Child care has a branding problem [1]

Let's elevate care language, not abandon it
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Excerpts

I was recently asked why I have such "devotion" to calling the policy area in which I work "child care." The term is not a given: many in the sector have since moved on to calling what we work on as "early care and education," "early childhood education," or some variation thereof–and there are valid reasons behind their decision. My answer, though, is as simple as it is fundamental: we lose out as a society when we devalue care, and there is a desperate need to rehabilitate the image of care and its place in a healthy society.

There is little question that the phrase "child care"–and its cousin hated by many in the field, "daycare"–can conjure up unimpressive images of low-skilled supervisory work worthy of meager respect or public support.

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I sometimes think it is instructive to consider the case of an 85-year-old stricken with Alzheimer's. The care being provided to that individual produces little future economic value. There is no educational element at play. And yet, I would argue that such care–as painful, labor-intensive, and heartbreaking it may be–is immensely valuable.5 There is meaning in dependency, and as Elissa Strauss and others have written, dependency is not a one-way street: if someone is dependent on you, you are tethered to them. If we lose the core concepts of care, whether care of children or care of spouse or care of neighbor or care of the elderly, we lose some of ourselves. Hence my devotion.

So there are two options: abandon care language altogether, or work explicitly to elevate and reposition care in society. I come down on the side of repositioning.

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