Power

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Chapter 1 examines the relationship between gender and power. First, it shows that gender is implicated in the power arrangements of institutions such as governments, factories, and schools, and that in turn, these institutions reinforce inequalities along gender lines. Second, this chapter emphasizes how the idea of gender difference can be used as a reference point—or a signifier—*to legitimate the power of dominant groups. To understand how gender shapes politics, the chapter turns to the concept of* hegemony: *the set of ideologies that predominate in a particular place and time. In particular, predominant gender ideologies—or* gender hegemonies—*help justify relations of power. Gender hegemonies are also* dynamic. *That is, over time and in different societies, different understandings of gender may become dominant, along with different gender relationships. The last part of the chapter addresses the process by which gender hegemonies change by tracing gender relations across five historical periods:* feudalism, industrialization, colonialism, the welfare state, *and* neoliberal globalization. *Comparing the dominant gender ideologies at work in these periods challenges contemporary expectations about what is "naturally" masculine or feminine. The chapter concludes by reflecting on how, as gender hegemonies change, so do notions of freedom, liberation, and agency.*

Introduction

Gender is tied to power. A traditional understanding of gender and power points out that men can—and often do—dominate women. In the 1970s, feminists in the United States and around the world criticized the ways that men excluded women from the workplace and politics. They questioned men's status as household heads, demanded an end to rape and domestic abuse, and argued against the idea that men were naturally strong or aggressive and women were naturally weak and nurturing. Still, men continue to exercise direct power over women in much of the world. For instance, this traditional understanding of gender and power suggests that men often use their interpersonal and institutional power to make decisions about women's bodies (e.g., whether they should have babies or what they should wear) and about their labor (e.g., whether they should work outside the home or whether they should earn as much money as men).

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Nevertheless, the relationship between gender and power is also broader and more complex than this traditional understanding might suggest. For one, gender relations have changed dramatically. In the 1950s, an "ideal American woman" was expected to keep her house and herself beautiful. By the 2010s, Sheryl Sandberg, the chief financial officer of Facebook and one of the country's most high-profile businesswomen, urged women to "lean in" at the workplace and embrace a new business femininity. Once excluded from higher education, U.S. women now earn more bachelor's degrees than U.S. men. The 2010 United States Census shows that 33% of women versus 32% of men have college degrees. In the labor force, even as men are losing jobs in manufacturing, women work in everything from white-collar businesses around the world to households in the United States to low-wage factories in countries such as Mexico and China. A woman is prime minister of the United Kingdom, and a woman ran for president of the United States as the Democratic Party nominee. Poor women in the Global South—once ignored by development programs or acknowledged only as dependents of men—are now held up as responsible entrepreneurs. It seems there are almost no jobs left that a woman cannot do.

Understandings of masculinity have changed as well. Though women still do a disproportionate share of household tasks, men's participation in care work is growing. In the United States, men and women do things every day that challenge the separate roles that American men and women once played. Indeed, the very idea that men and women make up two separate groups is no longer taken for granted. In today's world, people identify with a range of gender categories, from agender to cisgender to genderqueer to transgender and everywhere in between. Does it still make sense to say that, across the family, the workplace, and politics, men call the shots?

The interplay between gender and power goes deeper than the idea that one group labeled *men* dominates another labeled *women*. Early feminist scholars focused on analyzing areas considered *women's spaces*, such as the family, the home, and beauty. However, Joan Scott (1988), a feminist historian, criticized such scholars for looking for gender only in the places where it was "supposed" to appear. She argued that this focus obscured the importance of gender in areas that were not as obvious. Scott began to look at the roles gendered concepts played throughout society, even in areas that did not appear to be about gender. She argued that gender was important in institutions: places like schools, the economy, and—in particular—politics. This book looks for gender in such unexpected places. Even in arenas that appear neutral, the authors suggest, gendered ideas often reinforce unequal power dynamics. This hidden character is part of what makes gender so important.

Institutions are social arrangements that follow established rules and practices, such as the state, the legal system, and the family. Many institutions are organized around a gendered division of labor in which men and women take distinct roles. These institutions also help create the relations between men and women. They reinforce inequalities along gendered lines, limiting women's participation in spheres of power and helping produce dominance for some men (usually those who are wealthy and racially privileged). In addition, institutions shape—and reshape—gendered ideas about what is natural and desirable. For instance, welfare policies in the mid-20th-century United States enabled men but not women to earn a family wage,

reinforcing the breadwinner model and the idea that women were naturally housewives. In the 2000s, meanwhile, the rise of the technology industry in Silicon Valley, California, helped inaugurate a new brand of masculinity. While images in the 1970s had portrayed "nerdy" men as soft and effeminate, corporations such as Google tied technological savvy to masculinity (Cooper 2000). The representation of technological skills as masculine now helps reinforce such workers' influence over today's growing—and increasingly important—information superhighways.

The example of the newly masculinized Google workers illustrates how ideas about gender help naturalize relations of domination. Describing individuals and actions in terms of *feminine* or *masculine* helps people represent, legitimate, and—at times—criticize political power. While these symbols may portray the dominant as masculine and the subordinate as feminine, they can also be more complex. Think back to the example of U.S. immigration enforcement described in the Introduction. On the surface, immigration control is not gendered. Nevertheless, the U.S. government has used gendered images of *both* feminine "breeders" and masculine "criminals" to justify deportation.

Analyzing how gender relates to power requires a historical understanding of the assumed differences between men and women. The history of gender reveals changing patterns that defy a linear narrative of progress that starts with men and women around the world being less equal and moves toward them being more equal. Two examples illustrate this complexity. First, as described in more detail in Chapter 10, many people today frame female genital surgeries (the cutting and shaping of the clitoris and the labia) as antiquated practices lingering only in "backward" areas of the Global South. When these surgeries are performed in places such as Sudan, U.S. feminists often denounce the practice as *genital mutilation*. At the same time, growing numbers of women in the United States, especially young women, are also seeking out plastic surgery called *labioplasty* to "improve" the appearance of their labia (Rabin 2016).

A second example is the issue of gender identity: Even though many people in the U.S. look at the acceptance of multiple gender identities (e.g., trans men) as unprecedented progress toward gender equality, nonconforming gender identities have been a long-standing practice in many parts of the world, from indigenous Zapotec communities in Southern Mexico to the *hijras* (or *third gender*) of India. In such areas, Spanish and British colonial officials objected to non-binary expressions of gender and pushed them underground, moving in a direction that people in the U.S. today might see as backward.

These two examples indicate how gendered logics of power can shift over time and across place in ways that do not always increase equality. Rather, the meanings people make of *masculinity* and *femininity* are tied to broader social relations through processes including capitalism, colonialism, and globalization. Specific relations of power shape the predominant gender norms in each historical period. In turn, the ways people talk and think about gender often help legitimate the power of those who are in charge. But power is never simply fixed. At any given historical moment, people contest the rule of those in power. Relations of domination change, and the changes introduce new ideas and arrangements of gender.

Therefore, as this chapter will show, gender is political. The chapter starts by examining the relationship between gender and institutions. It then considers the gendered arrangements that have predominated in five periods in recent history: preindustrialism, industrialization, colonialism, the welfare state, and neoliberal globalization. The chapter concludes by exploring how dominant notions of masculinity and femininity change, both in the U.S. and across the globe.

The Gender Orders of Institutions

To understand how gender works in areas such as politics or the economy, scholars analyze institutions. Every institution has its own particular set of gender practices and norms that govern its operation. For example, in workplaces, gender shapes recruitment, social divisions, and job mobility (Connell 2009). Take industrial agriculture: Farm workers who are men often do heavy lifting, while farm workers who are women (and racially subordinated groups) are expected to bend down low to the ground to pick or sort produce for packing. Similarly, in white-collar offices in the United States, the majority of managers and technological workers are men, while women tend to work in marketing, sales, human service, or clerical jobs. Gender not only shapes who does what, but it also affects how people understand the character of different occupations. For example, managers are expected to act "masculine"—tough, decisive, and sometimes ruthless—regardless of whether they are men or not. By contrast, clerical workers are expected to act "feminine"—deferential and caring, no matter their gender identities. Treating some jobs as masculine and others as feminine establishes gendered expectations for workers' behaviors. These arrangements also separate those who identify as men and women into different positions. You will learn more about gender and work in Chapter 8.

Gender also operates differently across different institutions. For example, policing and public school teaching share many similarities. Both are interactive jobs managed by government agencies. Yet police are expected to be masculine (tough, physical, and assertive), while elementary school teachers are thought of as more feminine (nurturing and concerned).

The gender arrangements across different institutions are also related to each other. For example, the gendering of paid jobs, which determine people's wages and working hours, affects people's gendered responsibilities at home. In the United States, the institution of the family relies on long-standing expectations that women make childrearing their primary responsibility, while men focus on providing resources for the family to consume. Chapter 7 will explore the family in more detail. For now, suffice it to say that even though many families vary from this model, shared gender practices and expectations shape the institution as a whole.

In a given society, the predominant pattern of gender arrangements—that is, the combination of institutional norms and practices—is called the **gender order**. Thus, while individual jobs may be marked feminine or masculine, the gender order sorts the relationship between jobs, such as by marking physical and high-status work as masculine while marking

emotional or service work as feminine. Different gender orders entail distinct combinations of household production, paid work, and cultural ways of talking and thinking about gender.

Since understandings of masculinity and femininity are historically constructed and specific to particular places, gender orders change over time (Connell 1987). In the 1950s United States, the gender order positioned "good" middle and upper-class women to refrain from working outside the home, though many poor women and women of color worked for wages to support their families. A half-century later, it was considered normal for women to find paid jobs. Many white and middle- to upper-class women occupied professional jobs. During that same half-century, industrial jobs long considered to be male declined, the feminized position of *secretary* began to disappear, and the principle of equal opportunity grew increasingly important in the workplace.

These changes do not mean that there is no longer a gender order; they only mean that the gender order has changed. For instance, even as most women work for pay, the expectation remains that schoolteachers will act feminine and that police officers will act masculine—regardless of the gender identity of the individual worker. Women still predominate in jobs in the service sector and education, while men remain predominant in work such as construction and information technology. The gender order shifted to absorb women into the workforce while maintaining the gendering of jobs.

How Institutions Reinforce Inequalities

Institutions not only rely on gendered terms; they also have gendered effects. For instance, sociologist Joan Acker (1990) has shown that male power is built into corporate workplaces. Corporations often treat workers as if their jobs are their only concerns, assuming that workers are breadwinning men whose wives take care of family responsibilities. This expectation that workers will show dedication to employers by spending a substantial amount of time at work makes it difficult for people with caregiving responsibilities—particularly women—to succeed. The effects are gendered: For example, in the 2000s, women quit their jobs at Google at much higher rates than men, creating a workforce that was 70% male.

The government is also an institution with gendered effects. In the 1970s, many feminists looked to the state to protect them from men's discrimination, violence, and oppressions within the nuclear family, the workplace, and elsewhere. However, in the 1980s and 1990s, scholars pointed out that the state could also reinforce gender inequities, at times even co-opting feminist discourse as it did so. They argued that far from being neutral, the government and laws described the world from a masculine perspective and distributed greater influence to men than to women. Thus, the state reproduced the power of elite men and the subordination of women.

Feminist legal scholar Catharine MacKinnon was one of these critics. In 1982 and 1983, in a series of essays called "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State," MacKinnon questioned the supposed neutrality of the government by scrutinizing laws regarding rape and sexual consent. She showed that these laws defined rape in relation to men, framing the violation of

women as the transgression of a man's property by another man. Rather than treating women as persons with independent rights over their own bodies, these laws reflected women's value only as wives and mothers to men. These laws reinforced women's status as the property of men while silencing women's perspectives. The *claim* to be neutral hid the fact that such laws were made from men's points of view and designed to reinforce certain men's access to women's bodies. The issues MacKinnon raised over 35 years ago echo in contemporary controversies over rape on college campuses. Rape is still framed from men's point of view—even by judges—some of whom consider it a "natural" inclination for "unruly" young men that women should take responsibility to prevent. You will learn more about the relationship between gender and violence in Chapter 6.

In addition to reinforcing individual men's power, the state exercises its own power over women. In an essay called "Finding the Man in the State" (1995), Wendy Brown argued that the state was gendered in multiple ways: It was staffed by men; it used gendered ideologies in its laws and policies; and its institutions helped produce masculine dominance. The state limited women's participation in the highest realms of politics (at the time that Brown wrote her essay, only six out of the total 100 U.S. senators were women; in 2017, only 21 of 100 senators are women, although this is the largest number of women senators in U.S. history). It also exercised control over women's sexual and reproductive health. Extending MacKinnon's insight that the state ensured men's access to women, Brown showed that the state reinforced men's power to run the world and justified their prerogative to do so.

Even after the feminist movement of the 1970s relieved some women from some of their subordination to individual men in the household, women remained subject to masculinist state institutions. For example, state policies explicitly control women's bodies. Many conservative politicians in the U.S. promote laws that limit women's decisions regarding their own reproductive health. Several candidates for the 2016 Republican nomination for the U.S. presidency strongly argued for outlawing abortions, even in cases of rape. In terms of foreign policy, each Republican administration since the early 1980s has instituted a "Global Gag Rule" to prohibit funding to foreign aid organizations that provide abortion services. Through such laws, the U.S. government exerts power over the bodies of women around the world.

Another example of how state institutions can reinforce some men's economic and political power is the U.S. Social Security Act of 1935. The Act created the U.S. welfare system of the 20th century, but it separated welfare into two tiers. First, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) provided moderate economic support to poor single mothers on the premise that these women were "missing" a male provider. Second, the same legislation instituted Social Security to provide more generous old age entitlements to retired workers, who were almost all men. The act excluded farm workers and domestic workers, who were largely African Americans, immigrants from Asia and Latin America, and women. This welfare system reinforced men's higher-status roles as breadwinners, naturalized women's unpaid caretaking work for their families, and tied these gender inequalities to other inequities of race and immigration status. White men sustained both a

predominant role in the workplace and access to more economic resources than either women or people of color. The state, meanwhile, acted as the "protective father" in laws directed at women and children.

Gender Hegemonies

Hegemony refers to dominant ideologies that make the status quo appear beneficial for everyone while making inequalities appear natural and inevitable. This concept was initially developed by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1971) and English cultural theorist Raymond Williams (1977), both of whom used the term to analyze power relationships around social class. In many societies, they argued, the dominant did not rule by force alone. Rather, the dominant classes also reinforced their position through ideological efforts at cultivating *consent* to domination. Gramsci and Williams referred to the combination of force and consent as *hegemony*. For example, in the U.S., the belief that success comes from hard work is hegemonic. This belief both encourages people to work hard and makes it appear that poor people do not have a lot of money because they do not work hard. Circulated through schools, churches, and media, this widespread ideology generates consent for class inequality by framing wealth as an expression of merit rather than domination. To reproduce their hegemony, the dominant use these kinds of norms and symbols along with more overt forms of coercion and domination. According to Gramsci and Williams, much of this ideological work takes place in civic institutions, such as schools, churches, and government agencies.

But there are always alternative ways of thinking, and the legitimating ideology of any particular group is subject to opposition from those who do not buy into the present order. To the extent that the working classes question elites' right to rule, Gramsci and Williams argued, elites' hegemony loses sway, and their power comes into question. Opposing groups can also build support within civic institutions, including nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), churches, and so forth. When opposing groups are successful in persuading people that the current arrangements are not fair or legitimate, new ideologies gain leverage, overthrow previously dominant logics of power, and install new hegemonies in place of the old. The contested nature of hegemony means that any hegemony is *dynamic*: It is open to change.

Although the idea of hegemony was developed to understand class relations, it is also a useful concept for understanding gender because it emphasizes how norms and ideas help reproduce gender orders as well as enabling resistance to them. In *The Social Life of Gender*, we use the term **gender hegemony** to refer to a period's dominant ideology about gender relations, which in turn justify inequality. Like class hegemonies, gender hegemonies are located within a particular place and time, and like class power, they are *dynamic*.

Masculine and Feminine as Signifiers of Power

As mentioned above, Joan Scott (1988) argues that gender is "a primary way of signifying relations of power" (42). In other words, gender provides norms and symbols—known as **signifiers**—that alert people to what kinds

of positions are powerful and that make power relations appear natural. Gender is an ideal signifier of political power because, for many people, gender binaries seem to be sure and fixed, as if they are outside human construction. By linking power hierarchies to the supposedly innate differences between men and women, those in power make their control seem natural. Because gender is such a ready reference point, Scott argues, political history "gets enacted on the field of gender" (49).

For example, the term *Founding Fathers* links the writers and ratifiers of the U.S. Constitution to gendered ideals of fatherhood, implying that—like fathers—these individuals acted in the best interests of the nation. More generally, the president of a nation may be portrayed as a father figure, suggesting not only that is he a powerful decision maker but also that he has a legitimate right to tell citizens of that nation what to do. Other times, people use references to gender to express a ruler's fitness to rule. For instance, as former *Terminator* actor and bodybuilder Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger campaigned for George H.W. Bush's candidacy for president, and later in his own bid for California governor, he belittled his opponents by calling them "girly men." This quip was not simply meant to refer to Democrats' personal characteristics; it also described their political actions. When Schwarzenegger proclaimed in 2004 that Democrats were "economic girly men," he was using gendered language to express his support for American capitalism. Implying that masculine men support the free market, Schwarzenegger asserted the superiority of a free-market approach to economic policy and bolstered his claim to political power.

In his recent presidential campaign, Donald Trump also presented himself as hyper-masculine. *The Atlantic* magazine (Hamblin 2016) described him in this way:

> Trump is in many other ways a caricature of a man's man. He shouts and bullies and berates people. He speaks mostly in superlatives and mentions himself in most sentences. He plays golf and has a head full of hair, as men are supposed to. He hasn't gone full Putin and hunted shirtless on horseback with his press pool, but he has alluded to the size of his penis from the stage of a presidential primary debate.

While masculinity should have nothing to do with a person's ability to be president, people often use such masculine images to help define who is suited to lead. Gendering presidential power in this manner also makes it more difficult to imagine a woman in that role.

People also use gendered language more abstractly, such as to justify going to war. For example, when the United States invaded Iraq in 2003, members of the United States armed forces were framed as the masculine rescuers of the victims of the tyrant leader Saddam Hussein. At the time, many Americans felt that the United States should not risk the human costs of military intervention in the Middle East. Yet President George W. Bush justified his actions by describing himself as a protective father figure (Young 2003). He argued that the United States should invade Iraq and Afghanistan because its army was the masculine protector of two groups of victims: innocent civilians at risk of terrorism in the United States and "oppressed"

Muslim women under the thumb of terrorists abroad (Young 2003). These gendered framings not only legitimated U.S. intervention in the Middle East but also enabled President Bush to centralize his power at home. As another example, George Kennan, one of the architects of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States, imagined the Cold War as an "emotional, sexually charged struggle between a man and a woman" (Costigliola 1997). In a famous "long telegram" to the State Department in 1946, he portrayed Russians as a feminine people at the mercy of a despotic, predatory government that was applying an "unceasing pressure for penetration" into Western society. Such images are impactful insofar as they mobilize male/female oppositions as a reference point to understand and legitimate military power—and at other times, to break it down.

A History of Gender Hegemonies

Both gender orders and gender hegemonies are dynamic. There is no single, stable femininity or masculinity. Dominant arrangements and ideas are always subject to contestation and redefinition. Therefore, the shared meanings of gender—of what is masculine and feminine—change across place and time. As power gets contested, ideas about the "natural" predilections of men or women get remade. The history and examples that follow flesh out pivotal changes in gender hegemonies that have occurred in recent history in the United States and around the world.

This section traces gender hegemonies in five key periods: feudalism, industrialization, colonialism, the welfare state, and neoliberal globalization. Each subsection presents the gender hegemony that predominated at a given moment, the implications of that hegemony for who did what and who governed, and the ways that hegemony changed as political and economic circumstances undermined prior modes of control. The chapter focuses on the United States and Western Europe while also noting how the global dominance of those countries imposed Western gender hegemonies and intertwined Western ideas with gender orders in other parts of the world.

Feudalism and Dependency

Before the industrial revolution, the vast majority of both men and women in Europe worked under the feudal system as peasant farmers, sharecroppers, or serfs. Nearly everyone was economically dependent on the lords who owned the land where they worked. Politically, they were also considered *dependents* and were denied a voice in public affairs (Fraser and Gordon 1994). In the gender hegemony of the era, the nobility legitimated their power by describing themselves as father figures while treating the poor as dependent children.

Within poor families, relationships between men and women often echoed the arrangement between lords and peasants: Women were considered the property of their husbands' households and typically worked, without pay, for the benefit of the household (Kandiyoti 1988). While economic dependence was not necessarily considered masculine or feminine, women were expected to stay in the household and dutifully serve their husbands

and mothers-in-law. Nevertheless, both women and men helped with farming and occasionally other work, such as artisanship and crafts.

Likewise, noble families also considered women to be the property of their husbands. In fact, the term *family* comes from the Latin *familia*, which defined members of a household (including the estate, servants, and family members) as the property of a man. This patriarchal family organization provided a basic justification for early modern state formation: Modeled after a head of household, the king subordinated men and women alike in the family cum nation. However, the gender hegemony changed with the onset of capitalism.

Industrialization and the Independent Male Worker-Citizen

By the mid-19th century, with the growth of capitalism and the Industrial Revolution, a crisis took root in the economic foundations of the feudal system. This crisis transformed gender norms, reconstructing ideas about masculinity and femininity to support the emerging capitalist political economy. Industrialization eroded farm incomes, driving the lower classes to seek wage labor in the cities. As the poor urbanized, the model in which both men and women worked in the peasant economy was replaced by what Joan Scott and Louise Tilly (1978) call a **family wage economy**, that is, an economy in which one wage—the father's—was expected to maintain a family.

Both young men and women left the countryside and poured into towns and cities in search of jobs in factories. With so many people competing for jobs, workers faced miserable wages and working conditions. As a result, economist Heidi Hartmann (1976) argued, male workers—particularly in trades undergoing rapid technological changes or where women and men worked side by side—worried that they might lose control over the most desirable, skilled jobs in the labor force and that competition might drive their wages down. In the context of this struggle, men workers began to develop new gendered signifiers to support their demands for higher pay. Unions of male workers organized to exclude women from certain job sectors, such as manufacturing, and instead crowd them into less desirable sectors. To access the higher-status, higher-paying jobs, men pushed out their women competitors with the idea that women belonged in the home. In the wage economy, they argued, "real, responsible" men were providers charged with earning income to feed their families. That is, they were breadwinners. By tying the breadwinning role to masculinity while portraying women as dependents of men, male labor activists were able to demand a family wage sufficient to support a wife and children. At the same time, such divisions between men and women workers prevented them from unifying against employers.

Taking account of these changes, gender scholars Heidi Hartmann (1976) and Joan Scott (1988) argue that a new gender hegemony emerged in the industrial period. This hegemony centered not on the image of a family in which the nobility were fathers but instead on the breadwinning role of the male citizen. The male breadwinner model emerged

as formerly disenfranchised men sought citizenship. Along with better wages, men began demanding a greater say in political affairs. They supported these claims by highlighting their masculine status as responsible breadwinners and spokespeople for their families. By invoking and naturalizing the breadwinner model, men gained independence as workers and citizens, while women continued to be seen as dependent (on their husbands). Unable to speak for herself in public affairs, the female dependent became the opposite of the independent male citizen. Women went from being seen as partners in agricultural labor to being seen as "parasites" in the home, which hid the care and domestic labor they did to keep men alive. As men gained economic and political independence, dependence became stigmatized, taking on a new, feminized significance (as well as a racialized significance, as detailed below) that it had not held before.

The rise of the family wage helped nurture the ideology of the nuclear family, emphasizing women's duties in all areas related to the home, including children's education. Along with men's labor unions, various civil society institutions promoted idealized notions of the family and maternity. They demanded that women withdraw from paid work to fulfill their "appropriate" feminine duties in the domestic sphere. These norms helped stabilize the concept of the nuclear family with a man as the sole breadwinner and put women in a new kind of subordinated position.

Meanwhile, families who could not follow these ideals were considered deviant or less developed. While industrialization inaugurated new gender expectations, in reality, most working-class families were not able to subsist off only one wage. Among African Americans in the U.S. after the end of slavery, for instance, neither women nor children were exempt from labor. Women who did work outside the home in the 19th century were often disparaged using masculine terms. In a famous series of portraits, for instance, British diarist Arthur Munby sketched working-class women such as farmers, mine workers, and domestic workers as ferociously large, tough, and masculine. The implication was that these women had failed to achieve the ideal femininity of the time.

As the male breadwinner family became hegemonic in Europe and the United States, these ideals were exported in complex forms through colonialism abroad.

Colonialism and the Family of Man

The expansion of capitalism beyond Europe from the 18th century onward was fueled by European colonial intervention in countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Colonialism exported European and American ideas about gender to the rest of the world, interrupting the existing gender hegemonies in those places and imposing new ones. Colonialism helped intertwine ideologies of gender and race, which is explored further in Chapter 2. While we discuss colonialism more in Chapter 10, here, we describe how it reconstituted gender hegemonies as part of a global historical process.

As European countries and the United States sought to conquer other nations, they extended the gender hegemony that depicted white

middle-class European men as father figures of their own families to the level of international relations. They did so by describing European nations and the U.S. as "fathers" of a global **family of man**—a socially constructed hierarchy of human beings. To legitimate violent domination around the world, European nations described themselves as the "protectors" of a broad racial hierarchy in which people of other races were both behind historically and subordinate within the family, almost like children. According to this gendered, racialized logic, European nations were obligated to intervene abroad to teach "underdeveloped" peoples a more "modern" way of life.

As these racial ideologies became more dominant, framing white people as masculine fathers and Black and brown people as children, they also circulated back into European centers, especially as slave trades forcibly moved Black and brown bodies from the colonies to the metropolis. European upper- and middle-class people reinforced their economic privilege by symbolically distancing themselves from disenfranchised and marginalized people. They did this by denigrating the lower classes in gendered and racial terms. As historian Ann Stoler explains in her book *Race and the Education of Desire* (1995), colonialism reinforced the "cult of bourgeois domesticity" by creating boundaries between "good" bourgeois families—who supposedly had moral upbringing, order, and economic accumulation—and "bad" working-class and poor families. In the process, middle-class white women gained a new role as the protectors of the domestic sphere and the nurturers of boys who would one day become the new "fathers" of the family of man. This elevation of motherhood had important implications for white women, reinforcing the understanding that proper femininity was tied to motherhood and the home.

Meanwhile, in colonial contexts, imperialists mounted an assault on local gender traditions, demanding that people behave more like Europeans. In India, for example, British colonists claimed to be saving women from the traditional practice of immolating themselves on their husbands' funeral pyres (known as *sati*). They argued that, in the interest of more modern gender relations, Britain had a duty to intervene in and reshape Indian laws and cultural practices. Yet the imperial powers did such saving primarily through violent intervention, often doing great harm to the women they were ostensibly there to help.

While aspects of this colonial gender hegemony still persist today, it has not gone unchallenged. In many instances, people of colonized countries resisted the gendered terms used to legitimate intervention. As capitalism and colonialism spread, men and women also sought to assert other gender hegemonies. For instance, as we discuss further in Chapter 10, some women of Muslim countries actively choose to wear veils or avoid working outside of the home to practice what they see as a proper femininity and resist the imposition of Western norms. Some non-Western governments have also taken similar stances. In the past several decades, Iran has repeatedly expressed its difference from the United States by insisting that women wear veils in public, instituting gender segregation in parks and buses, and framing itself as a moral Islamic nation in contrast to what it depicts as the socially degenerate Western world.

The Welfare State: From Private to Public Patriarchy

In the latter years of global colonialism, a new gender hegemony also began to emerge in the United States. Starting in the aftermath of the American Civil War in the form of pensions for disabled veterans and war widows and then developing with the New Deal, the United States established the **welfare state,** a set of social assistance and insurance programs, universal citizenship entitlements, and public services intended to ameliorate class inequalities (Orloff 1996). At first, the welfare state upheld women's role as homemakers and men's role as breadwinners by treating men as the primary recipients of unemployment and retirement assistance and single women as recipients of aid for children and families. Reinforcing the image of men as independent, deserving breadwinners, state support provided to men tended to be greater than that provided to women.

Over time, however, government aid to families became increasingly stigmatized. Instead of being considered downtrodden widows, single mothers who received aid became marked as immoral because they did not have husbands and as lazy because they were unemployed. Thus, the welfare state promoted a gender hegemony that reinforced the norm of the nuclear family with the breadwinner father as its head. These programs protected the male breadwinner by making dependence on a man (private dependence) seem preferable to the vilified version of dependence on the state (public dependence).

At the same time, accepting aid from (or depending on) the state entailed its own form of subordination. For women who relied on public assistance, the welfare state itself acted as a "father figure." For instance, when women requested Aid for Families with Dependent Children (financial support for poor families with children), they had to submit to state assessment, which judged the quality of their homes and even their capacity as mothers. Social workers would come into women's homes and review their belongings and their parenting. Thereby, the government not only took on a more intimate presence in poor women's lives; it also put forth the idea that women who were not monitored by men needed to be monitored by public institutions. State welfare programs thus expanded the surveillance of poor, Black, and single women and stigmatized the recipients. While the shift from private to public patriarchy enabled some women to avoid depending on individual men, it also made them more susceptible to government control.

Neoliberal Globalization and the Responsible Woman Worker

Worldwide gender hegemonies shifted again with the rise of neoliberal globalization. **Neoliberalism** refers to ideas and policies that withdraw the state from public support and seek to replace it with market institutions. Starting in the 1980s and accelerating in the 1990s, governments around the world (led by Britain and the United States) embraced ideas of liberalization and free markets and withdrew many of the entitlements and services that had been associated with the welfare state. The privatization of welfare provisions in the U.S. also coincided with the dramatic rise of international

free trade agreements, the offshoring of production to nations with low labor costs, and the worldwide privatization of public goods ranging from healthcare to land to water. Market institutions gained power worldwide, vastly expanding the influence of multinational corporations and increasing the globalization of trade (Pyle and Ward 2003). Throughout the postcolonial world, meanwhile, institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund also promoted fiscal austerity and the withdrawal of public support for the poor.

As in prior historical periods, these shifts relied on and promoted new ideas about femininity and masculinity. This time, however, the gender hegemony emphasized women's role as self-sufficient producers. Many governments shifted from portraying women as mothers who should stay at home and look after their children to framing them as responsible workers and micro-entrepreneurs. This image of women as dependable and hardworking reinforced their growing role as wage labor for transnational corporations. On the one hand, women gained new opportunities as wage earners outside the home and more power within families. On the other hand, governments justified their withdrawal of support by referencing the self-sufficiency of these new "responsible" women, even as transnational corporations, global media, and market institutions remained dominated by men. The new femininity also suggested that women, not governments or corporations, were accountable for their own well-being. Across the globe, women faced a catch-22: States had abandoned them as self-sufficient wage earners, while corporations did not pay women the family wages that men had earned in the past because they did not consider women solely financially responsible for their families.

During the neoliberal period, being a good mother also became less and less linked to staying in the home. Worldwide, many women went out to earn money, with poor women often working in the informal sector or through migrant labor. In nations such as Mexico, Bangladesh, and China, women came to dominate sectors including export manufacturing and micro-entrepreneurship. Increasingly, women from such countries also moved to other places in search of income, often finding jobs as domestic workers and leaving their children behind (Dreby 2010; Hochschild 2005; Parreñas 2001). While these women earned more income and became more mobile than their predecessors, they still remained subject to multinational corporations, foreign states, employers, and trafficking networks.

In the United States, neoliberalism reinforced the idea that welfare dependency was pathological, especially for women of color. In 1996, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), otherwise known as "welfare reform," ended welfare as an entitlement, requiring recipients to begin working after two years of receiving benefits. It also dismantled AFDC and placed a lifetime limit on benefits paid by federal funds. Whereas AFDC was initially designed to help single mothers avoid having to work, by the 1990s, the dominant political rhetoric argued that these same women should get "off welfare and into work." PRWORA also penetrated the private sphere by explicitly encouraging two-parent families and discouraging unmarried women from having children. With the ideological power and economic feasibility of the male breadwinning model on the wane, the

worker became the universal social subject for both men and women. In turn, those who did not work faced punitive sanctions.

Mothers who received welfare were stereotyped as Black, unmarried teenagers who did not take care of themselves. Though women with such characteristics faced significant barriers to entering the job market, their economic struggles were portrayed as their own fault and not that of the state, the economy, or racial exclusion (Fraser and Gordon 1994: 327). Yet as Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein (1997) show in a study of mothers receiving welfare assistance, the prescribed transition from welfare to work was not, in fact, economically feasible. Rather, most people used governmental assistance because the kinds of low-wage work available to women did not provide sufficient income to support a family. In the neoliberal market economy, women needed *multiple* means of income to survive. In sum, the notion of welfare dependency came to describe women unable to make ends meet in the neoliberal economy, making their problems appear individual and moral rather than structural and economic.

The Ambiguities of "Progress"

Gender does not stand on its own but is intertwined with the state, the economy, and social movements. In this chapter, we showed how gender hegemonies reflect and reinforce power relations, generating consent for unequal relations between men and women, among men, and among women. Because these hegemonies are unstable and incomplete, they can always be contested, and they can change dynamically over time. The sections above traced key moments of gender change in feudalism, industrialization, colonialism, the welfare state, and neoliberalism. These five historical periods illustrate the need to account for how gendered ideas inform power relationships across time and geographic locations, often in intersection with race and class. To challenge existing ideas about gender, feminists must question the notion that differences between men and women are natural and instead historicize and locate specific understandings of gender difference.

Examining transformations in gender hegemonies over the last few centuries, some may be tempted to ask whether neoliberal gender relations have benefited women. By some measures, they have. Paid work has helped millions of women escape political disenfranchisement, exclusion from the workplace, and domestic abuse. Women have gained new access to income and new voices in politics, both as activists and as leaders.

But Nancy Fraser (2009) reminds us that corporations have also appropriated the idea that working can help liberate women and have used this idea to incorporate women into the low-wage global workforce. The more people expect corporations to liberate women, the more they may let governments withdraw from the responsibility to promote greater gender equality. As Sylvia Walby (1997) shows in her book *Gender Transformations,* increased economic opportunities for women in the United States and Europe have been accompanied by new forms of inequality. As upper- and middle-class white women gained new income, positions in the labor market, and

political sway, poorer women and those in postcolonial countries came to work at jobs that were more uncertain, lower paid, and had fewer benefits than those once enjoyed by working-class men. As we discuss in more detail in Chapter 8, women are now subject to abuse within the workplace, often working long hours at factories or in housecleaning without basic labor protections such as rest breaks or access to clean water and air. As control over the global economy and politics increasingly shifts into the hands of ultra-rich elites, even women who are active in politics may have less influence over the kinds of policies that matter for their lives.

In sum, new gender hegemonies represent both opportunities and constraints. As in each of the other historical periods we described, neoliberalism has shifted the ways people understand masculinity and femininity, with repercussions for who does what and who gets what. Like previous political–economic systems, neoliberalism recreates gender differences to legitimate power inequalities. While new ways of thinking about femininity and masculinity can be freeing for some men and women, references to gender still rely on gender binaries that can reinforce inequalities between the people and activities that are marked as feminine and those that are marked as masculine. Before proclaiming that changes in gender relations are a step toward justice, one must consider how gender continues to be redefined in potentially pernicious ways.

KEYWORDS

Family of man 12
Gender hegemony 7
Gender order 4

Hegemony 7
Institutions 2
Neoliberalism 13

Signifiers 7
Welfare state 13

QUESTIONS

1. What kinds of gender arrangements are at work in contemporary universities? How is labor divided, and who in the university is expected to act in feminine ways? In masculine ways? Reflect on how gender terms shape universities and power relations within them.

2. Give examples of gender terms you see at work in U.S. policies and politics today. Which groups are portrayed in masculine terms and which in feminine terms? How do these representations legitimate power relationships between these groups?

3. What does a comparison of the welfare state and neoliberalism reveal about the state as a gendered institution as well as the possibilities for feminist critique?

4. To what extent do you believe there is gender justice in the 21st-century United States? How about in the world? What has gotten better for men and women, and what has gotten worse since the 1970s and the welfare state period? What remains problematic about the ways we understand masculinity and femininity and the ways we use these norms in the political sphere? Why?

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