



PRESENTS
THE WORKING PAPER FOR THE 1995 UNIS/UN STUDENT CONFERENCE

WOMEN IN SOCIETY:
A NATURAL BALANCE, AN UNEQUAL WORLD



2-3 March 1995
United Nations General Assembly Hall, New York

“The Rights of Women”

While Europe's eye is fix'd on mighty things,
The fate of empires and the fall of Kings;
While quacks of state must each produce his plan,
And even children lisp the Right of Man;
Amid this mighty fuss just let me mention,
The Rights of women merit some attention.

Robert Burns (1792)

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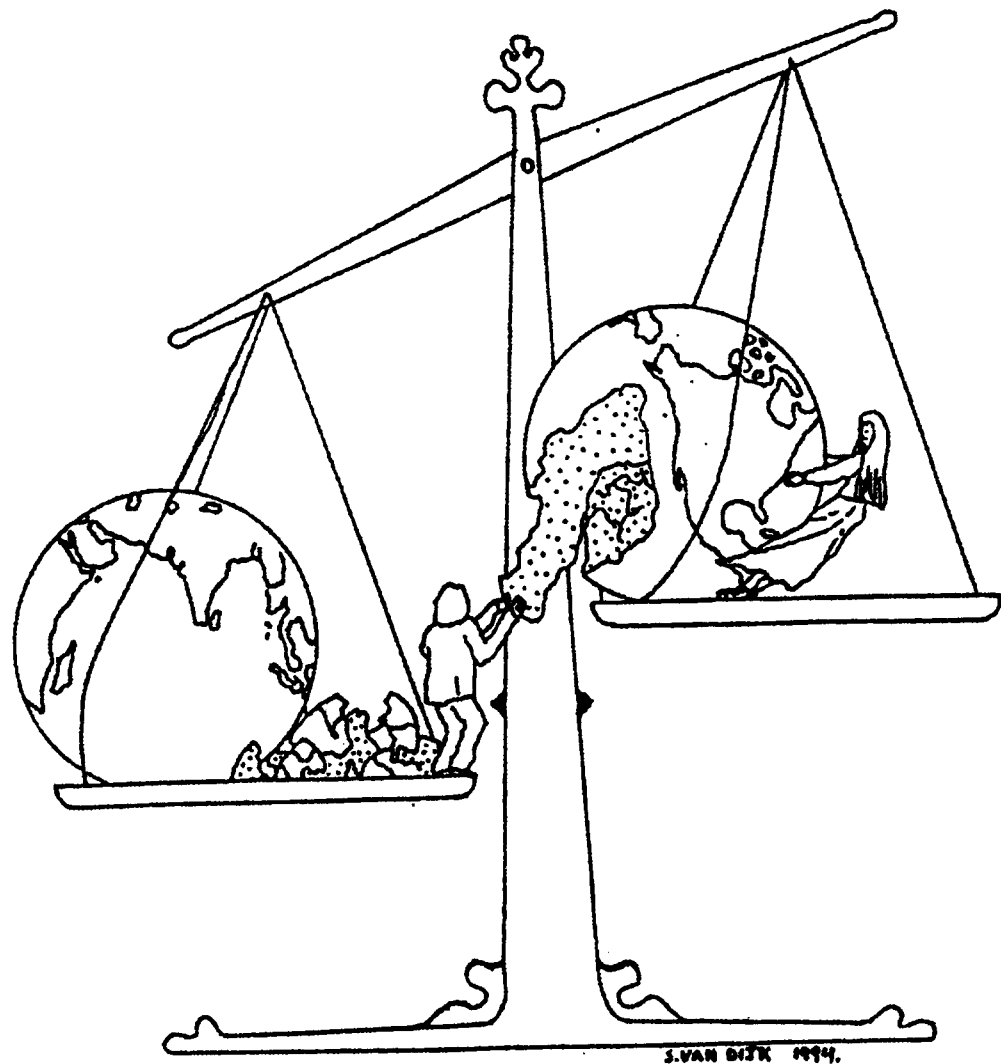
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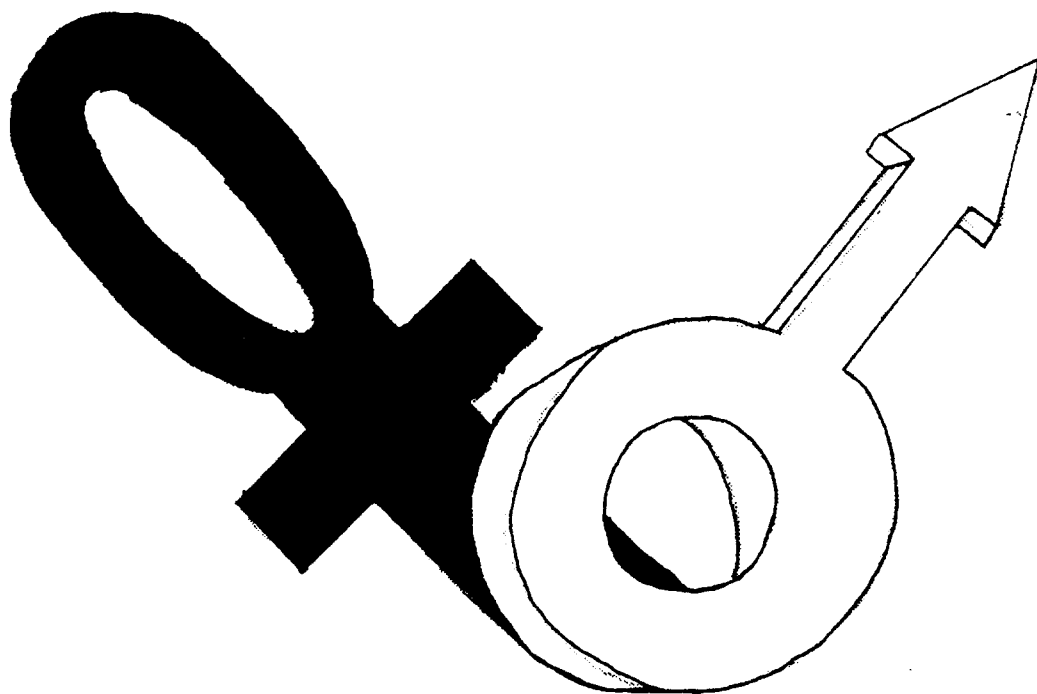
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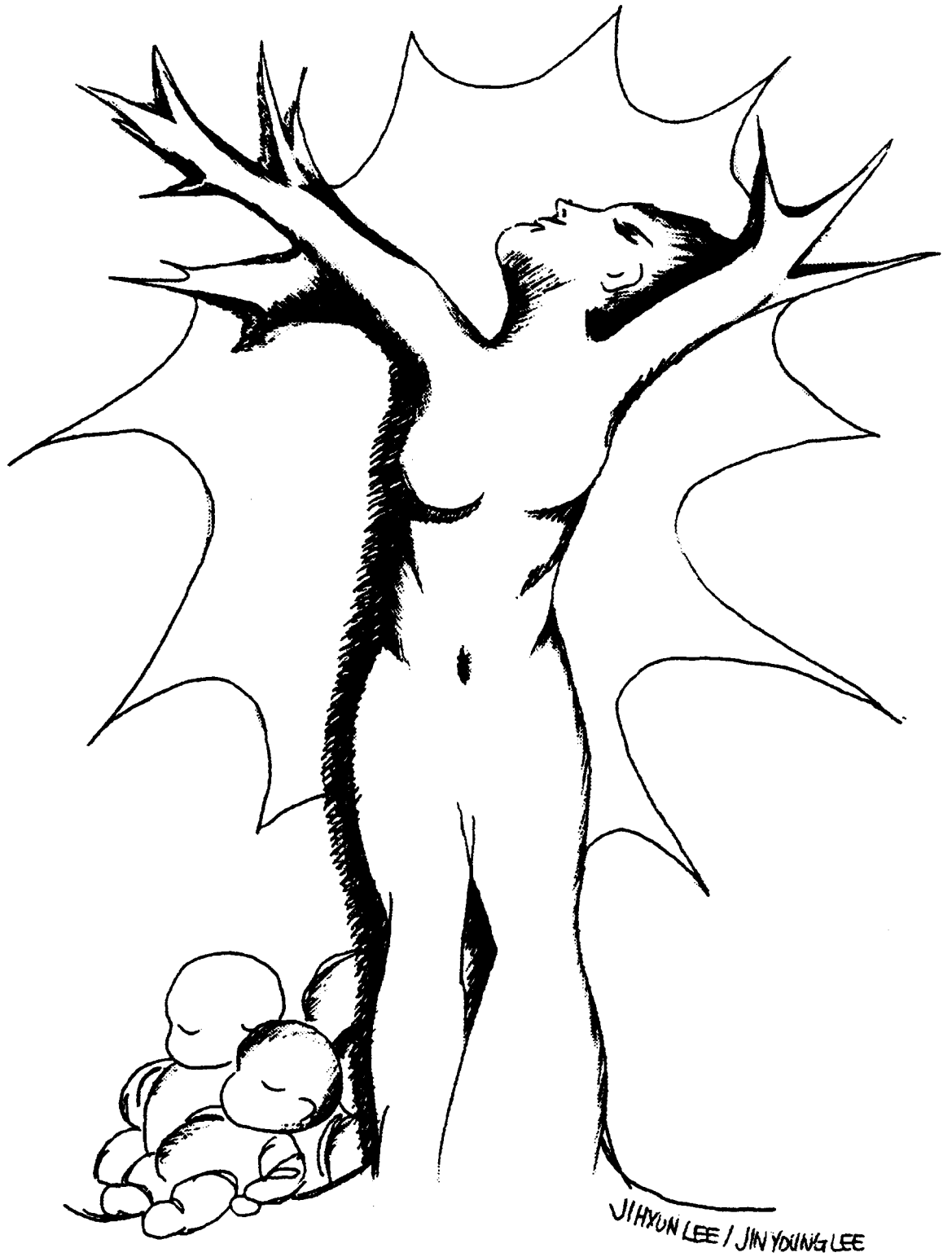


Introduction

By choosing gender inequity as the topic of the 1995 UNIS/UN Student Conference, we are acknowledging that discrimination against women is a major problem in our global society, and is a topic worthy of our consideration. We are not unaware, however, that it is also a topic which raises passions and which has the potential to create controversy and dissent. The purpose of this Working Paper is to provide the factual basis for the discussion to take place during the conference. It is the product of meticulous research, and it provides an objective survey of the types of discrimination encountered by women in different parts of the world. For ease of presentation and analysis, we have divided the body of relevant studies into political, social, economic, and cultural sections. The background section is included in order to explore anthropological and biological reasons for gender inequity, and the historical section intends to give examples as to how society has dealt with these issues in the past.

Age-old misconceptions regarding the role and status of women in society, many of which have been the root causes of gender discrimination, are steadily being refuted by current economic, political, and social realities. The members of this committee appreciate that these realities may not be wholly visible in some societies in the world, and that they may be facing genuine cultural and social obstacles to achieving gender equality. In this regard, it is hoped that the diversity of the participants in this conference will allow us to address a set of issues wide enough in scope to enable us to be active proponents of change around the world as we enter the 21st century.





Background and Historical Aspects

Is Biology Destiny?

It is often thought that women have traditionally been oppressed in Third World societies and that the solution to this oppression is 'development.' Accumulating evidence, however, shows that despite the fact that contemporary development provides political and professional roles to a few lucky women, it continues to undermine the status and autonomy of the vast majority. We must face the reality that the oppression of women is part of a system of exploitation.

To a certain extent, the history of the United States has been written as the history of white men. Recently, women have been 'tacked on' to this history, as if they were mere extras. The oppression of women goes back very far, to the origins of class itself. Today, the prevailing view is that women, to some degree, have always been oppressed or 'dominated' by men. The basic reasons for this oppression are that men are physically stronger, have traditionally been responsible for fighting and are naturally more aggressive. A decline in the status of women in relation to men was certainly one of the most consistent and widely documented changes brought about during the colonial period. The fact that tribal collectives were breaking up into individual family units, in which women and children were economically dependent on men, was yet another cause of this decline.

Today, the prevailing view is that women ... have always been ... 'dominated' by men.

Conflicting generalizations are often made about women and their roles in some cultures. For example: "all real authority is vested" in the women of the Iroquois, a Native American tribe located in the New York area. "The lands, the fields, and their harvest all belong to them," and "they are the arbiters of peace and of war." But a century later, the statement was made that the Iroquois men "regarded women as inferior, the dependent, and the servant of men." The former statement was made when the Iroquois still had a measure of political and economic autonomy. At that time they lived in longhouses, in multifamily collectives. The women owned the

land, farmed together and controlled the storage of vegetables, meat and other goods. They also nominated the *sachems* who were responsible for inter-tribal relations, and had the power to recall those who did not represent their views to their satisfaction.

According to the nineteenth-century anthropologist James Wesley Powell, the Wyandot (part of the Huron tribe) followed, the common, native North American practice of separating civil from military matters. Military affairs were handled by a council of male warriors who were responsible for fighting, and civil matters were decided upon by clan councils made up of four female heads of household and a man of their choice. The women councillors were responsible for important social and economic decisions, such as the allocation of land, issues of inheritance, and marriages. It was also said, however, that "whatever power women may have had was wielded behind the scenes." A woman's 'interest' remained within her family and household.

The Yanomamo people of Central America have been characterized as having one of the world's fiercest and most male-centered cultures, which is explained by the increase in population density and the struggle over new hunting lands. Others, though, say that this fierceness is not typical of the group, and that these behaviors may have been developed for self-protection. These Yanomamo 'defenders' say that elder women, like elder men, are respected, and that when collective decisions are made, mature women do speak up. It is said that much concern is shown for the well-being of these older women.

There are also conflicting statements made about women and their roles in most African societies. One may read of the "traditional ideal of male dominance" or of the monarchical systems of traditional Africa, in which one or two women of the highest rank held significant power and occupied a position equal to that of the king. Women's and men's positions were complementary throughout the various social ranks of African society. Women formed groups in which they carried out their various activities. These could become 'powerful organizations.' Robert A. LeVine (1966), writing of traditional male dominance in African society, stated that although women contribute very heavily to the basic economy, male activities are much more prestigious.

Another anthropologist, Sudarkasa (1976), described women's organizations as "vehicles of cooperation and collaboration with men, as well as a means of defending women's interests where necessary."

The anthropologist Steven Goldberg writes that men in almost all societies will undoubtedly "hold most of the top positions in the political and other hierarchies that set society's basic direction." He goes on to say that there are societies in which women perform seemingly high-status tasks generally done by men in the Western world, but that in those other societies, the tasks have less status. In Russia, for example, most practicing doctors are women, but their work is considered less important than that of research physicians, who are mostly men.

So why do men 'rule?' Goldberg says the answer is that men are driven to attain dominance more than women. "Males," he says, "are more willing to endure pain, frustration, and the like, to learn what they must and do what they must for dominance, while females are more willing to endure such pain, frustration, and the like for familial reasons, for children, for love but not so much for dominance."

It seems that these explanations can be justified, because, as Goldberg concludes, males dominate because it is the 'natural law.' He goes on to say that to try to change things and rid the world of gender inequality would be going against nature. Some women might very well agree that it is, in a way, a man's right to have such a "psychological predisposition, an obsessive need for power," for it is he who demonstrates (much more so than a woman) the ability to be very physically aggressive and, in some cases, reach a higher level of attainment. There is no doubt, however, that, despite these explanations, men do sometimes abuse the power they possess, adding even greater stress to the ever-present secondary status of women.

Some Further Biological and Social Explanations for Gender Inequality

All human beings possess twenty-three chromosomes in their gametes (sex cells). Only one is a

sex chromosome that will determine the sex of the child to be born. Females produce eggs that carry an X chromosome and males produce sperm that carry an X or a Y chromosome. At conception, the embryo will receive an X chromosome from its mother and an X or Y chromosome from its father. The combination XX will produce a female child, while the combination XY will produce a male child. Already at conception, a biological basis for sexual discrimination has been established. Because of this fact, it has often been accepted that maleness could only be passed down by the father. However, recent research indicates that androgens produced by the fetal reproductive system may also influence the development of the fetus.

Because of their biological traits, women have traditionally been considered to be physically, mentally and emotionally weaker than men.

There are many biological traits that separate men from women. Men are usually larger and stronger than women, yet women tend to live longer. Men usually have heavier bones and muscles and a higher rate of heart efficiency, and tend to have less body fat. Because of their biological traits, women have traditionally been considered to be physically, mentally and emotionally weaker than men. The most fundamental differences, however, lie with the reproductive organs of men and women and their specific functions.

Females carry the reproductive organs necessary to bear children, as well as the physical capacity to nourish their infants, and are therefore often bound to the home to care for them. In the early epochs of humankind, women, vital to the survival of the human species, had to be protected, especially during pregnancy, while men assumed the role and responsibility of protector. The men of the tribes or bands were hunters and gatherers and took long journeys to meet with other bands. The women stayed at home. They, too, gathered food, but never went far.

The roles of men and women in today's cultures have evolved from these natural instincts and behaviors. While in today's world many of the physical differences between women and men have

become less magnified, and while the means of survival have changed, women are often still kept in the home and are considered inferior. Women are often regarded as being physically and emotionally weaker from birth, and therefore, are often raised to believe these weaknesses.

The following two case studies are based on material gathered in the late 1970s. In hunting and gathering societies such as the Hazda of Tanzania, women gather all the food for their family, while the men mainly hunt small game. The women produce the bulk of the food and prepare all of it. The men do not interfere with the tasks of the women and the women do not interfere with the tasks of the men. Socially, these patterns are the same. There appear to be two separate worlds in which few or no gender conflicts or acts of discrimination occur.

In contrast, the hunting and gathering society of the Tiwi in Australia treat their women as a mere commodity. A woman is given to her future husband at birth. Each man has several wives, and often, for long periods of time, lives off the food he sends them out to gather. The number of wives a man has is a symbol of his wealth, and a woman can even be used as a form of payment. In this society, women are considered to be physically stronger than men but mentally inferior.

The Tiwi live in a patriarchal and a patrilinear society. The men rule society, and each family's wealth and ownership of property is handed down through a line of male descendants. Much of the world today is made up primarily of patriarchies and patrilinear societies. There are, however, nations with female rulers, such as Norway and Pakistan, as well as matriarchal and matrilinear societies such as the Navajo and various Amazonian tribes.

Women are becoming more vital to the workplace, and are gaining more political authority and social standing, but they still have a long way to go before genuine equality is achieved.

With the rise of industrialization, various working classes evolved. Middle class families were supported by men, who were given the responsibility of earning enough wages to feed, clothe and shelter their families. The women would stay at home, care

for the children and tend to the household. Women from poor families or unmarried women had to work, but were restricted from a variety of jobs. Jobs involving heavy labor were, and still are, dominated by men. Men have always dominated the fields of science, medicine and law, which is largely due to the fact that such training was less available to women than to men. Most developed societies today have come a long way since the start of industrialization. Jobs that were once unavailable to women, along with opportunities for training for those jobs, are becoming increasingly available to them.

The role and importance of women are continually increasing in today's world. Women are becoming more vital to the workplace, and are gaining more political authority and social standing, but they still have a long way to go before genuine equality is achieved. The biological differences between men and women will always exist, but the social, cultural, economic and political differences that have sprung from them continue to lessen.

Women and the United Nations

Women, after being ignored and discriminated against for a long period of time, are now overcoming these barriers, with help from the United Nations, and from many governments around the world today.

"Women are 'grossly under-represented' in political decision-making circles. The number of women in parliaments, parties and formal government remains low. In 1987, for instance, on average, only 3.5 percent of the ministerial positions in national governments were held by women. In 1989, out of 159 United Nations member states, only five had women heads of Government (3.1 percent)" noted a United Nations study.

The concern with women's rights is international and deals with everyone today. Margaret J. Anstee, the former director-general of the United Nations Center for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs in Vienna, said "the world cannot afford to write off the generation of women living today to control their lives and to make their con-

tribution to society and the economy.”

The United Nations has been one of the biggest facilitators helping women around the world to raise their status both practically and economically. A 45-member Commission, which meets annually and reports to the United Nations Economic and Social Council, was set up by the General Assembly in 1946 and is one of the United Nations' oldest Commissions. Its job is to establish legal standards for the treatment of women, and to prepare recommendations and reports on issues affecting women, including their role in development. It also collects and analyzes data to monitor the status of women around the world.

A conference was held in Vienna from 26 February to 9 March 1990. In that conference, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women recommended that women should occupy at least 30 percent of the decision-making posts at the national level, and should also make up at least 30 percent of delegations to international negotiations on peace and disarmament. The Commission is also going to follow-up in 1995, to evaluate how countries have been putting into effect the suggestions and demands that the United Nations made at the Nairobi Conference.

One major issue discussed by the Commission was the launching of a world-wide legal literacy campaign to inform women of their rights, including revision of textbooks to eliminate biased presentations; maintenance of government statistics on the relative remuneration of women and men based on the principle of equal pay for equal work; efforts to achieve a 50 percent improvement in the ratio of women's to men's pay by the year 1995; and steps to bring about a 50 percent increase in the number of women in leadership positions in government, political parties and trade unions.

The United Nations is also trying to help women in another way: by reducing global poverty, recognizing that more than 50 percent of the world's poor today are women. The forthcoming "World Summit," is a multifaceted effort by the United Nations and its agencies.

The United Nations has fought, and continues to fight for the rights of women to this day. While total success is in part limited by persistent stereotyping, it is hoped that this will steadily be eliminat-

ed by the opposing efforts of women.

The Last Three Women's Conferences

Over the last fifty years, the issue of women, their equality and their rights, has been brought to the world's attention many times through international conferences. The last three conferences were in Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980 and Nairobi in 1985. People from all over the world attended these conferences to discuss critical issues affecting women.

Women make only one tenth of the world's income and own only 1 percent of the world's property.

The United Nations declared 1975 the official "Year of the Woman," and thus the first conference was held. This was the first United Nations conference in which the majority of delegates were women. The central themes of the conference were equality, development, and peace. Other themes addressed were health, education and employment, the Middle East, apartheid and discrimination based on race, and feminism.

From this conference arose the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Women. Its purpose was "to provide assistance particularly to the least developed countries with financial programs for the advancement of women." The creation of this organization was an important achievement of the conference in Mexico City because it created a greater sense of self-worth for women around the globe.

It was decided at Mexico City that a second conference should be held five years later, and subsequently, in 1980, "The World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women, Copenhagen, 1980" was held. Its primary objective was to "review and appraise the progress, or lack of it, women have made in the first five years of the United Nations Decade for Women."

A third conference was held in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1985. Its purpose was to summarize the

United Nations Decade for Women. Statistics such as the following emerged: Women make only one tenth of the world's income and own only 1 percent of the world's property. Only one third of all women have access to contraceptives, and almost half do not receive proper healthcare.

A fourth women's conference is scheduled to be held in Beijing in September, 1995. Issues discussed in past conferences will be brought up again. It remains to be seen if the conference will solve any of the women-related problems that persist.

The Social Effects of War on Women

After World War I, as a result of the 10 million European men lost in battle, many women were left widowed or unmarried. As a result of the smaller number of marriages, the birthrate took a tremendous drop.

The war had another effect on the female populations of the United Kingdom and the United States. As a result of men going off to war as soldiers, women were incorporated into the depleted workforce, taking positions in factories and other previously male-dominated workplaces. Although, as the war ended, trade unions in the United States and economic measures in the United Kingdom pressured women to give up their jobs to returning soldiers, the women's liberation movement had grown tremendously, and after the war was over (1918 in the United Kingdom, 1920 in the United States) women were granted suffrage.

American and British women also played an important role in World War II. In the United States, the female labor force grew by 50 percent between 1940 and 1945. This greatly improved both the status and the standard of living of women. Women as a whole were made to feel important, not only as wives, homemakers and mothers, but also as citizens, workers and even soldiers. Public awareness of women's real and potential contributions to society grew. As greatly as the war helped women, however, their jobs were also a way to bring the men home more quickly, in order to return once more to pre-war patterns.

Although World War II did not permanently change the secondary position of women in the economy, it did expand job opportunities for them. It accelerated the movement of women from farm and household labor into other occupations.

In Asia, women did not make the same advances in their society. On the other hand they suffered from the war in a number of ways, including being used as 'comfort women', or prostitutes, for the invading soldiers.

Thus, during modern warfare can have two completely opposite effects, that can change the lives of women. One is the maltreatment of women by an invader. The other is the role women must play as citizens in their society when the male population is drafted to fight in a war. As the male workforce leaves for war, it becomes essential to substitute women for them. Once the war is over, men are reabsorbed into the workforce. Then, eyes focus again on women to replace the diminished population by increasing the birthrate. Wars have certainly shaped the role that women play in modern society.

War Crimes Against Women

In a war, there are victims on both sides, and no involved party escapes some sort of violence. But no group is as abused and vulnerable as women. Women have been the victims of war in many ways for as long as war has existed. Women in wars suffer in a way that no other group does, as a result of the instrumental use of rape and sexual assault.

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In the war in the former Yugoslavia, there have been numerous reports in the press of mass rape and sexual assault on women. This has sparked a debate over the war crime of rape. Sources have speculated that anywhere from 30,000 to 50,000 women have been raped by enemy soldiers on all sides of the conflict. These statistics are supported by personal stories of women who claim to have been raped by several soldiers repeatedly. Amnesty

International's report Bosnia-Herzegovina: Rape and Sexual Abuse By The Armed Forces states "The available evidence indicates that in some cases the rape of women has been carried out in an organized or systematic way, with the deliberate detention of women for the purpose of rape or sexual abuse." Rape is used as a weapon to demoralize the enemy.

The crime of rape has been committed many times before in the history of war. The greatest of the reported circumstances occurred in World War II. In 1945, as the war came to an end, Soviet soldiers reportedly raped 2 million German women as pay-back for the numerous crimes the Nazis committed against the Russians. The writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who served as a Soviet army captain in East Prussia wrote "All of us knew very well that if the girls were German, they could be raped and then shot. That was almost a combat distinction." In 1971, Pakistani troops are said to have raped over 250,000 Bengali women and girls in Bangladesh. In the 1937 invasion of Nanjing, Japanese soldiers are accused of having raped tens of thousands of Chinese women.

Japan has also come under fire for using women from Korea, China and the Philippines (an estimated 200,000 women) in their war brothels between 1932 and 1945. These brothels were used for rewarding the Japanese soldiers. In response, Japan has recently spent one billion dollars to recompense their victims, but the past still lingers.

Women will always be among the victims of war, but the particular war crimes against women are worse than those men encounter. Rape and sexual exploitation are among the most atrocious of all war crimes.

Women In Freedom Movements

Women have been an integral part of every revolution and freedom movement. Whether they have fought next to or in front of men, supplemented a depleted workforce, or participated in demonstrations, women have sacrificed their lives, their families and their state of mind in order to institute political change. What seems to be the pattern is that these women, so important to the revolution of their coun-

tries' political status, have usually been neglected and forgotten when it comes to changing their own status and rights as women. In most cases, the situation of women has remained unchanged or, in some cases, worsened.

In both the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the Algerian Revolution in the late 1950s, the women fought alongside their men and risked their lives, just as the men did. In Algeria, women would often act as lookouts, or transport important information and weaponry. Some women, changed their lives entirely by becoming spies. Women who were caught by the French suffered the same torture as the men. Women were integral to the freeing of Algeria.

According to Zahra Rahnavaard, wife of Iranian Prime Minister Husain Musavi, the Islamic Revolution of 1979 "took (women) away from being mere sex objects and made them intellectually and spiritually valued people." Rahnavaard is also of the opinion that "the women of Iran are among the freest in the world." Yet, the fact remains that under 3 percent of Algeria's and Iran's government positions are held by women, despite their important roles in bringing about the existence of these governments.

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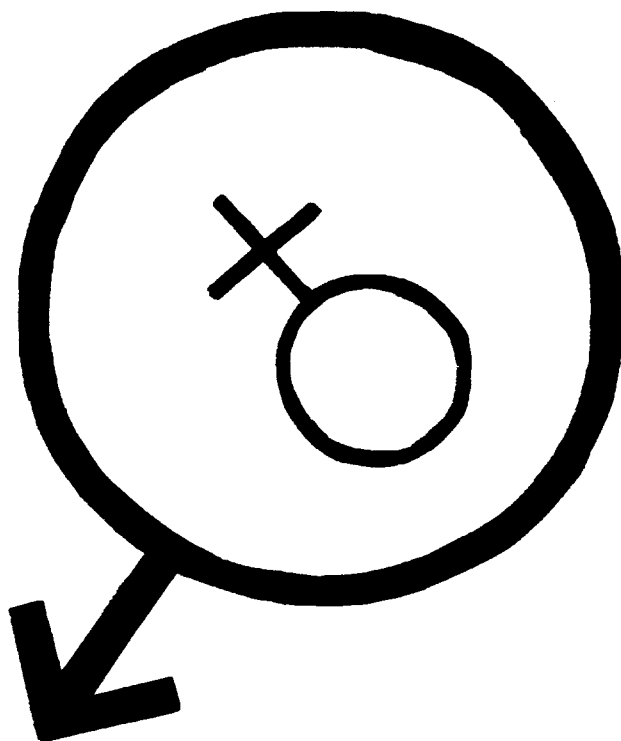
Traditionally, women who were considered equals when they helped to fight the revolution were expected to revert back to their previous second-class status once their wars of liberation had been won. In the same way, during the First and Second World Wars, women kept the British and American economies in gear by taking the place of the lost workforce. Once these wars were over, however, women were expected to return to their pre-war domestic duties.

Sometimes, women are so influential in bringing about the revolution that women's issues are addressed in the new government. The Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua created the largest feminist movement in Central America. The Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional, (Sandinista Front),

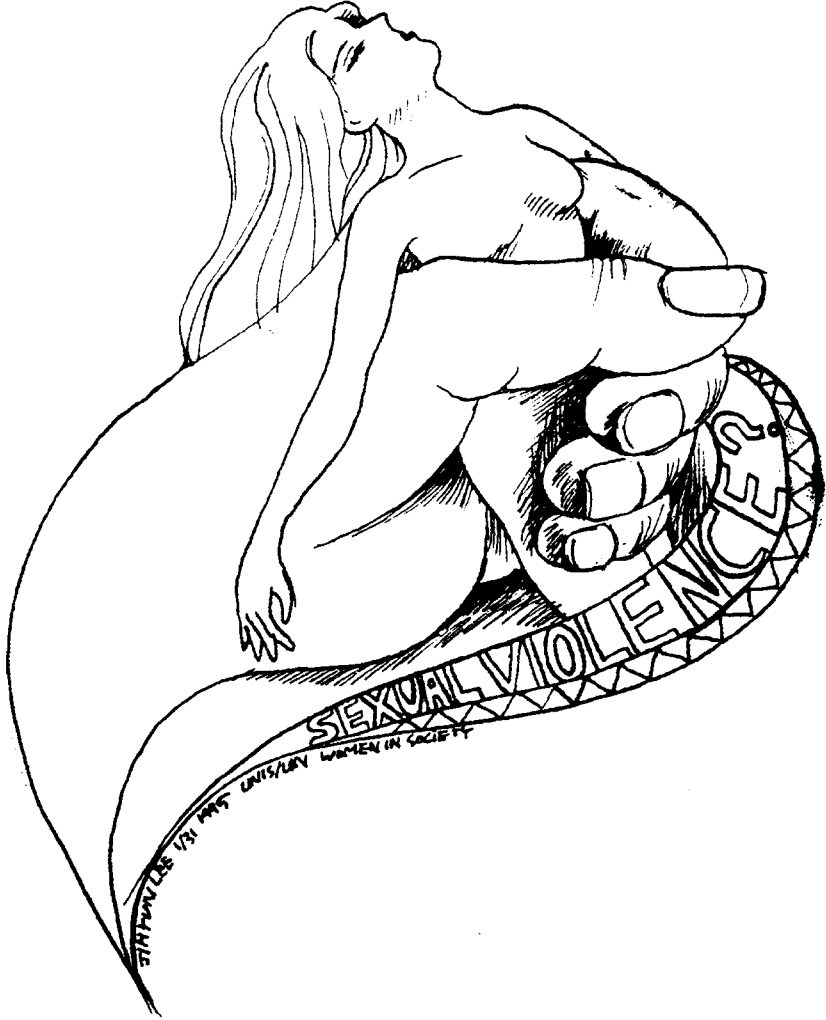
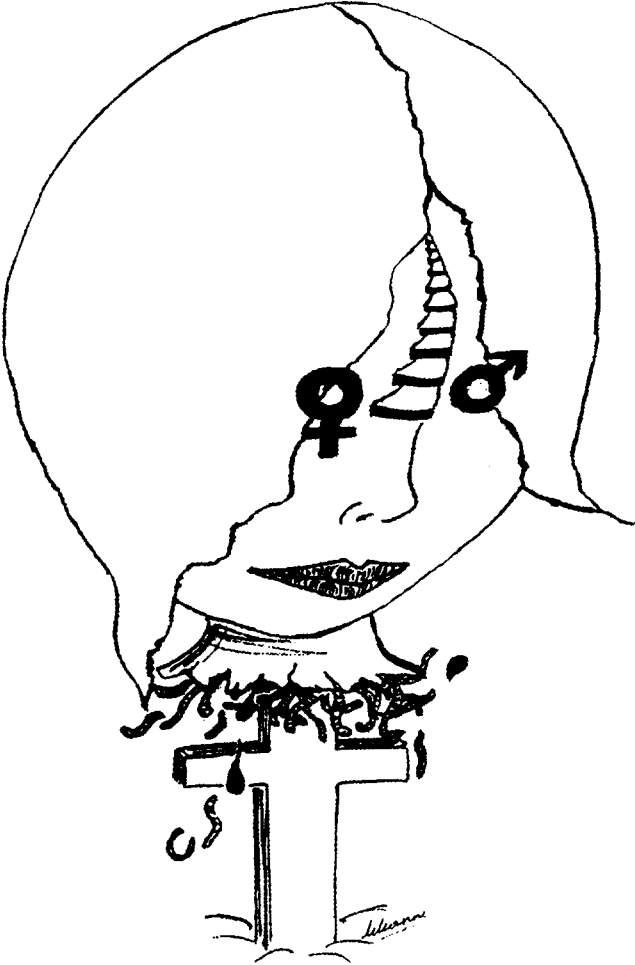
addressed women's rights from the start of their movement. In their Programa Historica, it is stated that "the Sandinista Popular Revolution will abolish the odious discrimination which the woman has suffered in relation to the man, and will establish equality between women and men." Nicaraguan women had fought side by side the men against Anastasio Somoza Debayle, the ruler of pre-1979 Nicaragua. The women's group AMPRONAC (Association of Women and the National Problem) mobilized women in the guerrilla war against the National Guard of Somoza. Women were leaders in the Sandinista party, not just aides. The result was a series of laws that the Sandinista government put into place after taking over in 1979 giving women the right to equal pay and to divorce. Later, the government instituted sex education and counseling for abused women.

The tendency of women participating in movements for political change was to accept the premise that they would work for revolution first and change their status later.

"The tendency of women participating in movements for political change was to accept the premise that they would work for revolution first and change their status later. Then they woke up and found that their agendas had not been taken up by the movements they supported," said Dorothy Thomas, director of the Women's Rights Project of Human Rights watch. This was perhaps the case in Algeria and Iran, but was not so in Nicaragua. The Sandinista Party seems to be an anomaly. Recently, however, this pattern of women's roles in freedom movements in the past has been contested. For example, in Mexico, a small group of urban women are fighting against the traditional machismo which they see as deeply rooted in the Mexican society, at the same time as fighting for the improvement of their country. This slum-based group, known as "Freedom of Expression," has been staging protests and demonstrations against the patriarchal government. These protests are not just for women's rights, however, but also for worker's rights and urban services. Women's roles in future freedom movements will, perhaps, be more leadership-oriented. This should lead to changes not only in the political structure, but also in the status of women in future societies.



Social and Cultural Aspects



Who's Liberated, Anyway?

Are women in the developed world more 'liberated' than their developing world counterparts? What does it mean to be liberated and is it generally desirable for the women world over? Also, is it justified to use the standards of one culture to evaluate the practices of another?

If one is to answer these questions properly, then one must set down the premise which is the basis for the following questions: What is meant by liberation and how does it apply to women in general, not just in a particular region of the world. What does it mean to be liberated? The concise Oxford English Dictionary defines liberation as a release. Liberty and liberation are words bandied about today by many people and groups and therefore a loose definition that can be applied to this context is necessary. The first place one should look for a definition of liberty is perhaps the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article Two of the Declaration stipulates that "everyone is entitled to the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which the person belongs."

While many women (in the United States, for example) would assert that they are more liberated than women from the developing world, they are not in a position to self-righteously criticize the societies of less developed countries.

Although the Declaration is a good moral guideline to work with, it is not and cannot be considered gospel truth, as it does not take into account two very important factors. The first is that it ignores the particular ideologies of every group. Secondly, it ignores the fact that each group has its own set of internal rules and mechanisms which, for better or worse, are an integral part of their social structure.

If we were to say that we in the developed

world were living perfectly in accordance with the Declaration, we would be deceiving ourselves, especially in relation to women. In the United States, for example, the average earnings for a male are much higher than they are for a female. There are no egalitarian societies, in which both men and women are equal. From the time we are children, we are socialized into certain beliefs, one of which is that men are regarded as superior to women. To varying degrees, this is as true in industrialized countries as in less developed countries.

When we grow up, we continue to be socialized into a certain set of beliefs. Each set of beliefs is specific to the cultural group to which it pertains. For example, various religions have different explanations for the creation of the universe. As we grow up, we learn more about the various ideals of our own specific world, and, as we see the world around us, we see it through the lenses of our own ideals and beliefs. Until we learn to understand the ideals and beliefs of another group, we cannot help but be ethnocentric, because we judge all others according to our own yardstick rather than their own. This is particularly dangerous.

While many women (in the United States, for example) would assert that they are more liberated than women from the developing world, they are not in a position to self-righteously criticize the societies of less developed countries. Establishing the rights of women as they are laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights entails changing beliefs and ideologies in societies around the world.

Women and Society: Obstacles to Change

In most societies, the majority of women are regarded as having a secondary position in society to that of men. For countless years, there has been no change or very little change in the status of women in societies all over the world. Economic factors and prevalent, established cultural beliefs have both been major causes of this perpetuation. But which one constitutes more of a major obstacle to change? Should cultural beliefs and practices be viewed as

'sacred' and impervious to change by outsiders?

In most societies, the workplace is one of the areas where women have difficulty achieving success. The more women rise into the ranks of the male-dominated executive class, the more influence they will gain in society. But there are still many other obstacles. Many cultures feel that women do not belong in the workplace, but rather that they should be at home playing the role of mother or housewife, while the husband earns the money.

Today, especially in the United States, this presumed role is changing as the number of single-parent families grows. Increasingly, women cannot depend on the men who once played the role of father and breadwinner. Not only do women have to shoulder the burden once assumed by their husbands, but at the same time, they must continue to perform the many tasks of the homemaker. Not only does this create a situation where women must enter the workforce, it also, according to a report on the status of women issued by a research affiliate of Douglass College, increases the risk of single-parent families living in poverty compared to more traditional families. The report also stated that the average annual income of a male-headed, single-parent family was \$13,855 more than that of a female-headed household. Overall, for every dollar made by a man, a woman receives only 72 cents. This is clearly a huge difference, due to the lack of access for women to the executive ranks. These statistics show that although women are heading out into the workplace, they are not getting the same caliber jobs as men.

It is not because women avoid entering the job market, but instead, that companies traditionally favor men over women. Women do not have problems getting blue-collar jobs, but they do have difficulties getting white-collar ones. It is not really a matter of getting a job, but more of getting a promotion. Women do not rise into higher paying, more influential jobs in the same numbers as men do. According to a study done by the University of California at Los Angeles Graduate School of Management and the corporate recruiter Korn/Ferry International, only three out of every 100 top executive jobs at the largest United States companies are held by women. This shows that women's efforts in climbing the executive ladder are being hampered by the men who have already established their positions

in the higher ranks of United States corporations. In a survey done of nine major companies, including PepsiCo, men had many misconceptions about women, such as the belief that mothers would find little interest in high-profile jobs because of the long hours that would be required. Today, about 60 percent of American women in the workforce are in clerical or other low-paying jobs.

Economic and cultural factors are powerful forces in suppressing women, but if women are given the ability to attain education, they will be able to lessen the effects of these forces.

In some Islamic societies, women actually have a greater advantage in getting high-paying, professional jobs, such as doctors, professors, or engineers, than women in the Western hemisphere. According to the Shariah, or Islamic law, women have exclusive rights over their inheritance and dowry as a precaution against divorce or widowhood. Although women must make their financial decisions through male representatives, they gain great experience in the handling of money. In Saudi Arabia, women who enter the workforce choose fields in which they will not disturb the harem tradition. They mainly enter highly respected professions in the fields of science or education, while shunning non-professional jobs due to reasons of status.

Women also usually start at the top rather than work their way up the ladder, as women in Western countries do. In Saudi Arabia, a middle class, young, educated woman is more likely to start out as a doctor or a professor, rather than working in a clerical job or as a nurse. But all the successes of women in Saudi Arabia and most Islamic countries are true only for those families who are able to afford tuition. Lower-class families cannot afford to send their children to university, and are much more likely to educate their sons than their daughters.

In Turkey, women are also gaining ground in the workplace. Science and medicine are considered feminine fields, while clerical jobs are not. But this is mainly true of Istanbul and other large cities. In the conservative countryside, old beliefs still remain strong. As the rural population is far from the influ-

ence of television, magazines, and city life and it is not affected by modern changes.

Education is the key for women who want to make a mark on society. The more knowledge women gain, the more society around them will change as a result. Economic and cultural factors are powerful forces in suppressing women, but if women are given the ability to attain education, they will be able to lessen the effects of these forces. This will bring them closer to achieving genuine equality.

Women and Violence

Domestic violence against women is hardly a modern concept. It has its roots in many, if not most, cultural outlooks and traditions. Historical explanations for the domestic violence that continues to oppress women globally is plentiful. Violence against women was often not only excused or ignored but considered acceptable, and even necessary, within certain societies. For example, Portuguese colonial law allowed men to kill their adulterous wives and their lovers. The effects of this law are still being felt in Brazil's "high incidence of violence against women," 70 percent of which, according to the United States State Department's 1993 Human Rights Report, is domestic.

Violence against women was often not only excused or ignored but considered acceptable, and even necessary, within certain societies.

English common law has a supposed rule declaring that men are allowed to beat their wives with a stick no thicker than a man's thumb. A verse in the Koran may also be interpreted as provoking violence in that it states: "Men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other, and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. Good women are obedient. They guard their unseen parts because God has guarded them. As for those who fear disobedience, admonish them and send them to beds apart and beat them."

However, religious encouragement of violence and oppression towards women is not exclusive to Islam. Christianity also portrays women as creatures deserving punishment and requiring discipline. In the Old Testament, Eve is blamed for Adam's expulsion from Paradise. Whether these connotations of violence towards women are intentional or not, the roots of cultural and subsequent domestic violence can be traced back directly to the religions on which most societies are based. This basis in religion would explain why societies found it easy to accept, condone and even encourage violence against wives, daughters and sisters.

Beyond the religious and 'moral' aspects, domestic violence historically springs from the fact that women were, and often still are, dependent on men economically and, ironically, for protection of themselves and their children. Men have traditionally played the role of provider and defender, casting women as dependent, vulnerable childbearers. When a woman was abused, her tormentor, whether he be her father, brother or husband, was able to maintain a pattern of violence because she had no knowledge of survival without him; she in a sense had "nowhere to run."

This scenario has changed surprisingly little over time. Domestic violence continues to be a method of control, maintained through preventing women's independence or through a blame the victim approach, in which a woman's own false, induced guilt pressures her to continue to take abuse and even sometimes, to die as a result of it.

Domestic abuse is a high-stakes game of control, and batterers are expert players. Often the batterer and his victim have grown up in households where they were physically abused or witnessed abuse. Each has absorbed distorted lessons: the man, who may have seen his father beat his mother, sees aggression as a manly characteristic, while the woman, having seen her mother take the blame, may often believe the abuse is her fault. These lessons are perpetuated in different societies and their respective arenas (social, cultural and economic) but they all contribute to an endless cycle.

Evidence of domestic violence that is ignored or even excused is yet another aspect of history that lingers painfully on in modern society. A woman can be imprisoned or even publicly stoned for adultery if

the accused is acquitted when she reports a rape in Pakistan. As recently as 1990, the Iraqi Revolutionary Council ruled that "Any Iraqi who kills, even with premeditation, his own mother, daughter, sister, aunt, niece or female cousin on the father's side for adultery will not be brought to justice." The extreme reaction to women who actually fight back against the men who abuse them in itself shows the disparity between the treatment of men and women on the issue of violence.

Women's rights movements began to develop as early as the beginning of the 1800s, but the modern awareness of women's rights known as the 'Women's Liberation Movement,' began only in the 1960s. This revolution was brought about by the dissatisfaction of women with their present situation as well as the context of the time in which it occurred. Awareness of the continuing revolution was spread through three United Nations women's conferences in 1975, 1980 and 1985, as well as by various women's rights groups.

The common issues the women's liberation movement addresses include equal wages for equal work, sexual discrimination, abortion rights (freedom of choice) and anti-violence rights. In terms of breaking cultural barriers and extending the scope of women's liberation to women in developing countries, feminists have learned to exercise caution in aiding women whose abusers can plead cultural or religious sanction. This means that women's liberation addresses primarily the Western countries.

When women ... are violently oppressed, the entire society suffers.

'Women's Lib' has had a positive effect in spreading awareness of violence against women. Though some opponents to violence as a public priority claim it leads to 'victim feminism,' violence against women is an issue that today is highly visible in the headlines. The rising awareness of violence against women has also resulted in an increasing number of support groups, shelters, and help hot-lines for battered and abused women in an attempt to decrease the number of victims and to teach prevention.

The realization of the detrimental effect of violence against women in society has so far reached

only a small minority of countries. But still the fact remains: When women, who constitute approximately half of any given society's population, are violently oppressed, the entire society suffers. Solutions to the rampant problem of domestic violence lie in an increased awareness that must permeate all societies, both the developed or developing. This is not to imply that there has not been a start, as women's rights advocates might point out, but there is still a long way to go.

Women's Health

After years of neglect, women's health issues have burst onto the forefront of medical research. For all the biological differences between men and women that lead to unique medical problems for each sex, the leading causes of death for both sexes still remain heart disease, cancer, and stroke. However, women have most often been excluded from many important clinical trials involving these major killers in the United States and Western Europe.

It is evident that the biggest health problem is the lack of knowledge about women's health in general, including the important biological changes that occur over the entire span of women's lives, as well as the impact of domestic violence on women's lives, which is considered a major public-health problem. The lack of research on women in specific areas has made good health care difficult for women to obtain.

Certainly one of these areas is heart disease. The unquestioned assumption has been that the disease in women is identical to that in men, but when examined in detail, major differences have been found. Yet, virtually all the decisions that physicians make regarding their women patients are based on studies conducted either predominantly or exclusively with middle-aged men. Women during their child-bearing years are typically excluded from research studies because of pregnancy, and often older women are not included in research because historically they never have been. As a result, we see distorted perceptions.

No one knows exactly how many women die

in pregnancy and childbirth. WHO estimates their number at 500,000 each year, 99 percent of them in developing countries.

It is in Africa that the risks of pregnancy are highest. Safe motherhood covers all aspects which contribute to make women safe during the hazards of pregnancy and delivery. Many mothers lack awareness of how to manage themselves during pregnancy. For example, almost 60 percent of maternal deaths are caused by anemia. Anemia occurs because women are not actually aware that they need to eat a special diet. Sometimes they cannot buy fruit and vegetables for the whole family; and because traditionally in many societies women are the last family members to eat, they would consider themselves greedy if they were the only ones eating fruits and vegetables. Also, because of economic hardships, women undertake many laborious activities and do not take sufficient rest. This uses up a lot of energy, as they work right up to the time of delivery, instead of having some rest each day, especially during the last months of pregnancy.

About a quarter of a million women in South Asia die every year (650 women a day) in pregnancy and childbirth.

The following examples can be shown what can be done to promote improved health care for women around the world. The new political atmosphere of Paraguay offer hope of changes which will profoundly affect the lives of women, especially their health. Paraguay has one of the highest rates of maternal mortality in Latin America (over 300 deaths per 100,000 live births) due to a lack of antenatal and obstetric care, poor family-planning services and a total ban on abortion. It is estimated that illegal abortion accounts for one third of all maternal deaths in Paraguay, as compared to only a quarter in neighboring Chile and Argentina. Health Minister Cynthia Prieto Conti is keen to put women's health on a community level. With the promised democratization, Paraguay is rapidly modernizing itself and providing better health care to all its citizens, including women.

Nepal's health system provides facilities at the national, regional, district and local levels. The country faces a wide variety of health hazards, many of which are the direct outcome of ignorance and

illiteracy. About a quarter of a million women in South Asia die every year (650 women a day) in pregnancy and childbirth. In the absence of accurate statistics, it is difficult to cite just how many women die in such circumstances in Nepal, but it is considered to be higher than the average for the region as a whole. This is why a safe motherhood program has been established in Nepal - part of the global initiative to reduce maternal deaths by fully one half by the year 2000.

According to demographic studies, millions of women are missing. Studies have shown that when females and males receive the same medical and nutritional care, women have better survival rates than men. In comparison to gender ratios in Europe and North America, 50 million women are missing in China alone, and the number tops 100 million when added to those in South and West Asia and North Africa. A United Nations report presents imbalanced ratios in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea and Turkey. Research on the 'missing women' phenomenon is ongoing, but one thing is clear - females are killed at birth, or receive inadequate medical care and food simply because they are female. One study showed that of 8,000 abortions done in Bombay after amniocentesis, only one had been a male fetus. One hospital in Bombay had the audacity to use the slogan, "Pay 5,000 rupees now or pay 50,000 rupees as dowry later."

Women and Family Planning

Despite advances in health, education and working conditions, life for millions of women across the world remains needlessly hard. Overworked, burdened by too many pregnancies, frequently undernourished, with little respect and care from family and society, women are often second-class citizens within their own communities. The expansion of available choices for women, specifically in regard to birth control and family planning, are instrumental in alleviating the hardship and inequalities that women currently endure.

Historic progress has been made in the area

of family planning over recent years. Only a generation ago, fewer than one woman in five could plan her family. Today, however, three-quarters of couples in industrialized countries, and well over half of those in the developing world, use family planning of some kind. The 'reproductive revolution' has firmly established itself as the major force in helping to alleviate the unfortunate living conditions of many women worldwide.

Recent findings contest the view that poverty is the main barrier to increased use of family-planning measures. Instead, these studies identify a direct link between individual choice and family size. When women, even poor women, are offered a genuine choice, they opt for fewer children. In doing so, they also open up a range of other options regarding education, employment, housing, and migration, both for themselves as well as for their fellow citizens. "Extending a wider range of choice for both men and women," according to the United Nations Population Fund's 1994 State of World Population Report, "is the key to human development in the rest of the century and beyond."

Women in particular find themselves at a crossroads. Empowering women to make their own decisions regarding family size will enable them to make decisions in other areas affecting both themselves and their communities' welfare. "Freedom of choice has special significance for women because it recognizes the importance of women's contributions to society, present and future," the State of World Population Report notes. "The invisibility of women as individuals, as opposed to their roles as wives and mothers, may be coming to an end."

1990 until today, the number of people who have adopted some means of contraception has risen from 51 percent to 55 percent. Seventy-five percent of couples in industrialized countries are using modern forms of contraception; the figure for less developed countries is now almost 55 percent. In absolute terms, this corresponds to 450 million people using some form of contraception compared to 60 million less than 35 years ago. The statistics, however, suggest wide national and regional disparities. Among populous developing countries with moderate to high percentages are Bangladesh, Brazil, Indonesia, and Thailand. At the opposite end of the scale, countries in sub-Saharan Africa maintain a low average of 10

percent with 20 percent in the Maghreb region and elsewhere in northern Africa. Average levels in Asia are 35 percent in South Asia, 50 percent in East Asia and the Pacific, and 57 percent in Latin America. Overall, the lowest prevalence found in cross-national surveys is Niger, with only 4 percent. In contrast, among the highest is that of the Republic of Korea at 77 percent. While the number of couples worldwide practicing family planning has evidently exploded during the last generation, the full range of family planning services remains beyond the reach of an estimated 350 million couples, apart from those who have access to such services, but refrain from using them for cultural and other reasons.

Empowering women means extending choices: choices about if and when to get married, about education, about if and when to get pregnant, and ultimately, about family size.

Obviously, enabling women to make informed choices is not only a matter of individuality and personal preference. In the wider context, encouraging and supporting women's growing command of the means to manage their own fertility is a matter for national governments as well as for the international community. Empowering women means extending choices: choices about if and when to get married, about education, about if and when to get pregnant, and ultimately, about family size. Empowerment requires that husbands, partners, family members, and communities help to promote a healthy environment, free from cultural and social coercion, in which women are free to use public family-planning services on a basis of unconditional quality and personal integrity.

Pregnancy and Contraception

The lack of women's economic and political participation globally can be attributed to the fact that women become pregnant. This is a burdening factor in their quest for equality in a patriarchal society.

Contraceptives are a method of preventing conception. Contraceptives include condoms, spermicides, diaphragms and birth control pills. More traditional methods of birth control include abstinence and the rhythm method. There have been significant changes in the availability of contraceptives and a growth of smaller and more isolated families in the United States in the past years. Women spend much less of their lives bearing and rearing children. In the last 20 years, women with children have entered the paid labor force in great numbers. As of 1974, about 46 percent of mothers with children under 18 were in the labor force with one-half of the mothers with school-age children and over a third of those with children under six.

According to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, people engage in sexual intercourse solely to produce children. Sex before marriage is prohibited, and therefore, the issue of contraception produces consistent resistance. It is the overall modern practice for Catholic women to compromise between church regulation and 'current trends.'

Before a major United Nations conference on population policy took place in October 1994 in Cairo, Vatican envoys were expected to work to keep abortion and birth-control topics out of official documents. The United States was accused by the Vatican of using the conference to promote the use of contraception in poor countries and among people of religious faith.

In Brazil, about two-thirds of married women practice some form of birth control; among this group about 43 percent use oral contraceptives. Brazilian Catholics account for 75 percent of the nation's 154 million people, this being the largest Roman Catholic country in the world. In a survey of 2,076 Brazilian adults, 90 percent said that they ignore the church beliefs on birth control and abortion.

These views on birth control have reduced the average family size; the average number of children born to a Brazilian woman has plummeted from 5.75 in 1970 to 2.35 in 1994.

Further census data show that the fertility rates are particularly low in Brazil's developed south, where they have fallen to 2.1 children per woman, which is the same rate as the United States. In the barren northeast, the rate is 4.0, relatively high in

Brazil, but still well below the 5.8 recorded in the region in 1980.

Simon Schwartzman, president of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics responded to the data, noting that "the trend is toward continued reduction" and believes the Brazilian population considers controlling its birth rate to be very important.

Unlike Columbia and Mexico, which have strong government-led family planning programs, Brazil's government follows a 'laissez-faire' policy. Family planning was emphasized in the 1960's by foreign aid organizations without intervention by the Brazilian government. Today, virtually all clinics that distribute birth control pills and information are maintained by private groups.

Female Infanticide

Female infanticide is a very important topic in women's rights. This crime usually occurs right after a woman has given birth to a baby girl. It has become a serious problem especially in less developed countries. Neglect, sex discrimination and health implications are among the awful causes of female infanticide.

One form of female infanticide is to have a bucket of water next to the birthing bed, which is then used to drown newborn girls.

Discrimination toward girls is very noticeable. Some studies show that daughters receive less food and attention than sons. Often, parents are more likely to seek medical care for boys than for girls. Mothers who gave birth to girls in China were often snubbed by their husbands' families because they failed to produce baby boys. Girl babies are more likely to be abandoned after birth than boys. The Convention on the Rights of the Child made the point that girls are typically disadvantaged compared to boys. In some places, ultrasound or prenatal genetic tests are used to determine gender, and in China, this has led to the abortion of female fetuses. There are constant new reports of deaths of newborn girls

in India.

One form of female infanticide is to have a bucket of water next to the birthing bed, which is then used to drown newborn girls.

With new medical breakthroughs, female infanticide is now rampant in many Asian countries. In parts of northern India, female infanticide is so rampant that the sex-ratio reached a low of 935 women to 1000 men in 1981. Few activists or government officials in India see female infanticide as a law-and-order issue. Instead it is being viewed as a social problem. Female infanticide and sex-selective abortion are not unique to India. The killing of daughters through infanticide has traditionally been sanctioned in many other parts of the world. Between 1953 and 1982 in China, the ratio of boys to girls in infancy was close to normal. When girls got older they suffered a higher mortality rate, and the ratio became imbalanced. In China, one province has had so many cases of female infanticide that a half a million bachelors cannot find wives because they outnumber women their age ten to one due to female infanticide.

Female infanticide is a problem throughout many countries. Most of us take for granted that girls and boys have equal rights, but it seems that in many less developed countries, women are deemed to be of low value, resulting in the loss of precious lives.

Women and Hinduism

In April 1989, a twenty-year-old woman in New Delhi who had just been married was severely beaten, covered in whiskey and then burned, all because her parents could not pay the dowry they had promised to pay the groom's family. She died of her burns four days later, and her husband is out on bail.

Dowry deaths, and other discriminatory acts towards women, such as female infanticide, still take place today, in spite of the on-going women's movement. In 1980 there were 17 reported dowry deaths in India, and in 1989 the number jumped to 110.

It is important to point out that India is a secular state and dowries are in fact illegal. However,

dowries are still expected in Hindu society, and the cultural traditions of Hinduism, which have been entrenched in Indian society for thousands of years, often take precedence over legislative laws. For example, a bride's family has to pay a dowry, but the groom's family does not have to pay anything. There are also discriminatory land laws. Traditionally, daughters never received any of their father's land; all of it was distributed among the sons. This is one of the reasons for dowries, since a bride never had any land in her name that her family could live on after the marriage. Therefore, in order to offer something to the groom's family, the bride's family had to pay a dowry.

There is little discrimination against women in the laws of the country, and in fact, India has even had a female Prime Minister, the highest position in the government.

However, cultural traditions are much more influential in rural societies than legislative laws, and since most of India's population is rural, the laws by which Hindu communities live are traditions mores. This means that regardless of how much the state tries to end sexism, it will not succeed unless it is also able to change the mindset of the people.

Traditional interpretations in religion that have for so long discriminated against women should be modified or modernized in order to account for women.

The view that women have of themselves in the realm of Hinduism is very important. It is even more important than the view that men have of women. Therefore, it is not enough to criticize men for being discriminatory towards women; it is important to educate women, for unless they know that they are being discriminated against, they will not be willing to effect change. Society cannot wait for men to change their views of women. As Gargi Chakravarty, a member of the National Federation of Indian Women, said, "Modernization has not changed general views of women."

It is unfair, though, to say that Hindu women are quiet and content. Groups such as the National Federation of Indian Women are spearheading a women's movement in India. They have been in the

forefront recently by criticizing such institutions as the prolific Indian film industry for its negative portrayal of women.

While maybe often treated as second-class citizens according to Hindu traditions, should the international community impose human-rights regulations and standards upon India, or will this be an invasion of the established customs of an age-old religion? Does the international community have the right to interfere in an individual's right to practice the religion they wish to practice? Arguably, this is not a question of the right to practice religion; this is a human-rights issue.

Sexism can exist in any society, for cultural laws are adhered to more firmly than state laws. Therefore, the traditional interpretations in religion that have for so long discriminated against women should be modified or modernized in order to account for the other half of the population. If sexism in religion is ever to be overcome, women, should realize such discrimination is not part necessarily part of the religion, but rather a result of the manipulation of religion by men.

To be born female is not a crime but you would never know it by looking at the deplorable condition of girls in many parts of the world,

Often underfed, neglected, overworked and denied access to proper health care and education, girls are forced into early marriages and pressured to bear children when still teenagers.

Deep prejudices against girls mean that many are never even born, because of sex-selective abortions, or are killed as infants, with the result that an estimated 100 million fewer women are alive today than could be expected.

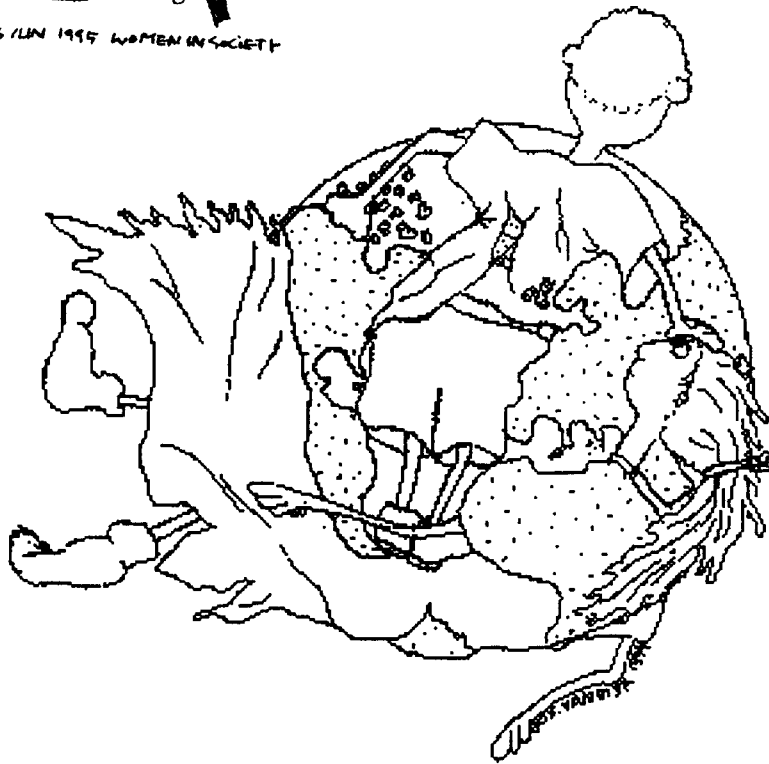
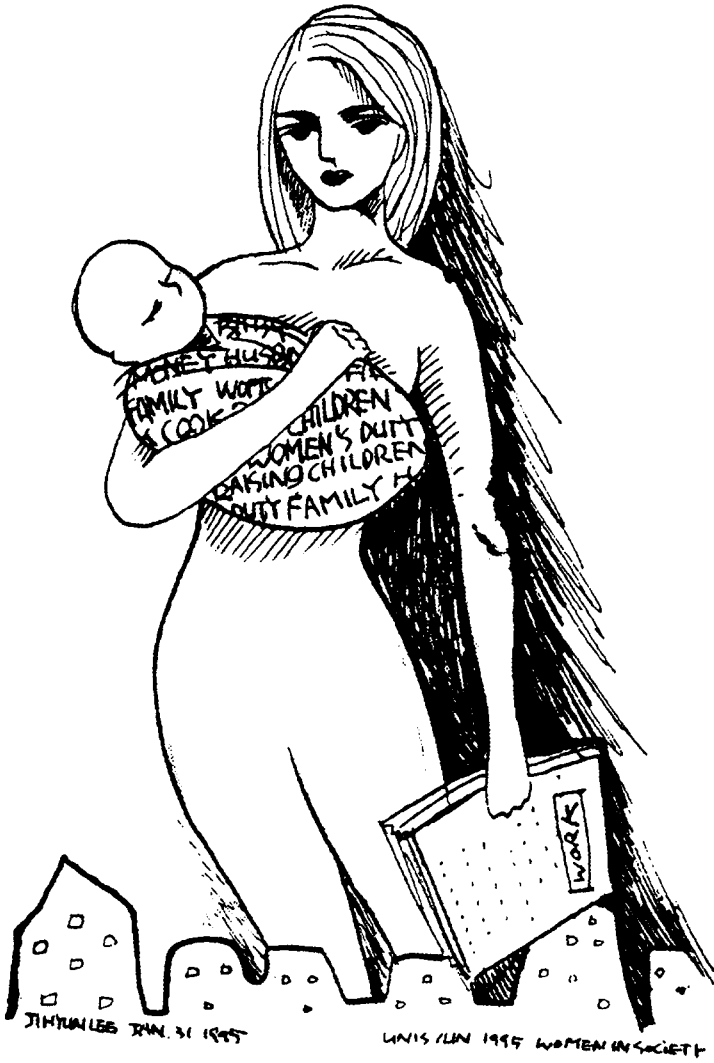
Today's girl is tomorrow's woman, her future clearly mapped out in the stages of her life cycle. To ensure that that life cycle doesn't become a vicious cycle, we must work together to stop disadvantage and discrimination at its roots----in the lives of girls.

Gender bias varies in form and severity, but it is pandemic. This is not just a subject for child experts. A broad, strong coalition is needed to break this global barrier and end stereotypes that should long ago have been uprooted.

If you are working for human rights, equal rights, human development, women's health, literacy, education, population control, economic development, fair labour laws, AIDS prevention, in fact, almost any of today's pressing issues, then girls are your concern ---- and need your support.

" To Be Born Female Is Not a Crime"
UNICEF 1994

Economic and Political Aspects



Women and Economic Development: Salient Issues

Although they constitute more than 50 percent of the global population, women continue to confront various problems at different levels of society. This paper identifies three major issues which impede the development of women. The role of women in the global economic environment can be viewed from three main perspectives: poverty, workforce and economic decision-making.

When analyzed through a gender lens, poverty represents one of the greatest obstacles facing women. Women do not have the skills, access and other prerequisites necessary to command resources. Men, on the other hand, generally have adequate means to exercise their entitlements. This explains why women and men experience poverty differently.

Women do not have the skills, access and other prerequisites necessary to command resources.

Taking the ordinary household as an example, women have little command over their own labor or that of others. The division of labor between men and women is unequal, with women working longer hours at largely underpaid and unpaid jobs. Women's access to resources such as land, credit and other services is also limited. This in turn affects their capacity to improve their own skills. Hence, female-headed households often constitute the poorest segments of even the wealthiest societies. This is because females in such situations have to undertake both productive and reproductive roles with inevitable trade-offs.

The feminization of poverty in rural areas is yet another manifestation of factors combining to make rural poverty a burden largely borne by women. Improving access to and control over resources like land, labor and credit would go a long way to redressing their plight. Logically too, health

services, including family planning for rural women, must be an assured part of any poverty-eradication scheme in rural areas.

Urban poverty is also an important issue, not only because women are again in the front line, but also because the nature of and solution to urban poverty requires a different approach. In an urban setting, women work outside the home, and life is based on a cash economy. Therefore, the availability of public services and the proximity of the workplace to home are important if women are to be able to balance productive and reproductive tasks efficiently.

The inevitable conclusion is that whether in developed or developing countries, in urban or rural settings, or even in individual households, the most sensible course of action to ease women out of the vicious cycle of poverty is to use public action to extend entitlements to them, and increase their endowments so that they can improve their own situation in ways best suited to their particular needs. The natural step would be to ensure women an education so that they can obtain the requisite job skills to allow them to enter the formal or informal workforce.

It is an accepted fact that the world economy has changed. Economic growth and development are seen as being intricately related to the advancement of women. "Where women have advanced, economic growth has usually been steady; where women have not been allowed to be full participants, there has been stagnation."

For the first time the "1994 survey of the role of women in development" has employed gender analysis to observe the many trends in the role of women in the processes of development. Two significant changes have occurred in recent years in relation to women in the economy. One is the improvement in the legal status of women; more states are now signatories to the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Women are gradually achieving de jure equality, and progress in economic participation is evident.

The second change has been women's progress in achieving equal access to education and training. The past twenty years have seen equality in primary school enrollment in most regions of the world, with the exception of Africa and South Asia.

However, the problem of access remains plagued by the content of curricula which are gender-biased. Women are still channeled to female fields of studies (ie. the Arts) with the result that they lack the technological skills needed to meet the challenges of the Information Age. Illiteracy among older adult women, a consequence of past inequality, also remains a major stumbling block.

Women's increasing participation in the labor force has been both an economic necessity as well as a result of their desire to exercise their right to work. It has increased the economic performance of nations. But any changes in employment patterns have tended to affect women more adversely than men. "On average women continue to earn 30 to 40 percent less than men for work of comparable value." Also, the increase in the rates of economic activity of women has often been accompanied by a decrease in the quality of working conditions.

In industrialized countries, gender discrimination occurs mostly in wages and employment. In developing countries, discrimination is more broad-based. It occurs not only in employment, but also in education and health care.

Despite a semblance of change that has occurred in recognizing the importance of women in economic development, women do not occupy positions that determine the direction of economic policy, whether long or short term. "Overall there is a very slow rate of increase in the proportion of women in top decision-making, regardless of the level of development of the country."

Few women are top executives of national bodies, senior managers of corporations, trade unions and professions or business organizations. They hold only 10 to 30 percent of management positions; less than 5 percent in top management. In 1,000 non-US corporations only 1 percent of the top managers are women. In government too, women hold 6 percent of ministerial positions and an even lower proportion of top posts dealing with the economy.

On average women continue to earn 30 to 40 percent less than men for work of comparable value.

The structural obstacles to the advancement of women include, the lack of unpaved career paths

for women in corporate structure and the male-dominated, male-oriented corporate culture that dictates work norms and achievement criteria based on stereotyped expectations. Together they create the 'glass ceiling,' an invisible but impassable barrier that prevents upward mobility of women, regardless of their education and experience.

Keep in mind that these obstacles, though they present a more serious problem for women in developed regions, are also what lie in the future for women in developing regions, or areas where overcoming poverty is a major concern. This clearly illustrates how, even after overcoming the prevailing socio-economic conditions and gaining a semblance of equality through education, women continue to face problems that will ultimately deprive them of the status, recognition and power they wholly deserve.

Unequal Division of Labor

The Gross National Product (GNP) is an important indicator of a nation's economic performance. However, many services such as child rearing and housekeeping, services largely provided by women, are not included in this calculation. Besides this, there are other ways in which women are discriminated against economically, such as the double day syndrome (women work at home and the workplace), unequal division of labor within the home, and unequal pay for work of equal value. In our article we will examine how these factors contribute to gender inequality in the eyes of society.

In many countries the woman's day is far longer than the man's. Women wake up earlier in order to prepare for their husbands and children and stay up far later in order to do all the work that permits their men to have extra hours to socialize and/or further their career interests.

A good example of this is the Mazahua, the migrant women in Mexico City. Their husbands often stop working when the women's trading becomes lucrative. The men may help with carrying baskets but other than that they simply relax. Another example is right here in the United States

where in some cases men get home at the same time as their partners, yet the men sit down with a beer in front of the television while the women prepare the meal.

In most societies, typically only men are in a profession where specialized labor is required while women perform the unspecialized and tedious, but necessary, jobs such as the preparation of meals. Since women are acknowledged as the ones who perform the necessary tasks at home, they are told that they aren't wanted or needed in a salary-earning profession. Women face strong penalties for being stereotyped because they earn less and have less access to professional employment than men. Women do four-fifths of the world's 'tedious' work such as preparing meals for their family but earn roughly 10 percent of the world's income.

Men and Women in the Workforce (United States)

Ever since the early stages of human development, labor has been divided by age and sex. Male children were taught specific skills, while young girls stayed by their mother's sides, only learning to cook, wash, sew, clean etc... The women were left to the housework while the men hunted, chopped wood, and built huts. As time went on these conditions began to change.

One important factor affecting the working woman is education. Girls have consistently outnumbered boys among high-school graduates, but women are increasingly lagging behind men in pursuing education beyond school. Another important factor is child-rearing. On average, a woman has her last child by the age of 30 and will be in her mid-thirties by the time her youngest child is in school. If she decides to reenter the job market after a period of absence for child-rearing she will face difficulty, both in the form of discrimination and in upgrading her skills in an occupational structure that is geared towards continuous employment.

An alarming conclusion is reached when one looks at major occupations in the workforce. Take the airline industry for example. When one thinks of

a pilot, one automatically thinks of a male. When one thinks of a flight attendant, one thinks of a female. But why? Why must the man fly the plane while the woman attends to the passengers? Is it because of what is expected in society? Or what is 'traditional?' Another example is the medical profession. Although the number of women doctors is increasing, they are still outnumbered by men, while the number of male nurses is outnumbered by females. In the army, the percentages of men to women enlisting and being enrolled are greatly disproportionate, the men being the majority. The police force is also greatly dominated by men. Women are strongly discouraged from entering traditionally 'male' careers, where great physical capability is required.

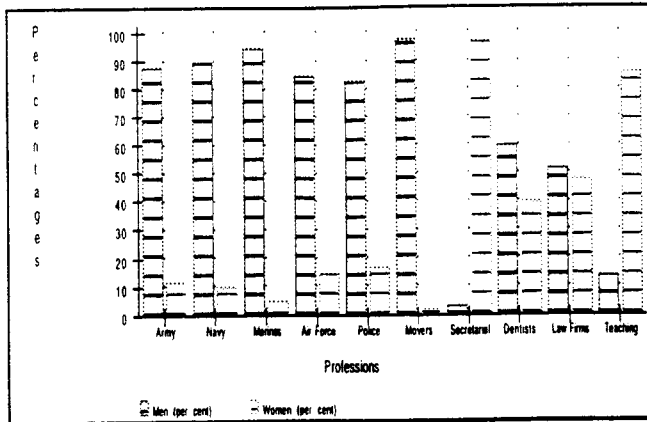
In 1900, women made up only 18 percent of the workforce. In 1940, the percentage of women workers increased to 25 percent, and by the end of World War II, women made up 36 percent of the workforce. When the men returned from the war, they took many of the civilian jobs, making the percentage of women in the work force drop to 28 percent. This shows that women were considered to be temporary replacements for various jobs until the men returned from the war. However, by 1972, women were back up to 38 percent of the workforce, and today, they account for roughly 45 percent. Hopefully, by steady increase, women will gain equal opportunity with men in the workplace.

Many people think sexual harassment is an expression of sexuality, but most experts agree that it is an expression of unequal power.

In the working world, women have begun to take action against sexual harassment. For decades, most women either quit their jobs or suffered in silence when they were harassed because of their sex. Many people think sexual harassment is an expression of sexuality, but most experts agree that it is an expression of unequal power. With one sex dominant in the workforce, there is likely to be harassment of the minority, the women. Sexual harassment can range from verbal comments to physical aggression, usually by the supervisor towards the employee.

Recent statistics enable us to get a closer look

at today's women in the workforce. By examining



the following statistics, it can be seen that most jobs requiring physical labor were held by a greater majority of men. It can also be seen that in most companies, women outnumbered men almost completely in secretarial and assistant positions:

The above statistics show that although the men were basically dominant, there was still a considerable number of women appearing in positions that formerly only men used to hold. Fifty years ago, we could not have found such great numbers of women in the work force, which demonstrates that women slowly but surely are making their way up the working ladder.

How Women's Role in Society is Perceived Through Different Political Ideologies.

Women's role in society is perceived very differently through the lens of different political ideologies. There are some that require women to simply stay at home and carry out routine domestic labor, and others that more openly advocate equality in all realms and the total emancipation of women. At the risk of undue oversimplification it could be said that while more conservative groups tend to try to maintain the social structure in which women are subordinate to men, the more liberal ones are in favor of the advancement of women's status in society. An example of the latter is Norway, which has an intricate and efficient network of social services,

healthcare and welfare. In this framework it is not a coincidence that a woman, Mrs. Gro Harlem Brundtland, is Prime Minister. Although the presence of one woman does not indicate the general advancement of women's condition, in Norway, this leadership is backed by a society which is evolving towards becoming one of the most 'equal' societies in terms of gender in the world.

On a more theoretical level, conservative theory is based on the imposition of strict rules to vigorously maintain the social structure, to benefit those who are the economic backbone of the nation. It follows that, in maintaining the status quo, women must occupy the same place they have for years, that is in the home, taking care of children. This ultimately inhibits the education of women and thus their consciousness of their condition as 'inferior' individuals.

Liberalism, which emerged as a movement during the so-called Age of Enlightenment in the 18th Century, because of its inherent call for freedom and justice, slowly brought with it a general improvement in the status of women in society. Since then, the status of women has improved exponentially, and although it has not yet reached an equitable level, we must recognize that the current of social reform which has swept the world since the 18th century, has also greatly influenced, in a positive manner, the status of women in society.

If equality and equity are to be achieved, countries need to implement legislation that ... embraces public policy ... based on the axiom of equality between men and women.

If equality and equity are to be achieved, countries need to implement legislation that abandons the traditional view of women as domestic laborers, and instead embraces public policy which is based on the axiom of equality between men and women. Only in this way will political involvement and representation of women increase, bringing with it the defense of those rights which every woman has, but is not yet able to take advantage of. Politicians all around the world should open their eyes to the needs, rights and opportunities of women everywhere, and pass laws that take them into account with consideration and respect.

The Politics of Power: Decolonization and the Status of Women in Developing Societies

It is generally believed that women in decolonized societies lead better lives than they did under colonialism. It is said that women who were previously oppressed under colonial rule achieved their political, social and economic freedom under decolonization, and that now they are treated as equals to men. It is true that the status of women in the political, social and economic arenas has improved after decolonization, especially in industrialized nations such as the United States, but women in most developing countries have yet to gain many of those rights which would put them on an equal footing with the men they fought with to gain freedom.

The goal of most women who participated in revolutions was not only to get rid of foreign power, but also to carve out a role for themselves in the new political structure they were helping to bring about. Women in developing countries received a rude shock when they discovered that their plight had not improved, even under their new governments. In some countries, the status of women even deteriorated after colonial rule was abolished. There were very few women representatives in the parliaments, and the socioeconomic status of women declined. In many developing countries women remained trapped in patriarchal societies, victimized by a complex web of social, religious and legal forces that deprived them of their basic human rights.

However, several women in developing countries have been important leaders in politics. Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan, Indira Gandhi in India, Khalida Zia in Bangladesh and Tansu Ciller of Turkey have all been leaders of their respective countries. However, many of these women at the top were widows, daughters or relatives of famous former politicians.

It is assumed that a country with a female leader gives more weight to the development and status of women, but this is rarely true. Benazir Bhutto, Pakistan's recently re-elected Prime Minister, came into office in December 1988 as a symbol of reform, but although she had a high profile as the only woman to lead a Muslim nation in modern times, she did little to empower women in her country.

One reason for this lack of empowerment of women by women leaders is that most of the politicians with power are men who do not want these changes to occur. In order for the female leaders to remain in power, they need to have the support of their party members and the members of the parliament, who are mostly men. Hence, the women leaders compromise the future of women in order to remain in power.

... women leaders compromise the future of women in order to remain in power.

However, there has been a surge of women (in both developing and developed countries) who have made a major impact on the political situation in their country. Tansu Ciller was appointed the Prime Minister of Turkey, a country where according to the civil code, "The husband is the family head" and the home is the wife's responsibility. Kim Campbell was elected leader of the ruling Progressive Conservative Party in Canada. She became Prime Minister and the first-ever female head of government in North America. Mary Robinson became the President of Ireland in the typically male-dominated world of Irish politics by beating thousand-to-one odds against her in 1990. These women have opened up the door for women in politics, to gain more power. Hopefully they will also empower women to be equal in the workplace and in society.

Case Study: Women's Role in British Society since Margaret Thatcher

Traditionally, in the United Kingdom as in most European societies, women have had a lower social status than men. This was partially because of the Christian Church, which has played a major role in people's lives in Britain. In 18th century Britain, the Anglican Church, the law, and the Industrial Revolution stereotyped British women. For a long time, it was accepted that a woman's duty was to submit to her husband. She had no separate legal identity once she married. The Industrial Revolution in some ways exploited women because in a free market, one needs a good education. In the 19th century, middle-class women were often denied a good education because the money was spent educating the males of the family. Many poor women worked under dangerous or unhealthy conditions for very low wages. The jobs that became available during the Industrial Revolution were bad, and women were paid lower wages for them. Most women did not have wages before the Industrial Revolution.

From the 1870's on, many good girls' schools opened and universities slowly began to accept women. In World War I, most of the young men were fighting overseas. This left jobs that were normally monopolized by males open to women. This happened again in World War II. Both times, women gained more rights, including the right to vote after the First World War. Women played a substantial role in the Labor Party (one of the three major political parties) right from its beginning in the late 19th century.

In the 1970s, women held the important posts of Minister of Education and Minister of Health. Margaret Thatcher was elected in 1979 as the first woman Prime Minister of Great Britain. She was not elected solely because she was a woman, or because she was going to improve women's rights because she never claimed that she would. She acted as male Prime Ministers before her had acted, paying no special attention to women's rights. So, during and after Margaret Thatcher's time in office, women still did not get as many job opportunities as men, did not receive as much pay, and were less politically active.

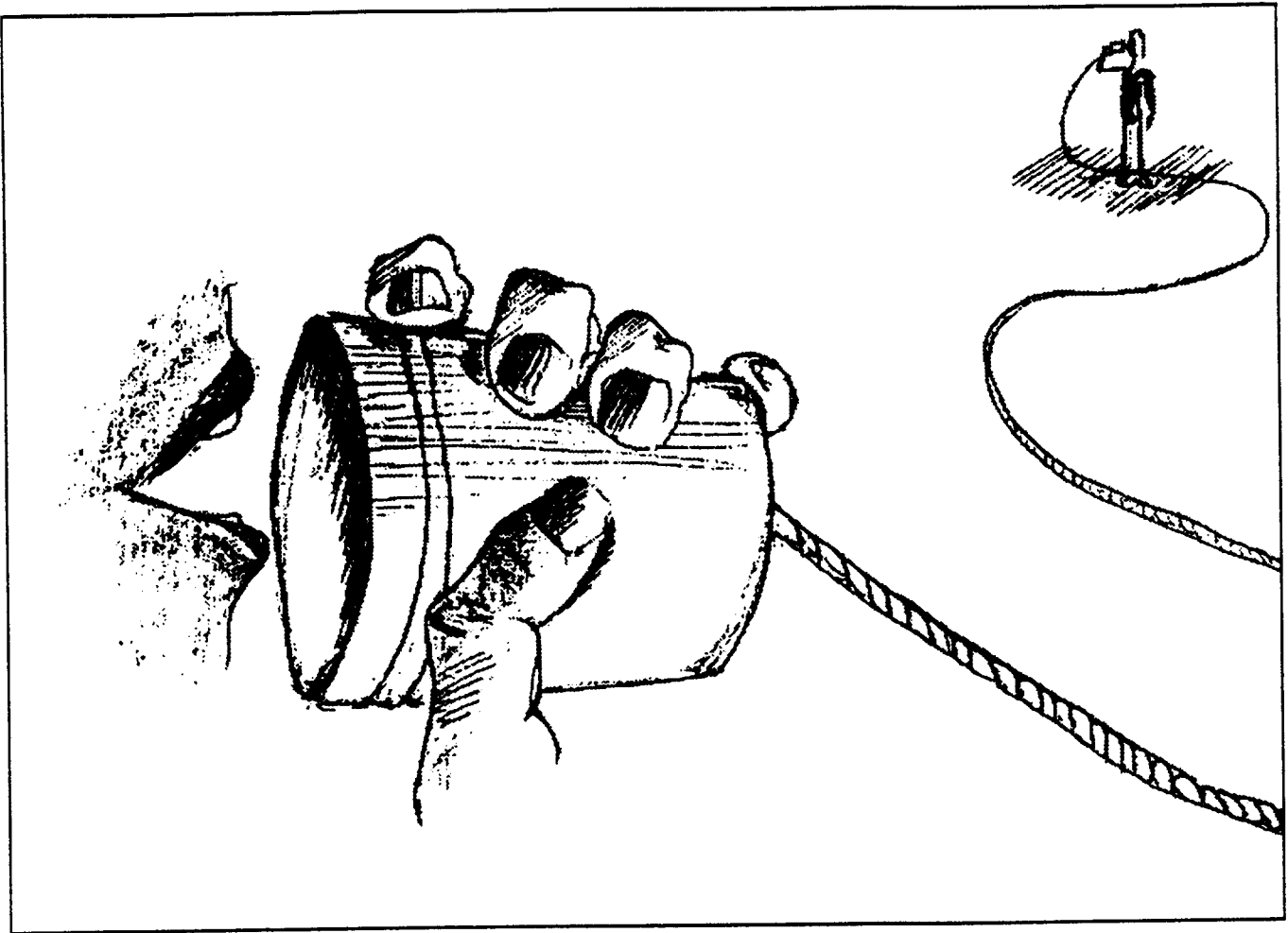
Due to the recent recession, the number of employed women in Britain has increased, while the number of employed men has decreased. This is because many of the jobs available are low-paying

ones which women will take, but men will not because they do not pay enough. Many women are taking these jobs because their husbands are out of work or are working for less than they previously earned, so they need two incomes to support the lifestyle that has become the norm in developed societies. One result of this situation is that many women are not spending time having or bringing up children, because it might get in the way of their jobs.

... even in a democratic, industrialized society having an elected woman leader does not automatically mean improvement for women.

In 1991 and 1992 "women accounted for 27 percent of academic staff [in colleges and universities] but made up 46 percent of the lowest lecturer grades" (11 November 1994, *The Independent*). There has also been a rise in the percentage of women receiving education in universities: 28 percent in 1969 compared to about 50 percent today. Girls' education in grade school has improved; recently there has even been a concern in Britain that boys are not doing well in comparison to girls.

Clearly, many things have happened to change and improve the social status of women in Great Britain in recent years, little of which can be attributed to Margaret Thatcher. Whether or not these improvements hold and increase in the future, only time will tell. However, the example of the United Kingdom shows that even in a democratic, industrialized society having an elected woman leader does not automatically mean improvement for women.



Perceptions

(These perceptions are not necessarily the views of the
UNIS/UN Student Conference Organizing Committee)

Women in the Developed and the Developing World, Do They Share the Same Problems?

by Nasheeba Selim

Historically, women have been viewed as second-class citizens. The gender relationship emphasizes the different roles of men and women, production and reproduction. Women have always been attached to reproduction, and they are merely tolerated or manipulated in the sphere of production. Women will not be viewed

as independent until they can acquire economic independence. Statistics show that occupational segregation and discrimination relegate women to low-paying, low-status jobs. Even when women do the same work as men, they typically receive less salary (30 to 40 percent on average world wide). Another economic obstacle to equality is that much of women's work is not paid or recognized as economically productive.

Problems concerning women in the developed and the developing world should not be viewed distinctly, but they certainly differ in degrees in the two regions. The problems are rooted in the same origins, but are suffered by women to a worse degree in the developing world. Both in the developed and the developing world, women are sexually abused. Up to three years ago, rape in prisons in the United States was legal. Women in developing regions are faced with the worst abuse, and there is nowhere for them to turn. At least in the developed world, in most cases, women can appeal for justice. They can demand their human rights just as any male can. Whether justice is served or not is a different issue. But in many developing countries, there is no system for young women to turn to.

Another interesting factor is the child-bearing gap between developing and developed countries. In Africa and Asia, a woman typically has her first child at the age of 19 or even earlier and her last at 37, a child-bearing span of 18 years. In the developed countries, a woman usually has her first child at 23 and her last at 30, for a span of only seven years. Getting pregnant too early is bad for a woman's health. It exposes women to a particular array of health risks. Women who experience four or more births have the greatest risks of hemorrhaging after childbirth. Complications from child-bearing remain a major yet avoidable cause of death among women in many developing countries. Steps have been taken to educate women in rural areas as to how it affects their health to have too many babies, even if doing so pleases their families.

Cultural discrimination is another factor that is still holding women back. This is still more true in the developing regions than in the developed ones. The saddest aspect of cultural discrimination in developing countries is that women are used to being treated unequally. If at the wedding the groom proudly announces that his wife will always be free to do as she pleases, nobody realizes that he holds the power to decide what his wife should be able to do. Everybody thinks that he is a very nice and decent man. Society has brainwashed women in such a way they do not even realize that a wrong has been done.

There are some set values that exist and downgrade women. For example, whenever men have extra-marital affairs it is considered wrong, but not an unforgivable sin. But if a woman has an affair, it is the greatest sin she could possibly commit. She becomes a shame and disgrace to her family and her society. That is the way it was in European countries during the Victorian era and that is how it is in many developing countries today.

One main reason for the situation in developing countries is the lack of education. There are big gaps between what women can produce and the investments they command. Households and governments invest less in women and girls than in men and boys. At the primary level, the recent male-to-female literacy ratio in the United States was 100 males to 94 females, whereas in Bangladesh, it was 100 men to 66 women. Today, they are trying to spread education, since women understand that if they wanted to have equal rights, they must be ready to challenge men and be intellectually equal.

Domestic violence is the dark side of family life in both the developed and the developing worlds. It is inflicted on the weakest members of the family, women, children and the disabled. It manifests itself in habitual physical abuse, psychological torture, deprivation of basic needs, and sexual molestation. Secrecy, insufficient data, and social and legal barriers all make it difficult to acquire enough data on this subject. Many criminologists believe domestic violence to be vastly underreported. Why are women afraid to report that something wrong has been done to them? It is the system that needs to change. The views of people have always been negative towards women. That is, wives can be beaten up, young girls can be stared at and whistled at, and cannot do anything about it. Should we, the future leaders of this unequal world, just sit back and let such practices continue.

What's Feminism?

by Michel Campbell

My grandfather's Sunday morning breakfast visits have become a tradition in my family. When I was younger, our conversations focused mainly on how my younger brother and I were enjoying school or what local bakery had the best soda bread. However, as I grew older, our discussions became politically orientated, as they coincided with the plethora of political forums broadcast on Sunday morning television. During one of our most recent visits my conservative grandfather and I discussed the controversial acceptance of a female cadet into a local, all male military academy. I repeatedly affirmed that one's gender should not exclude him or her from the education for which he or she is otherwise qualified. My grandfather disagreed vehemently and rebutted my position with talk of 'tradition' and the belief he and many others share; this academy was "no place for a woman." It was not these particular views that shocked me, instead it was that during our conversation my grandfather asked me in disgust, "What are you, a feminist?" It was this question that both enraged and puzzled me as I considered my answer and the manner in which it was asked. To answer this question I had to ask myself, "What is it to be a feminist?" and "Why does feminism carry with it a negative stigma?"

As I considered the question asked of me as well as those I asked of myself, I was certain of my belief in economic, social, and political equality among the sexes. I wasn't sure if this made me a 'feminist,' for I don't hate men or burn my bras, stereotypes commonly attributed to feminists. In looking further at these stereotypes I found what is essentially at the root of all stereotypes: fear. Many people fear change or deviation from a familiar, but not necessarily acceptable, social norm and attempt to control their fear by generating stereotypes that negatively manipulate a narrow aspect of the truth or are based on pure fiction. In the case of feminism, the most militant beliefs and practices thereof are exploited by opponents to shake the credibility of a wholly justifiable conviction. These stereotypes hinder the progress of women towards the equality they rightly deserve and give feminism the negative stigma that many recognize it by.

After a considerable amount of deliberation I decided to proudly call myself a feminist. Throughout time, fear, especially the fear of necessary changes in society, has proven to be detrimental to the enlightenment of a people. The necessity of equality among the sexes must not be compromised at the hands of fear and ignorance, which many such as my grandfather refer to as 'tradition.' We must put aside our stereotypes of one another and remember that we are all human beings, equal, and should be treated so.

The Tailhook Convention Sexual Harassment Scandal

by John Whitehouse

I have known many men and women in the U.S. Armed forces. In four years I hope to be a commissioned officer in the U.S. Navy myself. I therefore take an interest in the role of women in the military. An incident that has marred the military's record on the integration of female members was the Tailhook Convention sexual harassment scandal.

In this article I hope to present in detail the activities at the Tailhook Convention of 1991 that have been labeled 'sexual harassment.' The Tailhook Association is a private, nonprofit organization whose mission is to "foster, encourage, study, develop, and support the aircraft carrier, sea-based aircraft, both fixed and rotary wing and aircrew." Three years ago, Tailhook was unfamiliar to most people, and known only to those familiar with Naval Aviation. A failure of leadership three years ago changed that, and the term now carries an unfortunate, misleading connotation of sexual harassment. If that connotation is to disappear, and if the naval services are to "get tailhook behind us," the events surrounding Tailhook '91 require better public examination and discussion than they have received.

The 35th annual symposium held at the Las Vegas Hilton in September 1991 was a celebration of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Tailhook '91 was one of the largest ever held. In addition to 2,000 registered attendees, an estimated 2,500 civilians and military personnel visited the conference.

A feature of each conference is a flag panel, which allows a dialogue between the most junior naval aviators and the senior leaders of naval aviation. Tension arose when a female aviator asked the panel when women would be allowed to fly in combat. Vice Admiral Dunleavy initially responded with a "Hoo-Boy!" in acknowledgment of the sensitivity of the question. He quickly continued "If Congress directs the Secretary of the Navy to allow women to fly combat aircraft, we will comply."

The issue of women in combat is one that Congress has been wrestling with for decades, which illustrates its complexity. I believe that expanding the role of women in the armed forces is becoming increasingly feasible. Modern combat is more technologically focused, therefore biological differences between men and women factor less in battle effectiveness. Still, old fashioned beliefs are held by many regarding women in combat. Audience comments were described by one officer as "downright ugly."

Subsequent investigations reported many party activities including indecent exposure (by both male and female officers), indecent assaults, 'equipment checks' (an activity in which a woman grasps the groin area of a man through his clothing), leg shaving (in which a woman consents to have her legs shaved publicly), navel shots (in which a man drinks from a consenting woman's navel), displays of pin-ups and the showing of stag movies in some suites, female striptease shows, female officers sneaking up on unsuspecting male officers to pull down their shorts in public, and 'zapping' (placing squadron stickers on the anatomy of a woman).

Although the media mischaracterized each type of behavior as illegal, most of these acts do not constitute criminal activity. Most involved consensual touching (some women were circulating among suites 'collecting' squadron stickers, for example) or touching that was not regarded as offensive by those involved, male or female. Given the consensual nature of most of the activities, other than the actual assaults, few of these activities constituted 'sexual harassment' as the term is legally defined.

The principle area of misconduct and the catalyst for the reaction to Tailhook '91 was the hallway outside the third floor hospitality suites. In years past, this passageway served as an overflow area from the suites. As it filled and people endeavored to pass, there was an inevitable amount of jostling, both unintended and intentional. In recent years, the jostling at Tailhook had become somewhat more organized, and by Tailhook '91, it had taken on a life of its own as a gauntlet for hassling the men and women who attempted to negotiate it, some voluntarily. Some women 'ran the gauntlet,' turned around and ran back through it; some ran the gauntlet more than a dozen times. As the evening wore on and alcohol consumption increased, the gauntlet turned ugly, changing from consensual touching to physical assaults. The number of assault victims remains

unclear, ranging from estimates of 26 (more than half of them commissioned officers in the US Navy and Air Force) to 65.

Legality is a very small part of the issue, however. The emphasis on sexually related activities set a tone and manifested an attitude toward women that is incompatible with the increasing role of women in the military.

The scale of sexual harassment and assaultive behavior seen at the Tailhook convention was so large that I believe it possibly constituted a one-of-a-kind event, but the attitudes that permitted it to occur are not isolated. Rather, I contend that gender prejudice and misbehavior are so widespread in the armed services that basic, cultural change will be necessary to remedy harassment.

Childbearing: The Woman's Burden

by Andee Browne

There is a call for more female participation in political and economic affairs, but for many women living in developing countries, this simply is not possible. These women do not have the time, because they are bearing children for most of their adult lives. Whether it is for cultural or personal reasons, women in developing countries are more likely to be pregnant for a majority of the years between puberty and menopause.

A main cause of such multiple pregnancies is that in some cultures, sons are prized more highly than daughters, namely China, India, and Bangladesh. This is because sons usually remain at home to take care of their parents. Girls are regarded as temporary members of their families, and since large dowries are needed to make sure they marry well, they tend to exhaust a family's life savings. People even say that bringing up a girl is like watering a neighbor's plant.

With dowries so high, female infanticide flourishes. It is a common practice, especially in rural areas. When women bear daughters, the first thing they ask themselves is if the family has enough money to support a daughter through life. If the answer is no, the baby girl may be killed (often by mashing poisonous seeds into oil and force-feeding it to the child). In a survey of 1,050 women, in Madras, India, more than half the women had killed baby daughters. "You definitely do it after two or three (daughters)," said a young woman from the village of Ghandi Nagar, the mother of an 18-month-old daughter. "Why would you want more?" This is accepted in a society that does not ask how many children a person has, but how many sons.

Female infanticide and selective abortions are also common practice in China, where sons are also preferred over daughters, and where the government only permits one child per couple.

In Northwestern Brazil women have many consecutive pregnancies. There is no particular desire for male children, but the general desire for children is encouraged by the Roman Catholic Church, which has a large influence in Brazil, and many children are considered a blessing. Many children provide women with a sense of accomplishment and power, if only over the children. This is interesting, for the more children a mother has, the more power she seems to have.

Depending on which developing country one examines, childbirth and childrearing seem to be going from one extreme to another. Both are problems because the price of having a daughter is so high, and children barely have a chance for survival to begin with. It probably is not any wonder that women in many developing nations cannot participate directly in economic and political affairs. However, since they have control over who is participating in those affairs, the fate of their society lies in their hands.

There Is No Solution ...

by Michelle Chih-lun Chou

At first, I was going to write that I believe there will never be equal rights for both sexes. Then I spoke with different people, asked for their points of view, so they could help me get my ideas together on this topic. There would always be a big discussion, and people always ended up asking me; "What are the reasons that make you think there will never be equal rights for both sexes?" And I always ended up with no reason at all, because not only were my ideas changing all the time, but other people's beliefs also influenced my change in thinking. I started to have problems when I tried to sit and write that there will never be equal rights for both sexes. Then I realized that I would probably never resolve the issue of gender equality for myself, because I grew up in a society in which my parents and culture did not give me clear messages about this issue. I believe that I am not the only person who has this problem, and I am not the only one who is confused on this issue.

What are the messages I get from parents? Both my parents work. My mother works very hard and she is very good at her job. So, the perception I got from her was that a woman should be able to be self-supporting. I also learned that the best way for a woman to become economically independent is to get a higher education in the society in which she belongs. My father does not mind that my mother works, but he does complain that she should spend more time at home with her children. He told me that I should learn to be a lady, and learn everything that can make me a perfect housewife. It is also his position that I should do more than simply attend college, in order to become economically self-sufficient. This has subconsciously given me mixed messages about what I should do to be a 'woman' in my society, and what kind of roles I should play.

What are the messages I get from my culture? My culture, especially the media, has taught me that when a man takes a woman out for a date, the man should pay for everything. Is that fair to a man? In the Chinese culture, the idea that "the treatment of females as inferior to males" has existed for thousands of years. How long will it take to change this? I cannot answer these questions, because I am not sure how to. Comparing American culture to my own, I find there are different rules. For example, American women have more freedom in terms of the age at which they begin dating, marriage choices, decision-making options concerning family planning, and job opportunities. In my opinion, American women 'run faster' than other women of the world.

This is due perhaps to the media opening up many issues that affect the ways men and women relate to one another. For example, on television, sex is discussed very naturally, unlike the programming in some other countries. Teenagers' use of foul language to express their feelings is not practiced everywhere in the world. The educational system has a different set of standards, and it influences how the new generation thinks about gender differences.

I am still undecided on my views. The last part of my teenage years has been spent in the United States. While I am the product of my Chinese culture, I have also been influenced by my life here. In contrast with my background, American society is very open. Does that mean that in the end, men and women have equal rights here? I am still not sure. Despite appearances, Americans may not really achieve equal rights for both sexes.

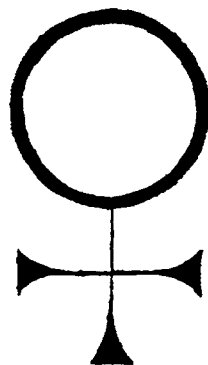
Conclusion

The bulk of this Working Paper has been devoted to gaining a better understanding of the perpetuation of women's second-class position in society, from economic, social, political, and cultural perspectives.

However, that understanding is futile if it is not translated into a concrete plan of action to end discrimination against women. And while this may be easier said than done, it is the only course of action that our generation can take. We may be taught our gender roles from the day that we are born, but we can and must escape the shadow of our socialization. Economic and political events may be the factors that incite social and cultural change, but we cannot forget that the issue of gender roles is merely one of perceptions.

Sexism is an ideology only loosely based on facts, and over the centuries it has been branded into our society and into our brains, so that its very existence seems natural and necessary. It is our responsibility to try and change those perceptions, on both an individual and a communal level. This responsibility crosses gender lines; while men and women may have different parts to play, social equality will only be achieved through a partnership. Both men and women have to strive to start with a clean slate, and to tackle our prejudices wherever we can.

Women, as the object of prejudice, have to work for empowerment, in order to disprove the social notions of inequality. Men, on the other hand, have to shake these shackles of sexism, which have been imprinted into their minds almost as soon as they were born, and relinquish some of their empowered position in order to achieve equality. And while this may entail changing entrenched practices, culture is not sacrosanct; it is all very well to recognize the value of being culturally relative, but not when it interferes with basic human rights ... In fact, we should not see it as change, but as an enlargement of perspectives and ideals.



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