannot be reduced into sexuality and care. Elderly care, for example, is theoretically included in her argument but does not play any important roles. When she discusses care for dependents and the need for privacy for the care unit, she mainly places child care as her primary concern. It certainly is reasonable for her goal, but it results in a narrowing the range of her argument and a mixing of the concept of care. As for privacy for the care unit, it does not make any sense to say that an elderly care unit needs privacy in the same way as child care unit does in order to protect arbitrary intervention from the government. Another example could be temporary care such as short-term care need for the sick and ill. The “traditional” family has long been taken this domestic task to prevent family members from complicating and worsening their diseases, possibly into serious and long term dependencies. However, it is not clear yet in her argument how these kinds of “light care” can be treated in the welfare system.

In addition, Fineman overlooks the importance of collectivity in our family life. In the “scale merit” within the family formalized by family economist Alessandro Signo (1991), the more people gather together the more economic efficiency rises. In contrast to the discussion on economy by the sexual division of labor within the family, this scale economy is basically irrelevant to heterosexism. Besides and before sexual ties, human beings have been lived together and collaborated with each other to survive harsh environments, otherwise they could not settle and prosper. Though how to combine this human collectivity and the protection of the dependent/care-taker relationship is a different problem, it is quite certain that family welfare has counted on the scale merit within the family.

These difficulties in Fineman’s argument mainly stem from her obvious goal of salvaging the importance of care for the dependent in the social context of an inflating dominance of sexual intimacy within the private sphere. However, it can be said that when multiple, complex and collective functions of family are seriously taken into consideration, Fineman’s argument is far from adequate as a theory of family, or welfare for human well-being, though it could be adequate as a legal theory.<sup>4)</sup>

#### Diverse Families as “Needs Mixes”

It could be helpful to sum up the logical flow of Fineman’s argument above, to

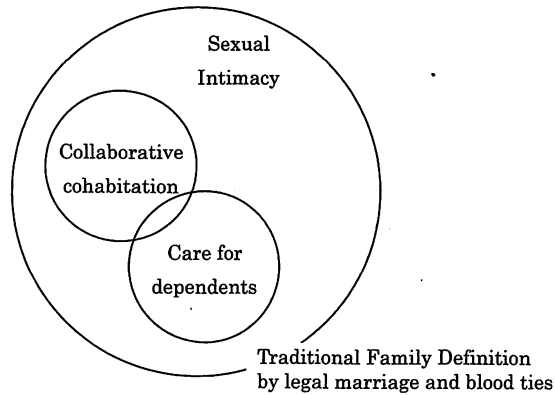
reconsider and expand the range of her discussion. Presumably, it can be divided into five phases below:

- 1) There are multiple needs within “family needs,” called the “sexual bond” and the “bond of care”, which long have been regarded as inseparable.
- 2) These multiple relationships and needs actually can and should be recognized to be fulfilled separately in this post-industrial welfare society.
- 3) Each articulated need may or may not be justifiable, on the grounds of its necessity or universality.
- 4) The care need for the dependent is far more important in its nature among other needs, hence, should be applied for all those who care and are cared for regardless of their marital status, sexual partner, or their sexualities.
- 5) The need for sexual intimacy is to be disqualified as a basic need, and should be treated as mere interpersonal contract.

As shown above, it can be said that Fineman tries to separate functions to fulfill needs within the family into two phases: sexual bonds between husband and wife, and mother and children. As already discussed, however, there could be more needs which are traditionally fulfilled within families. The need for collaboration for living, for example, can be quite important, because housing needs, including access to adequate and reasonable condominiums, have long been regarded as a basic and central need for human wellbeing, shown in the United Nation’s UNHSP/HABITAT.<sup>5)</sup> Then, following Fineman’s logic flow, we will see a historical and theoretical relationship between these three needs and social welfare.

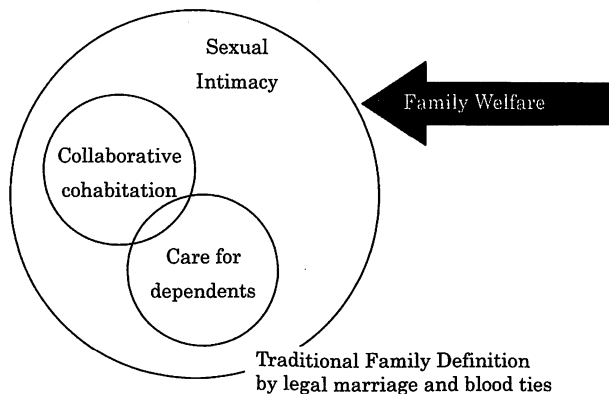
In the first phase, as in Fig.1, the “traditional” family can be depicted as a packet of needs which are assigned to the family to be fulfilled independently and autonomously. From the Marxist feminist standpoint of view, women’s domestic labor forces are appropriated by capital and/or the patriarchy. Marriage as a legitimate sexual intimacy is the dominant factor in defining the concept of family. It is of importance here that as long as the family actually is and is viewed as independent and autonomous, the problems over family definition are not that serious. As seen in research on poverty, however, the family turns out to be far from independent and autonomous, so in need of public support.

**Figure 1: Autonomous Family**



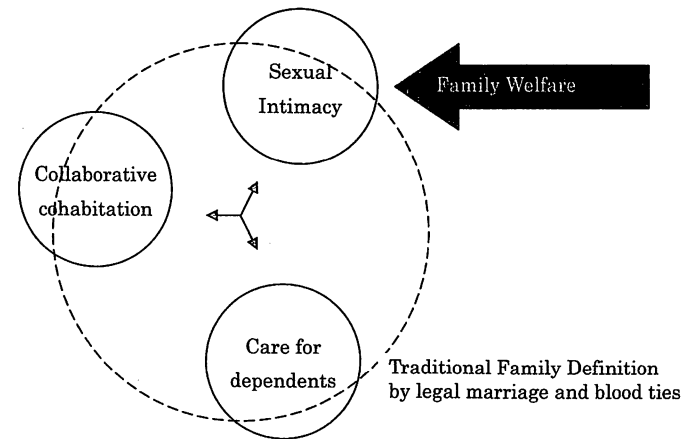
In the second phase, as in Fig.2, social welfare is supplied into family as a packet of needs, sometimes directly from the government or via an employer as the family wage and fringe benefits. In this phase, the definition of family as a qualification of family welfare could be controversial. It is important here that family welfare designated for the sexual family actually counts on a collaboration for living as a cost saving measure. Family as a cohabitation and collaboration unit can bundle their individual living needs into a packet of needs, and allow the government to discount the price of welfare.

**Figure 2: Family Welfare Model**



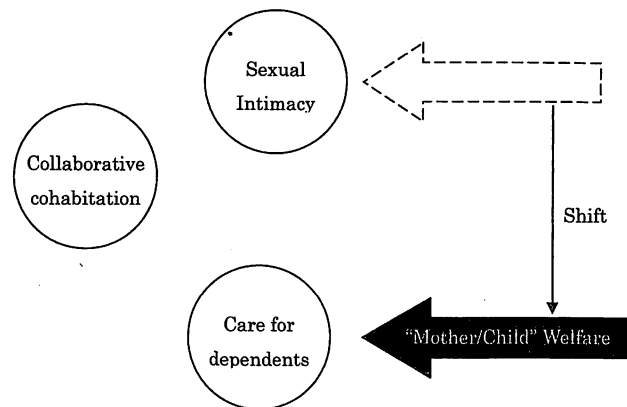
In the third phase, as in Fig.3, however, as the family comes to be thought more of as lifestyles people choose (Weston 1995) than as a survival unit and sexual intimacy and this grows more and more as a crucial determinant of the family, the traditional definition of family has to be challenged. Care for dependents, sexual intimacy, through collaboration of living, were once united closely but now can be separable like single mothers, couples with no kids, non-marital sexual relationships, and pre-marital cohabitation. In this phase, the fragility of the sexual relationship sometimes erodes the security of the dependent/care-taker relationship as Fineman asserts, because family welfare is still designated to sexual intimacy separate from dependent care.

**Figure 3: Diverse Family Model**



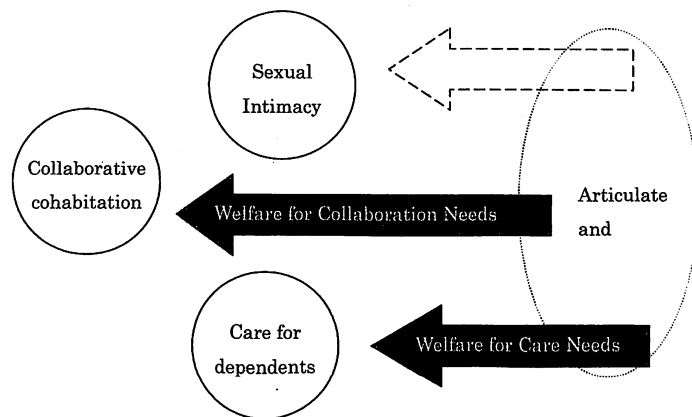
Instead, Fineman's suggestion can be illustrated like in Fig.4. There needs to be a shift of the supposed welfare beneficiary from sexual relationships, including not only traditional heterosexual couple but any other sexual intimacy, to persons or people who care for dependents directly. Fineman states, "If we are concerned about dependency and want to ensure caretaking through social and economic subsidy of the family, then why not focus on the direct relationship of caretaker/dependent? It is not necessary to support this unit indirectly through marriage when we can do so directly with care-taker /dependent directed policies." (Fineman 2003:108).

**Figure 4: Fineman's "Mother / Child" Relationship Model**



However, as stated above, a simple shift from Sexual Ties to Ties of Care possibly overlooks and underestimates the importance of the collective nature of our lives and the economic efficiency which family welfare has counted on. As in Fig.5, if there are needs within a family other than sexual intimacy and care for dependents, it is reasonable to separate and consider if these are justifiable as basic needs. A need for collaborative cohabitation, for example, can be a candidate for a basic need, because collaborations in daily life, including mutual light care for temporary illness, has also been an important part of family life.

**Figure 5: Articulated Familial Needs Model**



In this perspective, Fineman's argument can be expanded to other needs than care for dependents, even though caring is still of unparalleled importance among them. However, people have a long history of living together, caring for each other and caring for dependents together. It is necessary to take into account this fact of human collectivity and various efficiencies of collaborative cohabitation in order to consider how to organize a relationship between a care unit and a non-care unit which is supposed to financially support the care unit. Then it is essential to ramify and articulate the traditional packet of familial needs into several separate needs, so that human basic needs can be fulfilled depending on, not regardless of, the social significance and contributions of the lifestyles they choose.

**Conclusions**

As discussed above, two significant shifts can be depicted from family sociology and family welfare studies in Japan in the 1990s. The first one is the shift from "welfare by the family" to "welfare to the family" in social welfare studies, which indicates that the so-called "traditional" family comprising marriage, cohabitation and blood ties can no longer be assumed to be a stable and autonomous unit of society. Rather, families, including modern nuclear families, now seem to be more and more unstable and fragile, partly because of their heavy tasks and vulnerability through increasing life risks and partly because of the concept of intimacy with unparalleled power to define and evaluate what the family is. The second is from "standard families" to "diverse families" in family sociology, which has a strong influence from its backdrop of individualization over the whole of society and even within the so-called "private sphere".

These two shifts seem to have several backgrounds in common. However, they never get along because the very basic concept of welfare demands a narrow restriction of its target on the one hand, while the ideal of individualism and diversification never accepts the narrowly restricted concept of family on the other hand. It is for this reason that this paper has discussed how to reconcile these two trends in family studies, despite their rational and reasonable appearances if looked at separately.

The idea of "Dependency Critique", as propounded by the juristic feminist Martha Fineman and the feminist philosopher Eva Kittay, can bring discussion up to the level of the reasons of and justification for the concept of family welfare, dependency work at its core. Fineman contends that

Fineman's radical proposal indicates, first, that it is necessary to ramify and articulate the family welfare long considered as a standard packet of needs concerning both sexual bonds and bonds of care. And second, it is also unavoidable to weigh

articulated familial needs in balance, to put them into retrieval and judge whether or not they can be justified as basic needs deserving redistribution. According to Fineman's criterion, sexual bonds must be excluded from the list of familial needs, ending up being downgraded from institutional protections to interpersonal contracts or promises. On the other hand, welfare to bonds of care must be set at the center of social welfare, which must be accessible by anybody who wants to and is capable of doing so, regardless of their marital status or sexuality.

Of course, this is only an attempt to apply the idea of "dependency critique" to reconcile the controversy over "welfare to" "diverse families". However, it seems quite reasonable and indispensable to articulate the historical packet of familial needs, in order both to maximize the freedom of lifestyles of individuals on one hand, and to protect and esteem inevitable dependency and dependency work as human conditions on the other.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> A Japanese neologism, "konkatsu", which means active marriage hunting like job hunting, has now become a fashionable word at the national and municipal level for coping with later marriages and lower birthrates. Many cities and prefectures try to hold arranged marriage events to drive young people to marriage and (hopefully) children.

<sup>2</sup> The concept of welfare includes not only redistribution but also social recognition. For contemporary re-conceptions of Hegel's idea of recognition, see Axel Honneth (1992, 2000). For the complex and sometimes contradictory relationships between redistribution and recognition, see Nancy Frazer (1997) and Frazer & Honneth (2003).

<sup>3</sup> Besides dependency critique, West discusses the "ethics of care" proposed by the developmental psychologist Carol Gilligan (1982) and Nell Noddings (1984) in pedagogy, as other important critics of the liberal paradigm (West 2002).

<sup>4</sup> In terms of this point, Martha Fineman also argues, in her more comprehensive and detailed work, "Autonomy Myth" (2003), in trying to reconstruct and update the trilateral relationships between government, the market and the family, "First, the state provision or assurance of basic social goods to all individuals is essential in a humane modern society. Second, as argued in chapter two, inevitable dependency is of general concern and may therefore, be conceived as a generalized or collective responsibility. Third, undertaking caretaking exacts a unique cost from an individual caretaker, who becomes derivatively dependent on society and its institutions for additional material and structural resources necessary to do care work well" (Fineman 2003:285).

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Human Settlements Program

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## Message

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### A Further Step towards an International Foothold for Academic Research

Shuzo Nishimura  
Kyoto University Executive Vice-President

It is a great honor for me to have the opportunity to convey this message regarding the publication of the Proceedings of the First Next-Generation Global Workshop organized by Kyoto University Global COE Program for “Reconstruction of the Intimate and Public Spheres in 21st Century Asia”.



We hope that this program will function to increase the international competitiveness of the university, in particular by assisting young scholars. The Proceedings based on the Second Next-Generation Global Workshop held at Kyoto University in November 2009 are a part of this. The proceedings contain 38 articles from all over the world regarding family that intertwine gender, migration, policy, discourse and other aspects.

I understand that this GCOE, in collaboration with worldwide international academic partners, explores contemporary social issues from various perspectives. I expect this workshop to take an active role in establishing an international academic foothold by inviting many young scholars to discuss specific and significant topics, in a kind of Asian version of the ERASMUS Program that will be a basis for academic networks for the future.

As a research university, Kyoto University has a long tradition of international research. We accept foreign researchers and scholars as long-term contacts. Now there are more than 700 foreign researchers and scholars at Kyoto University. This excludes short term researchers, so the actual number is much higher than this.

We are still in the process of developing education courses. This year, we launched an educational project for youths, called the Global 30 Program. This program is designed to nurture highly-qualified human resources through providing a high quality educational program, improving the infrastructure for foreign students, and promoting strategic international collaboration to meet the demands of the globalized world.

I sincerely hope that the outcome of this program will be widely recognized and form a new step towards international exchange between Kyoto University and its overseas partner institutions.