**Gender Assignment Preparation**

Read the following and then follow the links and read those two short articles.

**Global Patterns**
Patriarchy in general is learned by boys and girls from adult family members, from adults in the community, workplaces, educational institutions, and indirectly from the laws of the country that permit patriarchal structures. There is a correlation between poverty and patriarchy. The wealthiest countries tend to have the least patriarchy whereas the most patriarchal countries tend to be the poorer countries. The same pattern appears among the wealthy countries. Those wealthy countries that have overall greater class equality than other wealthy countries tend also to have greater gender equality. The Nordic countries of Iceland, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands,

rank in the top ten for overall class equality and they also rank in the top ten for the [greatest gender equality](http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/GII). Other wealthy countries, like the United States, Austria, and Japan, have greater class inequality and also greater gender inequality. There are also exceptions to note among poorer countries. Some poor countries, including China (90 HDI, GII 37), Libya (102 HDI, 38 GII), and Moldova (107 HDI, 46 GII) which rank far lower in the Human Development Index, but have less or similar gender inequality than some rich countries, like the United States (10 HDI, 43 GII) and New Zealand (13 HDI, 34 GII).

Still, in the world-economy of modern society, the wealthiest countries tend to have less gender inequality than poorer countries. The most patriarchal countries tend to be the poorest countries. Among the bottom 20 countries ranked by gender inequality, none are wealthy countries. This pattern raises questions about the possible prospects that poorer countries taken together have in achieving the same levels of equality as wealthy countries. For centuries, about 20 percent of the population of modern society (the people in the wealthy countries) have become very wealthy by controlling the most profitable activities of the world-economy. This 20% controls about 80% of the world’s wealth and lives very high standards of living. Most people, about 50-60% of society’s population in the poorer countries remain stuck with the least profitable activities and get only about 10% of the world’s wealth. Unless there is a change in the world-economy’s division of labor, and how wealth is distributed, it would seem that they will continue to experience gender inequality indefinitely.

Extreme patriarchy, including the psychological and physical abuse of women by men is found more frequently in poorer countries, but also occurs in wealthy countries. There are instances of women abusing men, however, 85% of domestic violence victims are women (source: Bureau of Justice Statistics Crime Data Brief, *Intimate Partner Violence, 1993-2001*, February 2003). Violence against women is not natural, but learned, typically in households. In some poor countries of modern society, violence against women or repression of women is common and many men see it as "normal" or “traditional.” To the extent that violence against women is widespread, men who commit acts of violence against women are not seen as “bad people.” In wealthier countries, the culture has been changed by women’s movements for equality and violence against women is widely condemned and men who commit acts of violence are viewed as entirely responsible for their behavior.

**Two Approaches to Explaining Gender Inequality**

There are, however, two contending approaches to understanding the behavior of men regarding violence against women. One approach is “choice theory” which argues that people make choices freely, good or bad, and that they are fully responsible for their decisions. Men choose to be violent and should be held accountable. They shouldn’t be allowed to get away with such actions. Or women may choose to have children and so they choose to fall behind men in their careers and salaries, and therefore the free market is holding women accountable for their choices. However, choice theory may be an attempt to justify unfair male privilege, as with women who receive less wealth and power because they birthed children. There *seems* to be a reasonable logic behind this approach: that adults know (or should know) what the consequences are for their behaviors and must be held accountable.

Choice theory seems to be imbued with a sense of fairness and justice, but it may be misdirected. It confuses a scientific explanation of human behavior with a political position of how to deal with or respond to human behavior. There is a faulty assumption that human behavior is actually the result of choices or decisions that people make *freely* and knowingly. However, choice theory doesn’t take into consideration how people’s individual behaviors are in fact shaped by cultural patterns and local personal experiences. For example, where violence against women is considered acceptable, a man’s violence against a woman is not simply a freely-made choice: it is behavior that is explained by wider patterns of social norms and patriarchy. Because people are socialized into this behavior, sociologists and anthropologists explain behavior as the result of a cultural patterns, learning, and local experiences. Social scientists generally reject the idea that human behavior can be explained by humans simply choose their behavior and actions. No one, for instance, chose the language they speak or the norms of their ethnicity.

But what about those areas of modern society, like in Europe or the United States, where everyone knows that violence against women is unacceptable? Isn’t a man’s abuse of a woman the result of a choice the man has freely made? But it’s not that simple. For example, a fact cited in "Domestic Violence Facts" (required reading in module) explains that violence is *learned* even on a local scale. The fact is that children who witness “violence between one's parents or caretakers is *the strongest risk factor* of transmitting violent behavior from one generation to the next." In other words, there is a pattern of evidence in which children who grow up in abusive homes far more often become abusers themselves. One might expect that an individual's exposure to cruelty would have the opposite effect: that a boy witnessing violence against his mother or sister at home would make him *less* likely to be violent against women. However, the research indicates the opposite: exposure increases likelihood. Thus, to argue that the boy who witnessed repeated abuse and who becomes an adult abuser has "chosen" to act this way even though he knows it’s wrong simply doesn’t account for the behavior.

Of course, explaining the complexity of human behavior doesn’t mean that one is justifying behavior or arguing that a person shouldn’t be held accountable for abuse or other violations of norms. We should be careful not to confuse a scientific explanation of human behavior with a political position of how to deal with or respond to human behavior. The evidence from research shows that boys exposed to violence against women don't exactly "make an individual choice" to be violent as adults. Humans may be able to choose not to behave violently, however, the correlation between boys who witness violence and later behave violently toward women indicate that there is more involved than simply them choosing or not choosing to behave in certain ways. People internalize behavior patterns that they are exposed to and later repeat them. Thus, human behavior is not simply the result of “free individual choice." While it may be argued that individuals should still be held responsible for their behavior, that does not mean that people made a choice when behaving in particular ways. Humans are social creatures: social learning and context play a major role in individual behavior whether on a large community-scale or on the smaller household-scale. This is easier to see with less controversial behaviors and social conditions. For example, none of us chose the language we speak or to follow the norms of our culture. We are socialized. We have the capacity to change our behaviors, but that capacity may not be utilized for various reasons.

Even in countries where violence against women is generally considered unacceptable, like the United States or Japan, many men do not treat women as equals and believe that they deserve less pay and power. Women are paid less than men for the same work, are not equally represented in the management and directors positions in businesses or in government positions of power. Some people (men and women) claim that women's secondary status is the result of the choices they make, that women individually *choose* to earn less than men, or freely make decisions that result in earning less and having less power. As Dr. Horwitz argues, the gender pay gap is not the result of gender discrimination in the labor force, but of women’s free decisions in a free market. He contends that most of the differences boil down to women’s decision to have children and that as a result women fall behind men in their careers, or choose certain careers paths that offer more time off and pay less, due to market forces. Lower pay is the result of free choice and free markets. Since men choose to dedicate more time to a career, and women don’t, men end up getting promoted more and paid more. Horwitz is taking a “free market” position, arguing that gender inequality is the result of what people freely choose. He is taking a free-market position that opposes government regulation or “interference” in the market and he doesn’t see these outcomes as part of a wider pattern of patriarchy in modern society.

The pay gap is indeed partly the result of unfettered market forces that Horwitz describes. However, to argue that the pay and power gap is the result of “free choices” by men and women is not what sociological evidence indicates. With regard to the “free market” and “free choices,” Horwitz overlooks two realities. One (1), women didn’t choose to be the childbearing gender. Thus they did not really choose the consequences of less pay, status, and power that result when markets are not regulated. Two (2), women did not choose to live in conditions where unregulated market conditions punish them for having children and give men a benefit. Unregulated markets conditions are actually the political outcome of male domination in government where men choose not to enact policies that create a level playing field or compensate women for being the childbearing gender. In those countries where men and women cooperate and have enacted government policies that regulate or override markets, gender equality has been achieved. The achievement of gender equality in a number of European countries thus demonstrates that citizens can ensure that women are paid equally at work and are represented equally in business and government even though they may take time off to bear and raise children. In other words, people can create cultural norms and structures that reject “free markets” and so-called “free-choice” in the sphere of economics to create gender equality.

Another problem with Horwitz’s argument is that he overlooks evidence of workplace discrimination and other forms of patriarchy that affect women’s decision. Some studies of women engineers show that women are in fact discriminated against in the workplace by men who create hostile work environments that are unwelcoming to women engineers. Horwitz also overlooks forms of patriarchy that occur at the level of communities. Girls who grow up in communities and households where women typically pursue lower-paying careers end up in those kinds of careers. This is analogous to boys who grow up in violent households and become abusers as adults. In both cases, the behavior of the girl and the boy as an adult is not simply a matter of them making a decision to behave the way they do; they’re behavior patterns are shaped by social conditions. Likewise, in communities and households where women have successfully pursued careers in typically male-dominated areas, like in science and engineering, girls are more likely to become scientists and engineers as adults. Here as well the behavior of the girl is not simply a matter of her making a decision to become a scientist or engineer: her behavior is shaped by social conditions.

In both conditions of patriarchy and conditions of gender equality, social conditioning is a major factor in determining behavior. This doesn’t mean that people don’t make decisions and choices. They do. But that clearly is not all that his going on. There is a preponderance of scientific research showing that social conditions shape individual human thought and action. Moreover, the evidence and research of vast differences in cultures across history also demonstrate that there is no "natural" way for men or women to behave and that any pattern of gender relationships can be changed if enough people cooperate to re-shape those patterns and structures.

Read the following two articles to prepare to answer the questions in the next Team Assignment.

* [Many Women Leave Engineering, Blame The Work Culture](http://www.npr.org/blogs/alltechconsidered/2014/08/12/339638726/many-women-leave-engineering-blame-the-work-culture)

http://www.npr.org/blogs/alltechconsidered/2014/08/12/339638726/many-women-leave-engineering-blame-the-work-culture?

* [Why Aren't More Girls Attracted To Physics?](http://www.npr.org/blogs/alltechconsidered/2013/08/09/210251404/why-arent-more-girls-attracted-to-physics)

http://www.npr.org/blogs/alltechconsidered/2013/08/09/210251404/why-arent-more-girls-attracted-to-physics