**gender inequality**—males’ and

females’ unequal access to power, property, and prestige on

the basis of sex. Gender inequality is especially significant

because it cuts across all aspects of social life. No matter

what our social class, age, or racial or ethnic classification,

we are labelled *male* or *female*

In these

societies, women may have been equal partners with men.

They may even have contributed about 60 percent of the

groups’ total food. Yet, after reviewing the historical record,

historian and feminist Gerda Lerner (1986) concluded that

“there is not a single society known where women-as-agroup

have decision-making power over men (as a group).”

Consequently, sociologists classify females as a **minority**

**group**. You may question this terminology since women

outnumber men; however, the term *minority group* applies

because it refers to people who are discriminated against on

the basis of physical or cultural characteristic

world, found that in all of

them activities are **sex-typed**; in other words, every society

associates certain activities with one sex or the other. He

also found that activities considered “female” in one society

could be considered “male” in another. In some groups, for

example, taking care of cattle is women’s work, while other

groups assign this task to men.

**power**

is the ability to carry out your will in spite of resistance,

and in every group, large or small, some individuals have

power over others.

**coercion**, is power that we do not accept as morally correct

The idea of **citizenship**—that by

virtue of birth and residence, people have basic rights—is

relatively new to the human scene (B. Turner, 1990).

The concept of representative democracy based on citizenship

was revolutionary. Its implementation meant *the*

*reversal of traditional ideas, since the government was to be*

*responsive to the people’s wishes, not the people to the wishes of*

*the government*.

The idea of **universal citizenship**—of everyone having

the same basic rights by virtue of being born in a country

Functionalists say that **pluralism**, a diffusion of power

among many interest groups, prevents any one group from

gaining control of a government and using it to oppress the people. In other words, the Canadian government functions

like a healthy human body (Polsby, 1959; Huber & Form,

1973; Dahl, 1961, 1982).

**Authority** is power that people view as legitimately exercised over

them, while

A government run by a single person who has seized power

is known as a **dictatorship**. If a small group seizes power, the

government is called an **oligarchy**. Although one individual

may be named president, often a group of high-ranking

military officers, working behind the scenes, makes the decisions.

If their designated president becomes unco-operative,

they remove him from office and designate another.

Monarchies, dictatorships, and oligarchies vary

in the amount of control they exert over their people.

**Totalitarianism** is almost total control of a people by a

government.

Canada’s form of federal government is unlike a **unitary**

**state**, in which all power resides with the central government.

Neither does Canada’s parliamentary democracy

resemble a **confederal union**, in which provinces have most

are made by a coalition of individuals whose

interests coincide and who have access to the centre of

political power in the United States. Mills called them the

**power elite**.

As a result, they

broadly defined the **family** as two or more people who consider

themselves related by blood, marriage, or adoption. A

**household** may or may not be a family, since it is defined

as consisting of all people who share the same housing unit.

Within the broad category of **family**, some sociologists

classify families as **nuclear** (husband, wife, and children)

and **extended** (including people such as grandparents,

aunts, uncles, and cousins in addition to the nuclear unit).

Sociologists also refer to the **family of orientation** (the

family in which an individual grows up) and the **family of**

**procreation** (the family formed when a couple have their

first child). Regardless of its form, **marriage** is a group’s

approved mating arrangement—usually marked out by a

ritual of some sort (e.g.

older women may relish their independence

and opt for cohabitation rather than more formal

marital arrangements (Ambert, 2012: 196). Together, these

factors underscore the fact that throughout the life cycle,

marriage is becoming less frequently defined as a legal contract

or religious ceremony.

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ritual of some sort (e.g., a wedding) to in

Family generally

involves some sense of belonging to a particular group.

This sense is typically formalized in a society’s **system of**

**descent**, the way people trace kinship over generations. To

us, a **bilateral** system seems logical—and natural—for we

think of ourselves as related to both our mother’s and our

father’s side of the family. Interestingly, this is only one logical

way to reckon descent. In a **patrilineal** system, descent

is traced only on the father’s side, and children are not considered

to be related to their mother’s relatives. In a **matrilineal**

system, descent is figured only on the mother’s side,

and children are not considered to be related to their father’s

relatives

In some cultures, men are expected to have more than

one wife (**polygyny**) and in others women have more

than one husband (**polyandry**)

This **monolithic bias** in traditional sociology not only

lends itself to a very incomplete approach, but also tends to

support a **conservative bias**. It implies that the “normal”

and “natural” family is the one composed of two heterosexual

adults who reside with and raise their biological (or

adopted) children.