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Viviana A. Zelizer: Sociologist of the Family and Intimacy

Jeanne Lazarus and Maude Pugliese

Abstract

This article is an introduction to the themed section titled, “Viviana A. Zelizer: Sociologist of the Family and Intimacy.” It first reviews the major works of Viviana Zelizer and their significance for the social studies of families and intimacy, underscoring how she has accounted for the interplay between family and economy through a series of objects: life insurance, the assessment of children’s value, the social meaning of money, and, more recently, intimacy. The second part of the article describes extensions of Zelizer’s work in the fields of family and intimacy studies and presents the four articles featured in the themed section.

Keywords: Viviana Zelizer, relational work, family, intimacy, money

Throughout her prolific career, sociologist Viviana Zelizer has shown with great subtlety the intertwining of economic and family issues in contemporary societies and revealed why those embeddings are often concealed, sometimes even castigated. For a long time, it was self-evident that family life and intimacy mingle with economic issues, and that economic practices are deeply embedded in social, cultural, and ethical forces. The ancient Greek concept of *oikos* testifies to that. Referring to both the notions of house and wealth, this term drew no distinctions between kinship and the economy, instead defining the family as their union. Zelizer's work is devoted to the history and analysis of the growing dissociation between those realms in Western cultures, especially American society. She helped show that during the 18th and 19th centuries, economy and intimacy came to be understood and described as "separate spheres" and "hostile worlds" that pollute one another, as a consequence of the Industrial Revolution and the advent of capitalism. Money had never been so present in social and family life: to make this presence acceptable, societies and individuals came to deploy a constant work aimed at creating symbolic boundaries between economic and intimate spheres, preserving their mutual embeddings while maintaining the illusion of being sealed from one another. This work is ethical as much as it is legislative, economic, social, cultural, and interpersonal.

Those insights made Viviana Zelizer one of the most recognized and highly cited economic sociologists. However, her work is just as relevant to family sociologists, especially those interested in families' economic conditions. While that issue is frequently presented in public debate as a simple matter of "purchasing power," Zelizer shows that this represents only a small part of what is at stake, because money in the family touches on the protection of individuals and groups. Welfare regimes both derive from and reinforce family structures and gendered roles within the family (Morel, 2007; Orloff, 1993). Likewise, models for financing education (Zaloom, 2019) and retirement, as well as access to housing (Kohl, 2015) and

credit (Campbell & Pugliese, 2021; Lazarus, 2022), reflect and direct the distribution of responsibilities between the state, the market, the family, and individuals. Zelizer's work sheds light on how best to think about the economic stakes of the family by studying practices and their social and moral meanings, both individually and collectively. Her studies also showcase how close attention to economic transactions within the family and intimate ties provides a vantage point from which to grasp changing cultural norms about parenthood, love, and extended kin networks.

Yet, Zelizer's contributions as a scholar of the family and intimacy are not as often acknowledged as her additions to the study of the economy. This realization motivated the organization of a symposium titled, *The Social Meaning of Money. The Work of Viviana A. Zelizer in the Area of Family Studies*, which took place in Montreal in 2022 at the *Centre Urbanisation Culture Société* of *Institut national de la recherche scientifique*, which is part of the *Université du Québec* network. The event featured presentations from leading scholars from Argentina, Australia, Canada, Chile, France, India, and the US who described how they built on Zelizer's work to advance knowledge in areas as varied as conjugal money management and contemporary romantic ideals, care work, debt relationships within family networks, surrogacy, financial abuse, and children's changing social roles. This thematic section of the *Canadian Review of Sociology* brings together four articles that originated in the context of the symposium. In this introductory article, we offer an overview of Zelizer's main works and contributions, as well as their implications for the social scientific study of families and intimacy, before presenting the articles featured in the section.

THE FAMILY IS AN ECONOMIC ISSUE, THE ECONOMY IS A FAMILY MATTER

Viviana Zelizer was born in Buenos Aires to a Jewish family from Europe. Raised in a multilingual environment, she worked in Argentina as a translator between English, Spanish, and French. She studied sociology in the United States at Columbia University, where she obtained her master's degree and then her doctoral degree in 1977. She first taught and directed the sociology department at Barnard College, a Columbia-affiliated college for women, before being elected to Princeton in 1988, where she became one of the leading figures in its sociology department.

Her thesis supervisor, Bernard Barber, was a student of Talcott Parsons. Alongside scholars such as Mark Granovetter and Richard Swedberg, she is part of a generation of sociologists who decided in the 1970s to revisit the disciplinary division between economics and sociology, which had consolidated in prior decades. They established what they referred to as the “new economic sociology,” a research tradition primarily focused on network analysis and the role of social ties in market processes (Smelser & Swedberg, 2005; Steiner, 2011). To this new economic sociology, Viviana Zelizer brought a “different voice,” to borrow Carol Gilligan's (1982) expression, and she helped carve new lines of inquiry by incorporating the question of the family. She made topics such as gifts, children's allowances, consumption, and the informal economy central to economic sociology.

It is important to acknowledge that her success in this endeavour was the outcome of a risky bet. Indeed, it took some time before her predominantly male peers working on “serious” subjects such as business, networks, and trust, fully recognized her as an economic sociologist, as she told Florence Weber during a 2006 interview on the occasion of the French publication of *La signification sociale de l'argent*: “Until recently, my work had remained on

the margins of mainstream economic sociology in the United States. In this highly masculine discipline, women like me did not carry much weight” (Weber, 2006).¹ The challenges she faced were not just a matter of gender, however. They also arose in debates around the scientific question of where the economic sphere is located. Large swathes not just of economic science but also of sociology define the “real” economy as that of business or finance, whereas domestic money passing between individuals is perceived as peripheral and incidental. In contrast, Zelizer showed the importance of the domestic sphere for the “real” economy and demonstrated how the study of domestic money can powerfully reveal the social meanings of money – how it is attached to culture, religion, and relationships between people.

Indeed, at its core, Zelizer’s work asserts that all economic practices, not just those unfolding in the domestic sphere, cannot be imposed without being consistent with the culture and ethics of the societies to which they belong, even if this means transforming ethical standards to deploy previously unacceptable markets, practices, and forms of calculation. In that sense, culture does not “bias” economic rationality; it is the foundation of all economic practices.

The sociologist’s research focuses on the United States, particularly during the 19th and early 20th century, a period marked by social transformation and monetarization: cities grew, industry prospered, and money entered households as never before, becoming omnipresent in economic and social relations. The originality of Zelizer’s approach– and what makes it unusually heuristic – resides in how she links monetarization with the transformations that took place in the definition of the family, which became a “relational” family, as described by Émile Durkheim at the time: affection between members and personal fulfillment became indispensable ingredients to family life, at least in the middle and upper classes (de Singly,

¹ Translated from French by the authors: “jusqu’à peu, mon travail était resté en marge de la sociologie économique dominante aux États-Unis. Dans cette discipline très masculine, les femmes comme moi ne pesaient pas lourd.”

2017; Lenoir, 2017). The relationships between men and women, as those between adults and children, were profoundly transformed. Zelizer observes them (and their reconfigurations) from the point of view of money, which she traces within households, intimate ties, commercial relations, and even in courts, as the law, too, attempts to give meaning to relations between people based on their monetary ties. Zelizer's work is an ongoing exploration of those questions, which she addressed in four major books. In what follows, we offer a brief overview of each one.

Life Insurance

Viviana Zelizer's initial research focused on life insurance, which culminated in her 1979 book, *Morals and Markets* (Zelizer, 1979). Despite mobilizing financial markets, employing advanced risk-measurement techniques, using the best of financial engineering, and requiring an adapted legal framework, the history of this billion-dollar economic market lies, above all, at the heart of the family. To understand life insurance, Zelizer argued, we must understand the structure of families, the statutory roles they define, and their protection models. Who is responsible for earning money? Who is responsible for protecting the weakest (children and spouses)? How large are family groupings? What protection is available outside the family sphere (professional, community, or religious)? Zelizer showed that the promoters of this new market eventually perceived that actuarial tables, no matter how sophisticated, were not enough to sell their insurance policies, which were initially considered transgressive, as they appeared as a bet on death. For years, the market stagnated. But during the 19th century, life insurance salespeople promoted an ethical narrative that contributed to market growth.

In the 18th century, it was the father's role to provide for his family, and when he died, the community took care of the widow and children. However, as Zelizer explains, the transition

from a gift economy to a market economy transformed modes of protection towards individual and commercial ideals. Door-to-door canvassers in working-class neighbourhoods portrayed insurance policies as a moral duty for fathers aiming to fulfill their protective role. The success of this new ethical narrative was such that the status of life insurance changed completely: from a reprobated speculation on the future and death, which should be God's purview, it became a sacred expense, second only to rent among family priorities. Therefore, the market success of life insurance involved redefining both what is a "good" death for Christians and the modalities of social protection. A good Christian should not just prepare himself spiritually for the afterlife but, also anticipate and buffer against the financial consequences of his death for his family.

From the 1870s onwards, insurers began marketing another feature of their product: the fact that it amounts to an investment. In this new variant of the narrative around insurance, subscribing was no longer just a matter of hedging against the risk of disasters and early death, but also of prudential saving for all kinds of future needs. Here again, we can see a transformation in family finances: from a focus on survival and emergencies in the urban working-class households of the mid-19th century, they turned into a key clog of the monetary economy.

Priceless Children

Zelizer's work on life insurance was followed by *Pricing the Priceless Child*, published in 1985, which describes how the American middle class invented in the 19th century the priceless child: the notion that children must be devoid of any economic value (Zelizer, 1985). Children were extracted from the realm of work to become schoolchildren, and the economic links between generations were gradually reversed: parents should no longer

expect to rely on their children for support in old age, but instead must have sufficient resources to raise unproductive children.

Zelizer examined those changes in four spheres: child labour, life insurance, compensation for accidental death, and the cost of adoption. The end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries were once again pivotal. Child labour was gradually banned, and education became compulsory. The children of working-class families joined middle-class ones on school benches and in collective representations as having only their schoolwork to do. The value of children became inestimable, in the dual sense of being infinite and irreducible to a monetized price. This new cultural stance towards children paradoxically became a market tool, particularly for life insurance salespeople who, at a time when infant mortality was still high, developed insurance policies specifically designed to offer children a dignified funeral: funerals worthy of priceless children. Likewise, profound changes took place in financial compensation for children's accidental death: while at the end of the 19th century, judges sometimes considered a child's life to be worthless, as they were not old enough to work, a few decades later, estimations of the value of children's lives skyrocketed. The same is true of adoptions: Zelizer contrasts the "baby farms" of the 19th century, where urban working-class parents would drop off children they couldn't feed, against the tens of thousands of dollars that 20th-century parents were willing to spend on adoption or medically assisted reproduction.

The sacralization of family values and children, which should make them impervious to any economic value, has made both calculation a taboo within the family and child-rearing extremely costly, as North American families know only too well, with many going into debt or otherwise jeopardizing their financial well-being to fulfill what they consider to be their role (Zaloom, 2019). Bringing this economic aspect of the family to light helps us understand several hotly debated political issues around the world. In a cultural context calling on

parents to not only be self-sufficient but also support their children until they reach the (increasingly distant) age of autonomy, deteriorating economic conditions constitute an extreme form of violence against parents who can no longer perform their moral duty.

The Social Meaning of Money

Viviana Zelizer's best-known work internationally is undoubtedly *The Social Meaning of Money* (1994), which was translated in several languages, including French and Spanish. The book challenges a well-established assumption among economists and sociologists: that money is a simple medium of exchange, neutral and odourless. According to this notion, the neutrality of money is its greatest strength, enabling it to value everything and facilitating exchanges between anyone, anytime and anywhere. Money's neutrality is also the root of cultural criticism levelled at money, which impoverishes collective life by imposing a single value scale, making everything and everyone comparable. In this view, money and its increased circulation birthed a rationalist, calculating humanity that risks losing its soul in a modern monetarized society.

Viviana Zelizer debated both of those polar conceptualizations of money, positing it is neither a mere neutral oil to the engine of impersonal transactions nor destructive of social ties. In this argument, she deeply engaged with Georg Simmel, who, in his *Philosophy of Money* (2011 [1900]), viewed modern money as both ubiquitous and empty, symbolizing modernity and the accompanying loss of meaning. In contrast, Zelizer showed that money has a smell and that its users appropriate it, colouring it with layered social, cultural, or emotional meanings. Once again, Zelizer built her arguments from the observation of the family sphere during the period of social changes between the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As money entered every household, including the poorest, it was unavoidably "marked" by the actors

according to its origin (won in a lottery, received as a gift, as wages, illegally, etc.), its function (money for rent, coal, food, leisure, etc.), and its users (wife's money, husband's money, children's money).

Viviana Zelizer's sociology of money establishes that it does not impose its logic unilaterally, but instead is domesticated, given texture by its users, which ultimately drive how it is used. Hence, pre-existing relations of domination, for example between men and women, are reflected in the handlings of domestic money. To demonstrate this point, Zelizer pays attention to conjugal money management practices and how women's magazines covered this issue in the late 19th century. Middle-class women depended on their husband's money, and the magazines gave them advice on how to get as much money as possible for themselves and their children. They suggested avoiding asking for money directly as soon as the husband returns home, and waiting instead until he is relaxed before broaching the subject, making sure to always ask for money as a favor. Thus, attending to money dealings within couples does not reveal increasingly rational conjugal arrangements, but instead how the tensions inherent to romantic life and gender inequalities transpire in the circulation of money.

Another way to look at money within the family is through gifts. While gifts of money between relatives did exist and even grew during the early 20th century, they had to comply with certain codes of conduct in family relationships. For example, they are expected from parents to children, but not vice-versa. Similarly, money received is not used for just any expense; it is preserved for special things and occasions, not everyday consumption.

Zelizer's writings on money diverge from grand theories that aim to define this medium or understand the source of its value and the conditions under which it inspires confidence. Instead, she follows the uses of money to understand how it intertwines with social and family life. This domestication of money does not prevent money from transforming

lifestyles and moral values. But this transformation is reciprocal, a point that only close observations of money's uses and flows within the family can reveal.

Intimacy

In *The Purchase of Intimacy* (2005), Zelizer extended her explorations of money within families to cover the issue of money's presence in intimate ties. Intimacy and family do not perfectly overlap, and Zelizer aimed to understand their boundaries – how individuals relate to one another in multiple ways, sometimes institutionalized and stabilized, including by law, and other times according to modalities more difficult to define. Once again, she delved into intimacy and its intricacies by following their economic and monetary stakes. Her materials are highly original: press cuttings, home economics manuals, advice for newlyweds, and advertising leaflets are just a few examples. Above all, she drew on court documents to understand how economics and intimacy can be so profoundly intertwined when the dominant ethic asserts that these worlds should remain separate.

In particular, she offered a detailed analysis of the financial reparations paid out by the US government after September 11, based on the work of lawyer Kenneth Feinberg (2006), who was responsible for administering the compensation fund and defining compensation amounts. At first, it was decided that a minimum sum of money should go to all families (\$250,000 per victim, plus \$100,000 per dependent child and spouse), to which compensation for economic losses was added based on the value of the salaries that would not be received by the deceased. However, it was soon established that a person's economic value is not limited to the money he or she formally earned; women's domestic work was eventually included in the calculation, as was that of men (take, for example, the parents of a firefighter who argued that he helped around their house). Other questions arose: To whom should that

money be paid? How can links between people be established? Crises – monetary ones in particular – revealed family structures. Many situations were far from obvious, such as a woman living with a friend who claimed to be her partner, whereas the victim’s siblings presented her as a mere roommate. The proof of their love affair came through financial evidence: a joint account, shared gym membership, and so on. Conversely, a husband who separated from his wife was dismissed as a beneficiary following a legal battle led by the latter’s mother after it was proven that he no longer had any contact with his wife and had not suffered any financial damage upon her death (Zelizer, 2005: 275-278). This extraordinary event enabled Zelizer to implacably demonstrate the complex interweaving of intimacy, family, law, and the commercial world.

In this 2005 book, Zelizer also integrates a dimension of family and intimate life absent in her previous works: care. Even though this notion was not used in her other books, the links with her earlier works are easy to see. She has long been interested in the place of women in the family, their roles, the forms of domination they face, and the resistance they deploy. Zelizer also has a long-standing interest in family modes of protection and in the tension existing between family values that advocate selflessness, on one hand, and the presence of commercial ties within the family, on the other. Care work stands at the crossroads of those issues; the debates surrounding it aim largely at bringing to light the skills and efforts it requires and acknowledging that it is a marketable activity that can be valued and remunerated at its fair value, even though it is also a deeply intimate service to others, often loved ones, towards whom we usually expect selflessness.

Zelizer proposed the notion of *relational work* to refer to the incessant individual and collective efforts to reconcile such intimate and market processes. In all spheres of social life, we make arrangements she calls *circuits of commerce*, which consist of a specific adjustment with four elements: the type of social tie linking people involved, the type of transaction, the

means of exchange, and circuit boundaries. Instead of avoiding “polluting” intimate ties with money, as the separate sphere view would have it, Viviana Zelizer’s analysis shows that we constantly match types of transactions, media, and circuit boundaries with the type of social relation (for example gifts within families, payment between employer and employee). A good match does not only allow money and intimacy to coexist, it also weaves the very fabric of intimacy, as choosing appropriate transactions and media cues our acknowledgement of the intimate nature of the relationship.

Relational work is not an individual performance: marriage contracts, birth certificates, employment contracts, or declarations of interest are social translations of this relational work. They define and label the status of people and the nature of their relationship with others, while also guiding them on how to interact and – importantly – integrate into their routines the inevitable financial ebbs and flows, without letting money destroy their social bonds. Zelizer calls this integration process *good matches*: her deliberately optimistic approach flies in the face of what she sees as a simplistic vision that associates any presence of money in a relationship with a commercial and calculator logic that destroys authenticity. She has, however, been criticized for not sufficiently observing *bad matches* and acknowledging the potential violence of economic liberalism and commodification.² She calmly confronted these debates, demonstrating the emancipatory potential of her approach, particularly regarding the issue of care work most often performed by women. The separate spheres approach (the economy and the family are social spaces that do not obey the same rules) and hostile worlds one (their logics pollute one another) help us understand the special social status of paid activities within the family. Their commercial nature is often obscured to

² Including in a review one of us wrote of her work (see Lazarus, 2012).

present them instead as quasi-familial. This is what invisibilizes the professional nature of these activities, the skills deployed, and their financial value.³

EXTENSIONS OF ZELIZER'S WORK

Viviana Zelizer's scientific production has influenced scholars worldwide, as shown by the academic meetings organized to celebrate the 20th anniversary of *The Social Meaning of Money* in 2014, including at Yale University and in Paris, each time bringing together scholars from nearly all continents. Although Zelizer is read not only by sociologists but also by anthropologists, historians, lawyers, and economists (especially behaviourists), the scholars who mobilize her conceptual tools generally share one commonality: their interest is in the economy and money. The book, *Money Talks*, published in the wake of the anniversary symposium held at Yale, bears witness to this (Bandelj et al., 2017). It is not so much a tribute book as a series of articles showing the extent of the discussion provoked by Zelizer's work. What the articles share is that they challenge the standard description of "modern" money as neutral, necessarily backed by a legal and governmental framework, fungible, and reductive of social life to mere calculation.

However, a comparatively still small, but growing group of scholars are building on her work to advance the sociology of the family, kinship, intimacy and household processes, instead of that of money and the economy. Many of them adopt her methodological stance: family dynamics take shape and reveal themselves in money affairs; therefore, following money is a research strategy for understanding family behaviours, cultures, and norms. To give only a few examples of the exciting research on families, intimacy, and households deeply

³ One example is Viviana Zelizer's contribution to the 2008/2 special issue of the *Revue Française de Socio-économie* in 2008, titled, "le care : entre transactions familiales et économie de service," and edited by Florence Jany-Catrice and Chantal Nicole-Drancourt.

influenced by the Zelizerian approach, one can think of scholarship on remittances and how they bring to light national variations in the “right” way to care for children and the elderly, even more so when migration has dispersed families across continents (Singh et al., 2012; Vari-Lavoisier, 2016). Several studies also draw on her concept of earmarking to describe contemporary conjugal arrangements and how they are reached without ever being explicitly discussed, often at a disadvantage to women, although their access to their own money helps reconfigure power dynamics over spending decisions (Belleau et al., 2020; Gowayed, 2022; Kim, 2019).

Florence Weber and others who have worked with her to develop the *economic ethnography* approach have drawn on Zelizer’s research to observe and analyze economic practices in families and between people with all kinds of non-market ties (Weber, 2011). In particular, Weber and her colleagues have built on Viviana Zelizer’s insights to assert that individuals’ reference systems are plural, enabling them to circulate between multiple social scenes in which they apply different models of reasoning and calculating (Weber, 2013). Other scholars have expended the Zelizerian concept of relational work, using it to describe gendered realignments of family expenditures and lifestyles following a parent’s job loss (Rao, 2022), or how people decide and justify to lend (or not) to kin members (Wherry et al., 2019). Zelizer’s framework has also inspired scholars to explore the “moral frames” that facilitate the institutionalization of “intimate industries” such as international surrogacy and egg donation markets (Parreñas et al., 2016; Rudrappa & Collins, 2015).

Moreover, family scholarship increasingly engages with the uses of financial products within kin networks and intimate ties, and many of them have built on Zelizer’s insights to challenge common assumptions about the repercussions of the growing financialization of everyday life. This concept describes the transformation of household money in the context of what American political scientist Jacob Hacker (2006) calls a “risk shift”: a transfer of risk from

the collective to the individual. To cope with the new risks they face, individuals now turn to the multiplicity of financial products targeting them, such as medical insurance, pension funds, or credit to finance education, housing, and sometimes to compensate for reduced income. Research exploring this financialization process initially focused on the Anglo-American world, analyzing money and the family in tandem, but often with the assumption that the presence of financial tools within the family transforms people's subjectivities, turning them into self-entrepreneurs and forcing them to endorse financial logics. By combining Zelizer's approach with this research, however, a new way of looking at things emerges, together with new questions.

Consider, for example, the chapters in Marek Mikus and Petra Rodik's book on the financialization of household money in Eastern and Southern Europe in the 2000s, after the end of communism and in the wake of European integration (Mikuš & Rodik, 2021). A series of case studies illustrate the role of the family in the very development of finance: the financial industry often relies on family ties as a safety net, especially through guarantee schemes. When the financial crisis hit, in Spain or Bosnia-Herzegovina, family groups sometimes found themselves caught up in the debts of one of their own. In a similar vein, several Latin American researchers draw on Zelizer's work to explore the growing financialization of poor households and reach similar conclusions. Examples include the work of Lúcia Müller in Brazil and José Ossandón in Chile, both of whom find highly complex circulations of money flows within family support the formal credit infrastructure : some people hold credit cards and lend them to family members and neighbors, while others repay their relatives debts (Müller, 2014; Ossandón, 2017). In short, instead of cultivating individualistic, returns-seeking dispositions, those works show that the financial industry's viability depends on the integration of its various instruments within family protection

routines, a point reminiscent of Zelizer's famous, and family-centered, explanation of the birth of life insurance.

PRESENTATION OF THE SECTION'S ARTICLES

The goal of the present thematic section (and of the symposium that led to it) is to bolster this emerging line of research drawing on Zelizer's work to better understand the family, intimacy, and household dynamics. More broadly, we hope to affirm her significance as a sociologist not just of the economy, but also of the family. To this end, the section brings together four papers that reveal the fruitfulness of the analytical tools she developed, including notions of earmarking, boundaries, and or relational work surrounding money. Although they are grounded in very different research fields and address a broad range of issues, these articles all explore family reproduction and aim to display the fine relational work actors, especially women, deploy in their attempts to achieve *good matches*.

The first two contributions (the articles by Ariel Wilkis and Florencia Partenio and by Lorena Perez-Roa) highlight the central role played by women in the management of household money, particularly during the Covid-19 crisis. They approach the issue from two different perspectives: Wilkis and Partenio stress the fact that women are on the front lines of economic crises, especially the one provoked by Covid, as lockdowns around the world confined nearly all of life's dimensions within the home. Not only did this increase women's invisible, unpaid domestic work, but it also had concrete economic effects, in particular that of increasing their debts, whether for paying for internet services, medical expenses, or other necessities. By studying this period in Argentina, Wilkis and Partenio propose an original argument, one that enriches studies on care: they show that "money management is a

fundamental condition of caregiving”. Managing family money means taking care of others, while taking care of others increasingly means going into debt to meet others’ needs.

Lorena Perez-Roa, for her part, shed light on the reality of single mothers’ experiences in Chile by studying how they experienced a unique Covid-related policy: Chileans were exceptionally authorized to release 10% of their public retirement funds at the time of the pandemic. The law also allowed women to claim this 10% from the father of their children as reimbursements for unpaid alimony. This decision, aimed at helping families during the pandemic, brought to light the prevalence of child support delinquency in Chile and the pressing need for systems directing money toward mothers. In fact, this Chilean political choice went against the grain of typical policy responses to economic crises, which often channel public aid towards “male” interests, through unemployment benefits or support to economic production, as was the case during the subprime crisis (Adkins, 2015). Yet, as we acknowledge that the Chilean state did look for ways to help women and the domestic sphere during the Covid crisis, it is equally important to underscore that the policy did not involve actual public aid for single mothers, but rather the early activation of their individual savings (and those of the fathers). Overall, Perez-Roa’s article demonstrates the potential of Viviana Zelizer’s work for the analysis of public policies, looking at the way they mark out the boundaries between intimacy and the economy, and the way they frame the gendered domestic economy.

Nina Bandelj and Michelle Spiegel’s article also focuses on the economic situations of parents, albeit through an entirely distinct lens and in a different cultural context. Extending the magnificent *Pricing the Priceless Child* (Zelizer, 1985), the authors analyze the money spent by American parents on childcare, and, more specifically, center-based childcare designed to prepare children for the academic and professional competition that awaits them. As Zelizer has shown, children became exorbitantly expensive, as they became priceless, for

spending for them turned sacred. This is nowhere truer than in the United States, where higher education is largely privatized, parents have become accustomed to high tuition, increasing parental spending and saving for adolescents and young adults. In their article, Bandelj and Spiegel show that American parents have also raised their spending on center-based care for infants and toddlers substantially and that this new norm of childrearing cuts across all strata of society, as it is adopted by both low-income families and wealthier ones. The authors link this trend to changing parenting cultures that emphasize the importance of expert knowledge in child-rearing and cast this process as an investment. Paradoxically, these emerging norms make the deeply affective role of parenting rest on cold economic calculations: it is on the basis of cost-benefit balance and accounting tools such as “returns on investments” that spending in center-based childcare is presented as the best choice for parents, and the way to express their love.

The question of the separation of the spheres of intimacy and the economy is at the heart of the last article by Catherine Lavoie Mongrain. She investigates “sugar dating” in Canada, typically described as a mutually advantageous relationship in which an older “wealthier person [most often a man] offers different types of material and symbolic incentives—such as cash payments, cash allowances, gifts, all-expenses paid trips, and mentoring—to a younger, financially precarious person [most often a woman] in exchange for their companionship,” which includes dating and often sex. The article explores how the participants navigate between separate spheres and find workable arrangements in this loosely institutionalized type of intimacy. Affect must be produced for sugar dating to be properly performed, as buyers are looking for the fantasy of a real relationship (the “girlfriend” experience), not paid sex work. The difficulty resides in defining the situation as genuine intimacy while circulating money payments. For sugar “daddies,” disappointment arises when economic intrusion is too brutal and money matters are brought forth too directly. For sugar “babies,”

then, demanding remuneration directly is not possible and can only be cued. Beyond building bridges between the concepts of emotional and relational work, Mongrain's research can be read from a feminist point of view. We see this, for example, in her analysis of how care work is seen in the sugar dating world as something to be given for free, particularly when it concerns sex. When money is demanded in exchange, women face accusations of venality and impurity.

The four articles that make up this special issue show just how fertile and useful the tools developed by Viviana Zelizer are for shedding light not only on the monetary stakes of the domestic space but also on gender relations, public policies, and changing cultural norms regarding parenting and intimacy. As Zelizer invites us to go beyond the notions of hostile worlds and separate spheres, she calls on us to understand and describe how individuals find ways to circulate money without jeopardizing the ties that bind them. This relational work, within economic circuits, becomes the main object of study. In this sense, Zelizer's contribution is methodological, as well as theoretical. In the words of José Ossandón (2019: 188), she "helped us to expand the imagination of how to study the economy more widely"; to paraphrase him, we could say that she developed our imagination of how to study families and intimacies more deeply.

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