

Lecture 3

GENDER INEQUALITY



- Gender selection is illegal in Canada [and] physicians consider disclosing the gender unethical if the patient's purpose is sex selection
- Couples can get around the Canadian law by heading south of the border*
- *Globe and Mail, Sept 21, 2012

The dream: a daughter

- A recent Slate article followed a Toronto nurse who spent \$40,000 (U.S.) in pursuit of a **baby girl** – reportedly the preferred gender for most Caucasian-American patients seeking gender determination.



The reality: a son



- The Slate piece also unearthed numerous online communities of mothers agonizing over the male gender of their newborns, and looking for support.

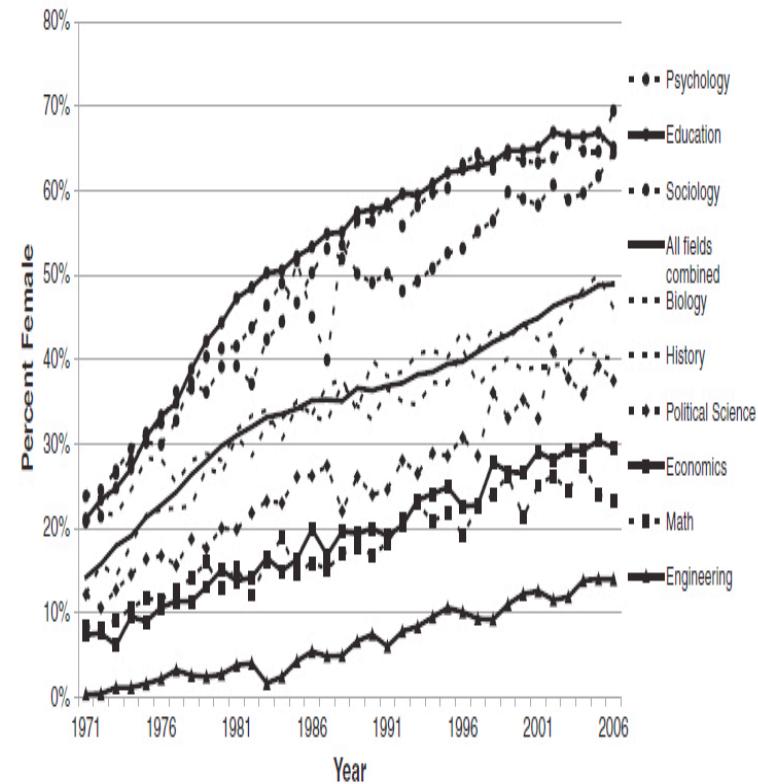
Is this a new ballgame?

- Women used to be the “second sex”
- Are women now equal to men?
- Are women doing even better than men?
- If so, how did this come about?



One element: Education for women

- Women were not admitted to North American universities at all until the late 19th century
- It took a full century until women became more numerous than men in university programs
- Today, women are more numerous as graduates than are men
 - However, they are still gender-differentiated



Fri
Figure 4: Percentage of All Doctoral Degree Recipients Who Were Women in Selected Large Fields, 1971-2006

Another element: The disappearance of “men’s jobs”

- At the same time, the type of jobs men do – or used to do – have been replaced by machines or moved overseas
- Primary industry (farming, logging, mining) employs few, and secondary industry is in decline
- Tertiary (service) industry is booming and female-friendly



Teaching Assistants in the Course

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Available for consultation in person or by e-mail

- Will give review sessions before each test and final exam



Habits of Inequality Theory



- All societies display social inequality of varying kinds
- These social inequalities are socially constructed: that is, collectively imagined on the basis of a supposedly important natural difference (e.g., sex)

Societies vary in Social Inequality

- Societies vary in the degree and kinds of social inequality they display.
 - This variation proves that social inequality is something we can regulate and change
- Societies with the widest variety and intensity of inequality are most likely to display clear and long-lasting patterns we call “habits of inequality”

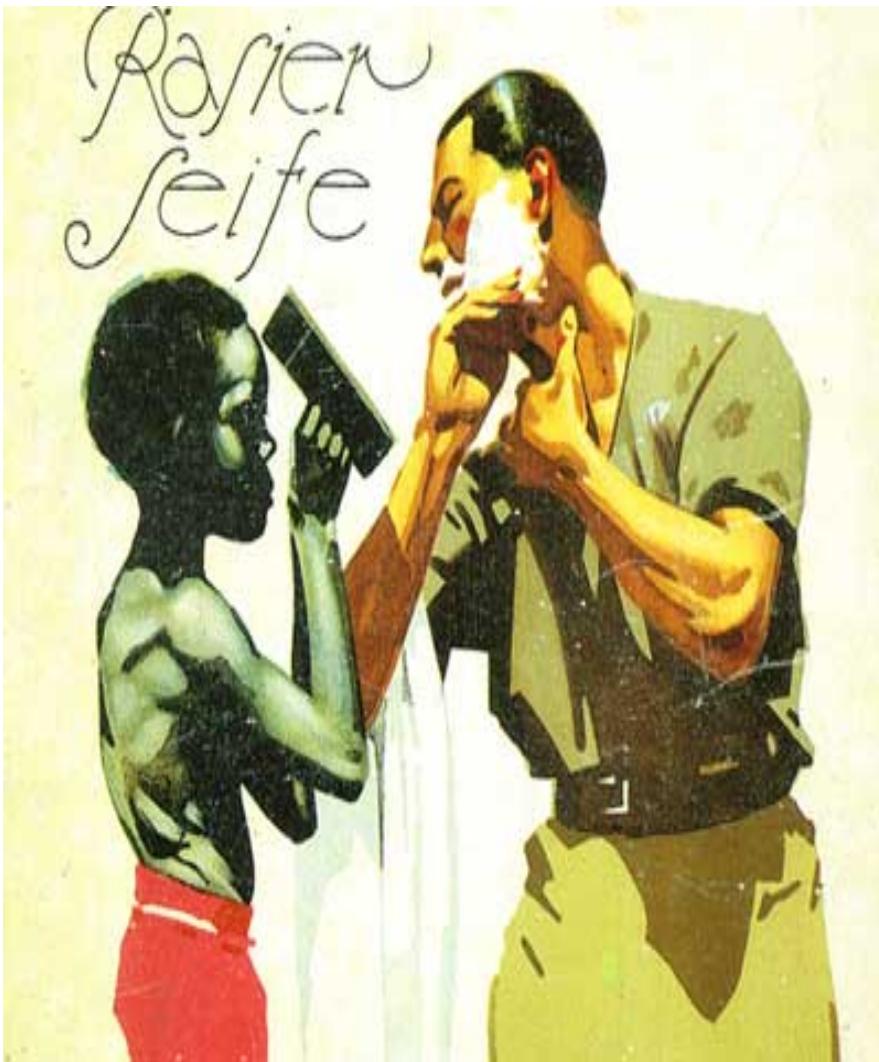


The Cultural Habits: S-N-P-N-S

- All types of social inequality display similar patterns or cultural “habits” that include the following (S-N-P-N-S):
 - Social differentiation
 - Narratives of blame
 - Practices of oppression
 - Narratives of validation
 - Strategies of resistance



S = Social Differentiation



- *Social differentiation* is the practice of identifying different “kinds” of people who are assumed to be essentially and unchangeably different, and whose difference is consequential for social and economic life
- This process is the transformation of natural differences (for example, sex) into socially important differences and inequalities.

N = Narratives of Blame

- *Narratives of blame* are socially constructed accounts that attach social or moral qualities to different groups
- These narratives derive from a belief that the world is just in its distribution of rewards and punishments— the so-called Just World Theory



P = Practices of Oppression



- *Practices of oppression* comprise a variety of economic and non-economic behaviors that disadvantage certain groups and advantage others
- These practices of oppression may follow the creation of narratives of blame, or may serve to justify pre-existing oppression.

N = Narratives of Validation

- *Narratives of validation* are socially constructed accounts that attach different, even opposite, social and moral qualities to groups in society, as a response to narratives of blame.
- They may take various forms:
 - deny the factual accuracy of the blame narratives, denying any fault, deficiency, or misdeed
 - hold advantaged people responsible for creating conditions that are blameworthy



S = Strategies of Resistance



- *Strategies of resistance* include collective (social) actions that combat practices of oppression, reduce inequality, or ameliorate the effects of inequality.
- They may take various forms:
 - consciousness raising activities
 - social movement formation to achieve social and political goals
 - legal challenges to oppression, through the courts

Sex versus gender



For sociologists, there is an important difference between sex and gender

- By sex, we mean *biological* characteristics that make a person biologically *male* or *female*.
- By *gender*, we mean the social expectations that people describe as *masculine* or *feminine*.

Social construction is the process that makes sexual (i.e., biological) differences seem large or small, important or unimportant

Why women fail in business: a narrative of blame

- Despite recent successes, in Canada, mythical beliefs still hinder women in business
- Men in business tend to believe that **women are not serious about work** – more concerned with family
- This is (allegedly) why women in business do not ascend the corporate ladder
- However, research shows this account is not valid



Narratives of blame versus the reality

A recent survey of women executives found five key reasons why women (say they) leave business:

- not being valued (is the most often cited)
- feeling excluded
- male-dominated work environment
- lack of opportunity
- work-life issues (is the least often cited)

A second belief many men hold is that **women cannot hack it** in business.

- However, in a 2009 Harvard Business School survey on “the exodus of women,” only 6 % admit quitting because the work was too demanding.

Women and men hear differently

A third belief many men hold in the corporate world is that **women lack self-confidence**

- This is because they speak differently from men, and respond differently

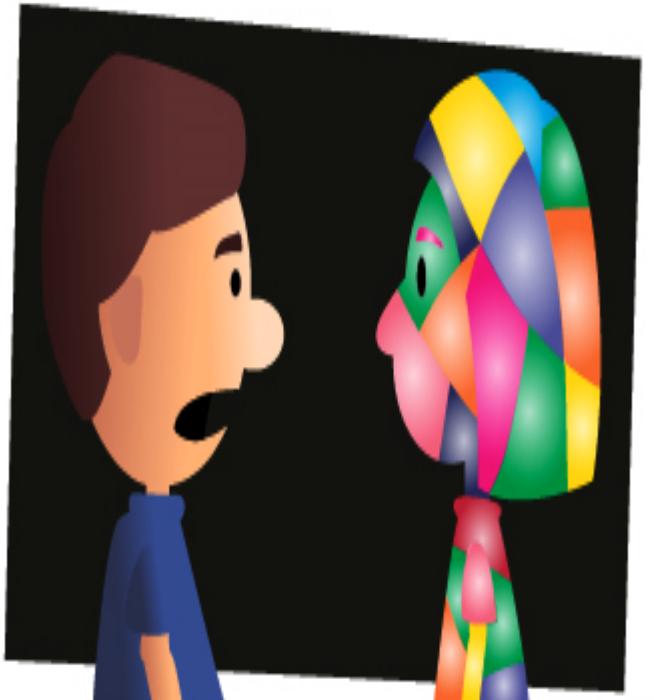
e.g., Women interpret the question “What do you think?” as a prelude to conversation

- By contrast, men interpret it as an invitation to give an opinion or make a decision



The role of gender intelligence

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"The problem with you girls is
you're all so intricate."

- Many women executives believe men are inclined to exclude them
- Research suggests men only seem more exclusionary
 - Men do not think about situations at the level of detail that women do
- This confusion suggests that we all need more *gender intelligence*
 - Men and women do not understand each other

Glass ceilings and wage gaps



- With industrialization and the bureaucratization of office work, gender inequalities in workplaces have declined.
- However, many women still suspect a “glass ceiling” at work
- As well, a wage gap often remains between men and women

Women still lack opportunities

- A classic study, *Men and Women of the Corporation*, argues that when women fail to get ahead in business, this is because women lack opportunities
- Rosabeth Kanter is a Harvard Business School professor and famous business consultant.
- Kanter's book, *Men and Women of the Corporation* (1977), challenged assumptions about the traditional system of reward within organizations



That's why they are timid at work



- It is **because** women have less opportunity for promotion that they are forced to act “like women”: subservient, devious, seemingly unambitious
- All the “corporate women” -- executives, secretaries, or even wives -- are in a similar bind
- Because of powerlessness, they behave in “typical” female ways
- These female performances support the male view that women, by nature, are poor executive material

Minority status promotes timidity

- People in a numerical minority *often* feel restricted in what they can do
- Adding a few “token women” to an organization does *not* significantly increase choices for women, nor allow women to flourish
- To reduce inequality and increase productivity, traditional hiring and promotion practices have to change
 - Have to reach out for more minorities



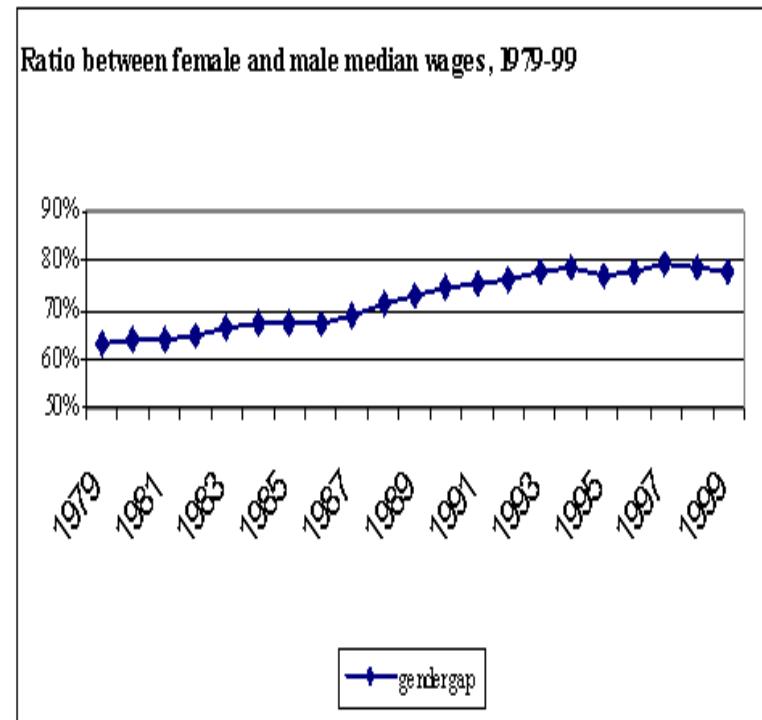
Overcoming tokenism



- Tokenism prevents us from seeing how people could potentially adapt and grow into their roles
- It is in an organization's interest to make the best possible use of its human capital: for example, its talented women
- Legislation has been important in promoting that change

The feminization and proletarianization of work

- Men and women who graduate from the same university program, enter the same job, and work fulltime in that job can expect to earn roughly the same wages
- However, many women find their credentials devalued by “the proletarianization of professions” previously dominated by men
- Despite their successes at school, many women are still being educated largely for female-dominated professions



The valuation of “emotion work”



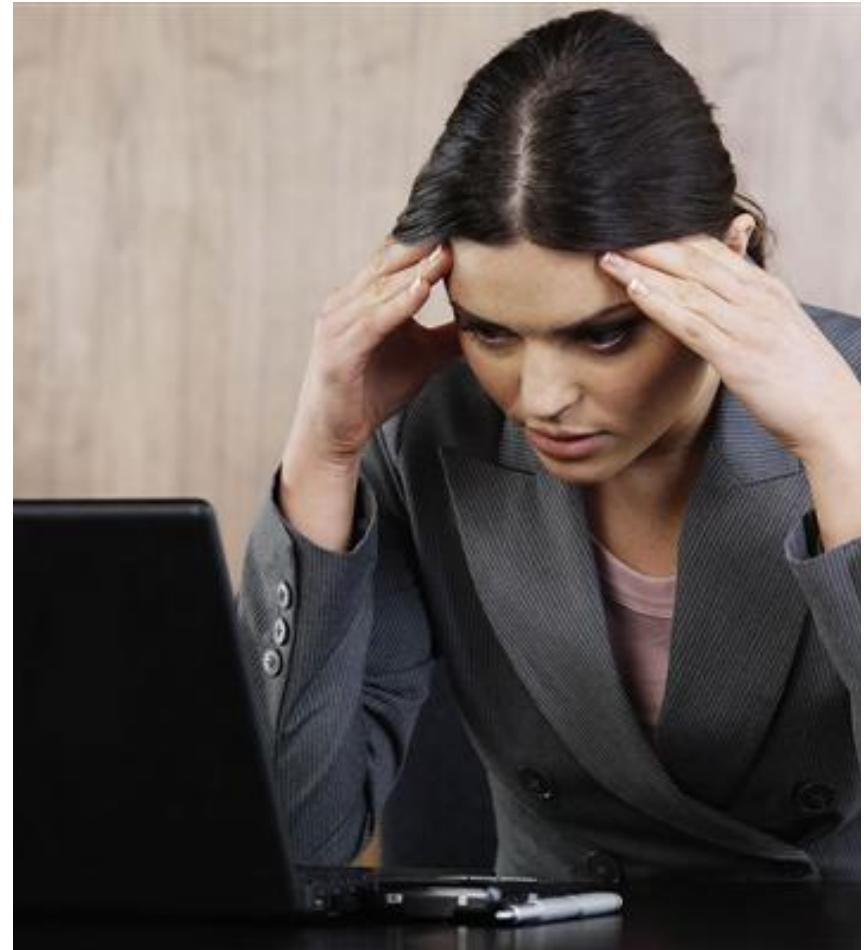
- Women excel at emotion work and emotion management, but men have a tendency to trivialize its economic or social value
- “Emotion work” requires maintaining an atmosphere of warmth and comfort, while providing customer satisfaction and service
- Men need to learn how to do this emotion work better

However, all service work is precarious work

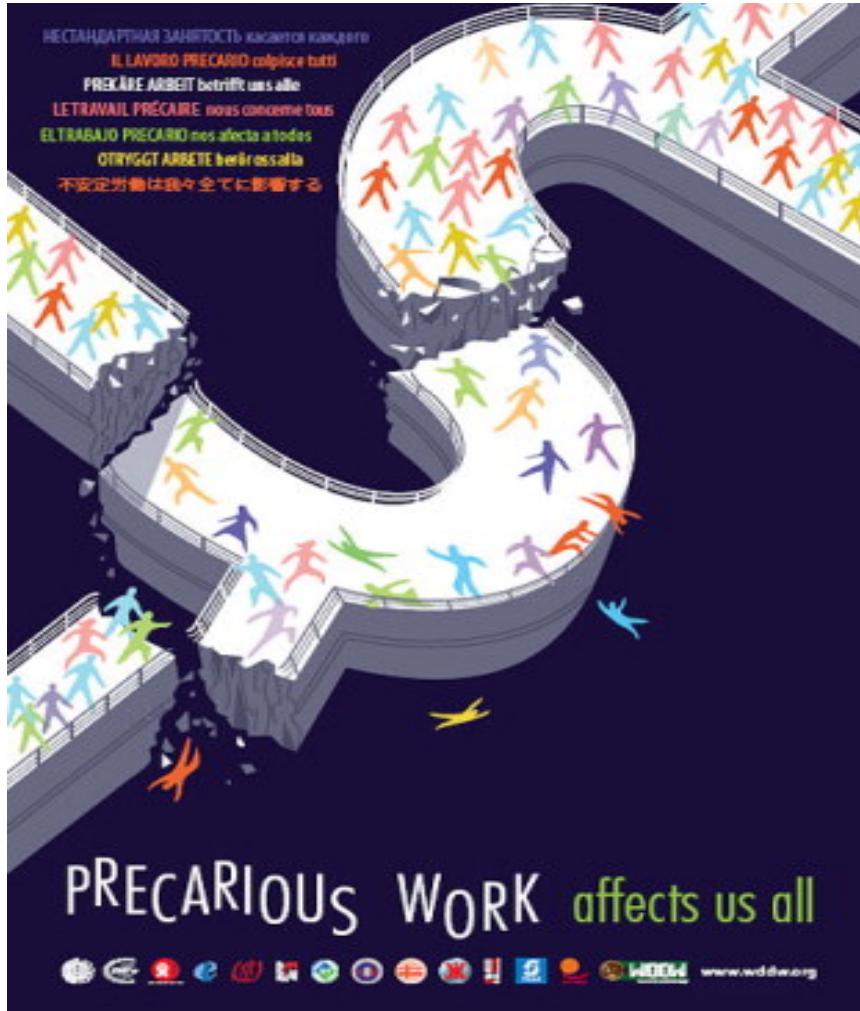
The notion of “precarious work” is often associated with:

- Part time work
- Fixed term work
- Self-employed work
- Temporary work
- On-call work work
- Homeworking
- Telecommuting

Typical of sales and service jobs



How is this different from standard work?



Precarious forms of work differ from the standard employment relationship, i.e.,

- full-time work
- continuous work with one employer

Precarious work is characterized by

- low wages
- few benefits
- lack of collective representation
- little or no job security

Precarious work is most often women's work

- In the last two decades, the standard employment relationship has declined across the board
- More men are taking jobs that were previously associated with women.
- Yet women continue to make up the majority of precarious workers
- This has led to the growth of precarious employment being referred to as the "feminization of work."



The “feminization” of work



- In Canada, an estimated 40 percent of employed women hold precarious jobs
- “Feminization” refers to not only the increase of women in the workforce but also the increase of precarious work that was previously assigned only to women
- Women have higher rates of part-time employment, earn less than men do for the same work, and face a glass ceiling that prevents upward mobility

The feminization of poverty

- As a result of the gendered earnings differential, sociologists sometimes call this imbalance the *feminization of poverty*.
- Moreover, gender inequality in the workplace is strongly related to gender inequality at home.
- Work-and-family form a “double ghetto” from which women must release themselves



Learning to differentiate: the beginning of gender inequality



- Inequality requires making essential, universal distinctions between different “kinds” of people in a power relationship
- Several patterned or institutionalized processes maintain gender inequality
- First, there is gendered socialization in childhood – different treatment of girls and boys by parents

Schools also differentiate people by sex

- Second, schools maintain gender ideologies about the differences between boys and girls
- Schools also channel boys and girls into different courses of study
- Currently, evidence suggests that gendered schooling is working better for girls than for boys
 - Especially in a service economy



The role of mass media



- The mass media also play a large role in calling attention to gender differences and suggesting these are natural or inevitable differences
- Mass media dramatize differences between men and women in advertising, music videos, movies, beauty pageants, situation comedies, and pornography.
- The media still teach women to be sexy and beautiful love objects for men

The sexual double standard: another narrative of blame

- Mainstream media continue to treat men as experts in the fields of business, politics, military matters and economics
- One of the key cultural devices that keeps women and men different is the *sexual double standard*
- It is evident in the way men and women dress in traditional, especially religious, societies



Women, religion and fashion



Orthodox Jew



Catholic Nun



Orthodox Christian Nun

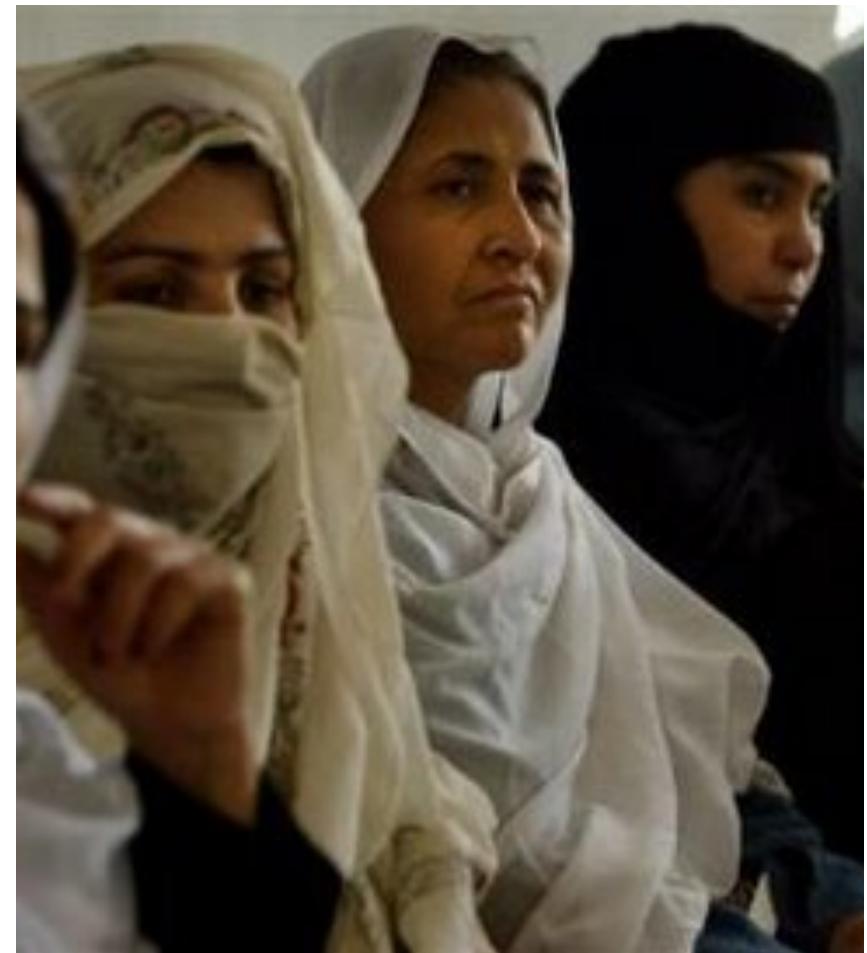


Muslim

Mormons and Catholic nuns



Orthodox Jews and Orthodox Muslims



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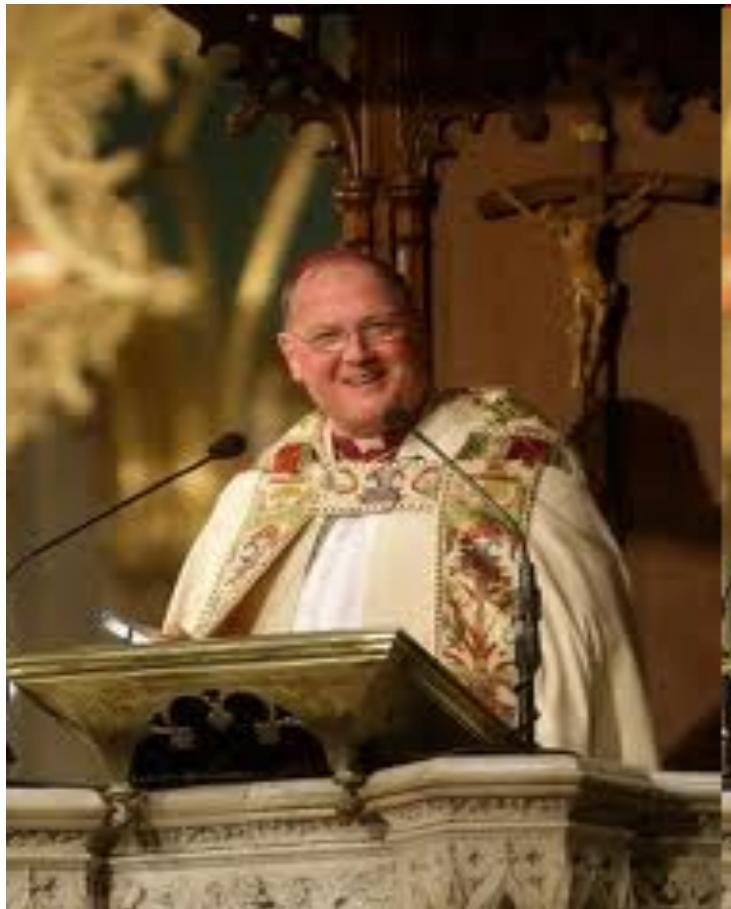


How do we account for male domination?

- Why, historically, have men dominated women at work and home?
- Max Weber defines domination "as the probability that certain specific commands (or all commands) will be obeyed by a given group of persons."
- Domination is an exercise of power – but a particular exercise of power



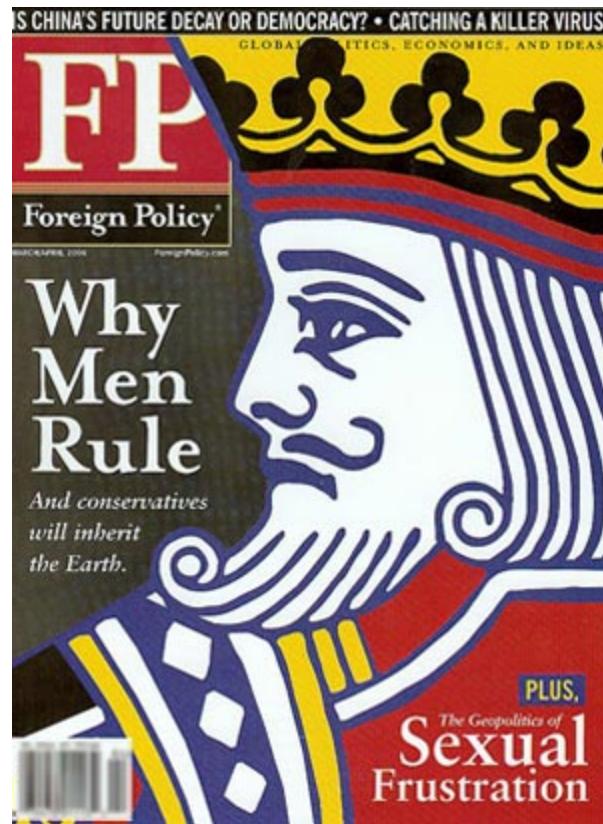
Domination and legitimacy



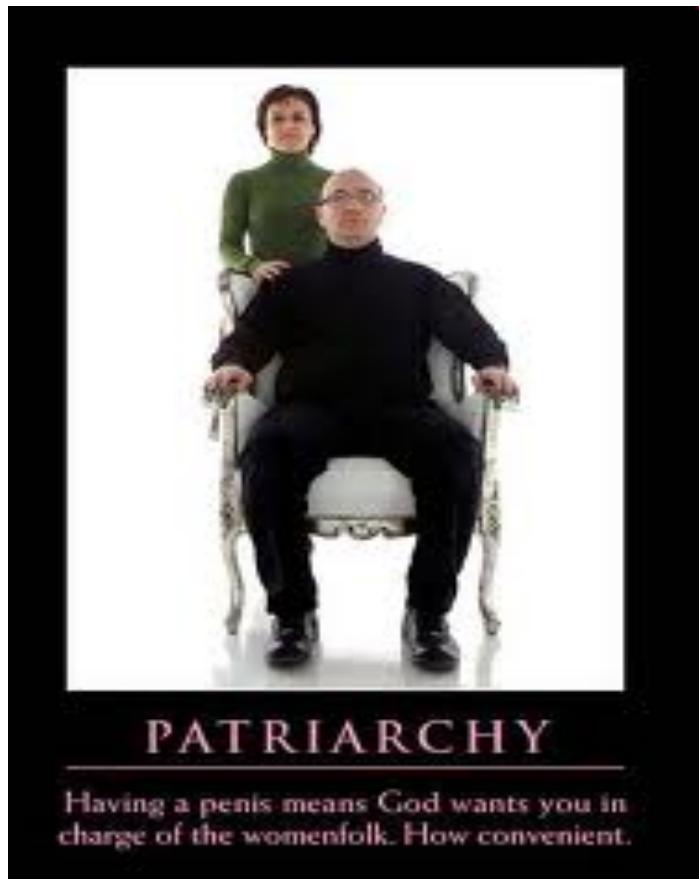
- Domination is a power relationship that implies voluntary compliance or obedience
- Usually, there is a belief in the *legitimacy* of the actions of the dominant individual or group
- Obedience is not haphazard or brief, but sustained and institutionalized

Patriarchy as authority

- We grant legitimacy (or authority) to a power arrangement when we consider it valid
- Powerful people eliminate the need for naked force if they can convince subordinates that they really ought to obey and that a failure to obey them is immoral, sick, or abnormal
- In many societies, *patriarchy* has served as a legitimating ideology.



The “head of household” myth



- Today, patriarchy has come to mean male domination of any kind.
- The traditional patriarchal “head of household” ideology refers to the principal earner in any household
- In theory, it could refer to the oldest or highest earning female
 - But rarely in practice

Using “normality” as a stick

- Today, women have the legal tools to challenge domineering males, yet they fear doing so for a variety of reasons
- Michel Foucault has argued that people are taught that compliance with authority is “normal” and people who repeatedly oppose authority are abnormal and sick
- Whenever the subordinate group no longer accepts traditional privileges unquestioningly, the status order starts to break down



Challenging domestic inequality

- How do we translate ideal (formal) rights into actual (real) rights, that change people's lives in practice?
- In 1974, British sociologist Ann Oakley published *The Sociology of Housework* –the first to consider housework as real, unpaid work



Anne Oakley's research



- Oakley's research for *The Sociology of Housework* was based on a small sample of working- and middle-class homemakers
- These housewives were caught in a social and psychological conflict

The alienation of housework

- They are deeply unhappy; yet they feel morally and socially obliged to play a fundamentally alienating, frustrating and self-destroying role
- Judith Hammond (1977) wrote that Oakley “narrowed and distorted the picture of housewifery into that of a thankless joyless task”
- However, Oakley has rightly called our attention to the neglected topic of housework: household alienation



The contraceptive revolution



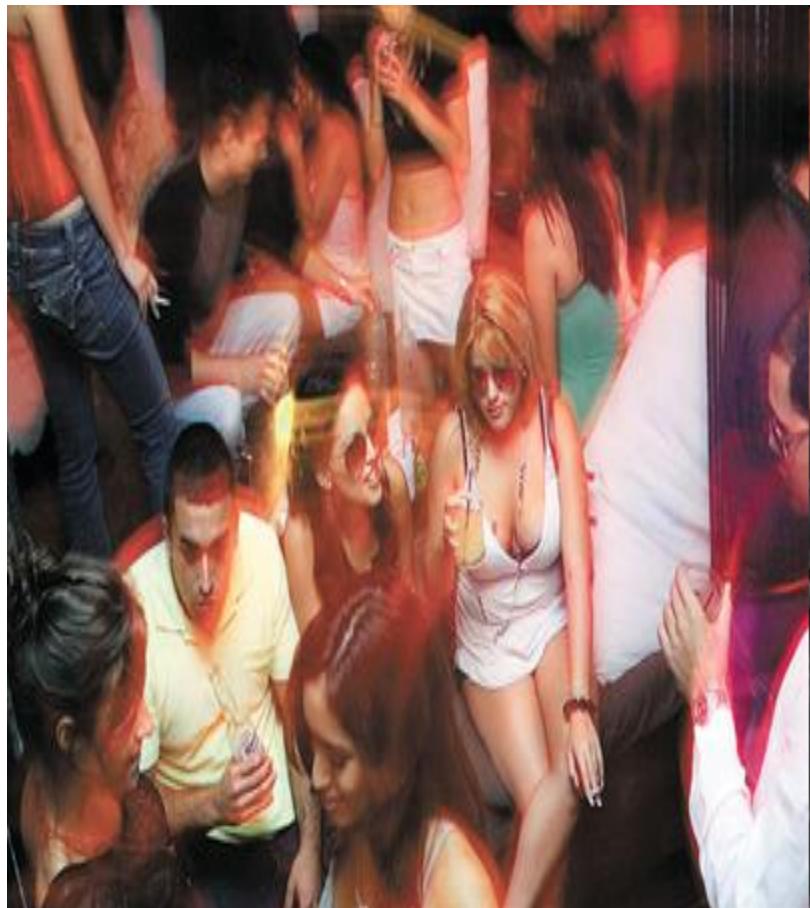
- The sexual double standard continues to hold women to higher standards of “purity” and innocence
- However, improved birth control has played an important part in bringing about greater gender equality
- The role of contraception is captured, indirectly, in a classic work by William Goode, *World Revolution and Family Patterns* (1963)

World Change in Family Patterns

- Goode's *World Revolution and Family Patterns* reviews changes to family life around the world in the first half of the 20th century.
- Even the conjugal family has shrunk in size.
- Individual family members today have more freedom than ever in the past;
- Husbands' authority over their wives has declined, for example.



The second demographic transition



- Related to all this has been the liberalization of attitudes around divorce, abortion, cohabitation, premarital sex, and contraception.
- “The second demographic transition” was a transition to individualized, liberalized relations between consenting adults.
- The family – also, sexual and gender relations -- have changed largely because of industrialization and urbanization

In smaller communities, traditional patterns persist



- *More than a Labour of Love: Three Generations of Women's Work in the Home* examines the value and the popular evaluation of domestic work.
- Luxton examines the everyday lives and labours of working class wives in Flin Flon, Manitoba.
- She interviewed one hundred women about their domestic roles and activities

Sex as domestic work

- Duties include providing meals, childcare, emotional support for husbands and children, shopping, paying bills, and organizing family schedules.
- They also include satisfying husbands' sexual demands.
- Women in this community are trained to recognize and care for the needs of others, even if it means denying their own needs.



Capitalism and patriarchy in Flin Flon



- A patriarchal system dominates women's lives socially and psychologically
- Equally, a class-based capitalist system dominates men's lives socially and psychologically
- While women are solely responsible for the care of the family, men are solely responsible for financially supporting the family

Women in a “double ghetto”



- Women play a valuable role in maintaining the capitalist system
- It is a good thing for capitalism that the workforce participation rate of Canadian women continues to rise rapidly
- More women are competing with one another within the female job ghetto
- This undermines gender solidarity, undermining mobilization by women

Even modern urban couples fall into traditional patterns

Despite more awareness on the part of men, gender inequalities at home remain

- The share of domestic labour carried out by men has increased in recent years; but women are still mainly responsible for ensuring it is done.
- After childbirth, most wives stay home, taking on the main childcare responsibility
- Couples tend to fall into traditional, patriarchal patterns



The social reproduction sector

- Women continue to dominate the social reproduction sector that includes caregiving, family, and community service
- Social reproduction contributes to the survival of the capitalist system, which benefits from this *unpaid* labour
- Though women play a central role in paid workplaces today, they also continue to fulfill an important role as unpaid caregivers and housekeepers



Many wives are housebound



- Women stay home with the children for an extended period if they can't find suitable childcare
- Childcare services outside the home are not readily available or affordable for many families
- Many wives are stuck at home, economically and socially dependent on their partners

Women suffer more violence

- Abuse or violence against women by men is common
- By contrast, women rarely abuse men, and rarely do so as severely as men
- This speaks to the continued domination of men in couple relationships



Break-up time is danger time



The biggest danger women face is from their husband or lover.

- Men are at greater risk of physical assault and women are at higher risk of sexual assault

Women are at high risk of murder in societies that are transitioning from male dominance

- Men there have not yet accustomed themselves to the idea that women might have an independent life