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Claremont McKenna College  
Arguments for the Abolition of Gender

Submitted to  
Professor Adrienne Martin

by Antonio Pineda

for  
Senior Thesis  
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## ABSTRACT

Throughout the process of writing this thesis, I have struggled with whether or not to use the term “gender abolition.” In one sense, the term itself initially piqued my interest in the topic. I remember the first time I heard of gender abolition, I had an immediate intuitive resistance. I thought it was another manifestation of the disconnect that exists between academia and society at large. However, my feelings quickly changed when the concept was explained to me in my sophomore year philosophy seminar. My incredulousness transformed to excitement when I realized gender abolition was actually simply the full realization of gender equality. I loved how provocative the term was, and my friends skeptical reactions when I would bring the topic up in conversation. Gender abolition was also an intellectual challenge, as I had minimal exposure to gender theory prior to college. Everything I was learning was new and made me confront issues I had never questioned before.

Yet, as I began to get further along in my writing process, I again began to question the effectiveness of the term. I worried that abolition was too trendy of a term. It reminded me of the echo chamber of social media, particularly at a liberal arts school in California. I thought back to my initial feelings and conversations I had with others and started to fear that the term could distract from my argument. I worried people would either write off the topic immediately, or uncritically embrace it. As someone who loves argumentation, I did not know which was worse, and upon reflection I realized I could not fault people for either of these positions. Abolition is a powerful word intimately

connected with the struggle against slavery. Who wouldn't want to be an abolitionist? At the same time, the term has deep legal connotations, so I understand why someone's initial thought could be: and now they want to make being a man/woman illegal?!

Despite these reservations, I decided to embrace the term. I think there is a very profound duality and tension at the heart of gender abolition. In one way, it forcefully articulates the worthy and (seemingly) uncontroversial idea that men and women should be treated as equals. At the same time, the scope of abolition makes clear how deeply gender based injustice runs, and how hesitant we all are to truly accept what is morally required of us. Perhaps even more so than race, the inequalities between the genders is assumed to be a natural consequence of biology.

Overall, my thesis aims to demonstrate that the full realization of human advancement as understood from a Marxist perspective, as well as within the framework of Amartya Sen's *Development as Freedom* requires the abolition of gender. I argue that as long as gender endures, neither Sen nor Marx's vision for the development of humanity has been achieved. I begin by offering my own operative definition for gender. This definition is not a normative definition laying out how I believe gender should function, but rather how gender does function within our patriarchal world. Chapter two focuses on the meaning of gender abolition. I question the legitimacy of the way we currently conceptualize biological sex, which I argue erases the existence of intersex people. I also consider the position of transgender people within my framework, and their relationship with gender abolition. The second section of this chapter draws heavily upon, and offers abolitionist readings of Cheryl Harris's *Whiteness as Property* and Angela Davis's *Women and Capitalism*.

Having defined these two key concepts, I transition to my analysis of Marx and Sen's theories. Looking first at Marx I argue that despite the fact that he never discusses the concept of gender explicitly, his call for the abolition of the division of labor found in *The German Ideology* is effectively an argument in support of the complete dismantling of gender. I also argue that the ideal of human emancipation articulated in *On the Jewish Question* necessitates gender abolition. I then shift to Sen's *Development as Freedom*, which defines development as the removal of forms unfreedoms, one of which, I argue, is gender. I chose to focus on Marx and Sen because I think there is a significant juxtaposition between the two philosophers' overall beliefs. Most obviously, Marx held that capitalism was the source of great degradation for the human race, while Sen believes capitalism has the ability to promote freedom. I believe this strengthens my argument because whether or not the reader has faith in capitalism, it is clear that gender must be abolished to maximally advance the human condition.

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## CHAPTER 1: My operative definition of Gender

In furthering my argument for gender abolition, I will define gender as the societally and institutionally enforced construct that delegates duties, privileges, and expectations based on biological sex assigned at birth. The “morally arbitrary” characteristic of biological sex ascribes onto every individual a binary conception of what constitutes a proper life. Gender is taught and entrenched as children grow up, as failure to conform behaviors with gender-based expectations can have dramatic social, economic and legal ramifications. Fundamentally, gender offers to men much greater freedom in actualizing, defining, and pursuing their desires, while perpetuating women’s servility. Moreover, gender is also a major force in shaping the way we come to understand what we believe that we desire. Critically, the burdens associated with gender are not felt equally by all women and compound with other forms of vulnerability (race, class positions, disability) to create unique challenges.

Here, it is important to point out that this is not intended to be a normative definition of gender. This is not what I believe gender should be, but what I believe gender is at present. My definition is not what I believe that gender can be in its best form - a recognition and identification with our internal and external selves. I intend for this definition to reflect the historical and cultural realities that find their root in the restrictive gender binary, not to replicate these unjust forces. If this definition seems uninclusive of transgender people, that is a reflection of the historical fact that gender in its traditional construction *has not been inclusive of transgender people*. It may seem counterintuitive

but in fact, the courage of transgender individuals to live life as their truest selves is one of the most revolutionary forces (through the erosion of the linkage between biological sex and gender presentation) furthering gender abolition.

As I see it, there are two main components of gender abolition - two different avenues through which we can dismantle the most restrictive elements of gender. By gender abolition, it is not meant that presenting in a particular way will be met with some type of sanctions because it is now against the law. Instead, abolition in this context refers to change that fundamentally alters the way in which gender functions. This can occur either through eroding the linkage between biological sex assigned at birth and gender, or by changing the relationships of dominance and subservience that characterize the traditional gender binary. This will be explored in greater detail in chapter two.

## **“DELEGATION”**

Turning now to my definition of gender, I first want to focus on the delegation of “duties, privileges, and expectations.” I do not aim to give a complete account of all the duties, privileges and expectations that come along with gender as presently constructed. Instead, I will highlight some of the aspects that have the most impact on individuals ability to achieve the life that they desire, while simultaneously respecting and affirming their human dignity. These three concepts, duties, privileges, and expectations, are all intimately connected. For example, the burden of women’s “duties” serve to perpetuate male “privilege.” This is seen in Karl Marx’s observation that, as with the division of labor generally, men are better able to attain material wealth by “disposing of the labor

power” of women within the household (German Ideology 159). In other words, the duty of domestic labor shouldered by women privileges men economically. Moreover, gender based assumption of “duty” and “privilege” both inextricably linked to the “expectations” of both parties. I choose to separate these terms not to suggest that they are different, but instead because each plays a specific role in my definition. Additionally, the phrase “delegates expectations, duties, rights, and privileges” aims to situate my definition in the context of the discourse of distributive justice.

Focusing first on duty, one of the main areas of consensus across feminist thought is the recognition that gender places a disproportionate share of unpaid domestic labor on the shoulders of women to the benefit of the male breadwinner. This is one of the foundational assumptions of the traditionally gendered family. Plainly, gender delegates far greater domestic duties to women than to men. Susan Moller Okin, one of the greatest modern feminist thinkers, opens her book *Justice, Gender and the Family*, by attributing inequality between men and women to this particular aspect of gender. Moller Okin states, “Underlying and intertwined with [the inequalities between men and women] is the unequal distribution of the unpaid labor of the family (Okin 4).” This perspective is not limited to modern feminist thinkers. In *The German Ideology*, Karl Marx also contends that the division of labor found within the family is the basis for the division of labor more broadly, which he views as the root of all inequality (German Ideology 158, 197). This will be explored in much greater depth in chapter 3.

Critically, the justice of this unequal distribution of domestic duty has long been left unchallenged, even among esteemed contemporary philosophers like John Rawls. Okin argues that Rawls fails to sufficiently address how gender fits in his theory of

justice put forward in his seminal work *A Theory of Justice*. As Moller Okin points out, Rawls “specifically mentions the family as a just institution - not, however, to consider whether the family “in some form” is a just institution but to assume it (Okin 94).” This issue is compounded by the fact that the subjects of Rawls’ hypothetical “original position” are all “head of families (Okin 94).” Based on this critical omission, Okin holds that even if those in the original position adopted Rawls’ two principles, they would fail in creating entirely just institutions as the family is a major institution itself - one that Rawls regards as foundational to developing a sense of justice in all citizens (Okin 95-97).

Turning now to the delegation of privilege, it is important to recognize that definitionally, the term implies that some occupy a relatively superior position as compared to others. Thinking of gender in this way is useful for a couple of reasons. Firstly, conceiving of privilege as something that is distributed on the basis of gender makes explicit the power differential that exists between men and women in patriarchal society. Gender as I define it implies a power differential between men and women. If this does not exist, then gender no longer exists in its current form. For example, men generally hold more economic and political power than women. This power differential is largely based on the social roles that men occupy as a result of their privileged position within the traditionally gendered family. If this power differential ceased to exist, it would require that gender no longer assigned social roles that leave women with relatively weaker agency as compared to men. More concretely, this means that if we were to eliminate gender privilege, we would likely have to deconstruct the delegated social roles that define gender itself.

At the same time, this way of conceptualizing gender also makes clear the injustice that necessarily exists within gender. No one can question that men and women are equally deserving of dignity by virtue of our shared humanity. Yet, the idea of privilege distributed based on gender is inherently opposed to the notion of human dignity. All non consensual relationships of dominance and servility are inherently degrading, and this is exactly what gender is. First of all, gender is unconsensual in the sense that no one other than transgender people explicitly chooses their gender. Instead, gender is assigned at birth based on biological sex. If we understand consent as the act of “giv[ing] assent or approval,” it is clear that a newborn cannot possibly consent to gender, and therefore their delegated position of dominance or servility (Merriam Webster). Moreover, if gender ceased to be degrading, then what would be left could no longer be properly referred to as gender so long as we maintain our current understanding (the rationale for this claim mirrors the logic put forward in the previous paragraph). Fundamentally, gender implies coercive hierarchy.

This observation is supported by Adrienne Martin in her unpublished paper, *Against Mother’s Day and Employee Appreciation Day and Other Representations of Oppressive Expectations as Opportunities for Excellence and Beneficence*. It is important to note that although not all women are mothers, the dominant, patriarchal construction of gender is largely built upon the traditionally gendered family. Many of the values that our society has imposed on mothers are also imposed on women generally without distinction. For example, one of the primary assumptions of motherhood is presence of certain domestic skills such as cooking, cleaning, and ability to handle childcare (Martin 4). Yet, these are many of the same qualities that society generally attributes to all

women. This is evident in women's occupational over representation in the caregiving industry which includes childcare, cleaning, and nursing (Erik Olin Wright). For this reason, the implicit assumptions connected to motherhood applies to women that are not mothers themselves. Consequently, observations regarding motherhood provide critical insights into gender generally.

Returning to Martin's paper, one of her foundational assertions is the idea that motherhood within the traditionally gendered family places "oppressive expectations" on mothers (Martin 5). Most forcefully, as I have mentioned, an expectation of domesticity defines what is normatively required of mothers within the traditionally gendered family (Martin 4). Implicit in domesticity is the willingness to sacrifice your own self interest for the good of others. Martin points this out stating, "when push comes to shove, you will put your child's interests before anyone else's, including your own (Martin 4)." Martin supports this point by examining mothers day advertisements that by and large "depic[t] an onslaught of domestic labor, demanding and needy kids, helpless male partners, and exhausted moms (Martin 4)." It is with this background that Martin rightfully asserts that the traditional idea of mothers as "self-sacrificing care-givers, nurturers, and homemakers (Martin 4)."

Given that motherhood's historical and contemporary construction mandates that mothers must sacrifice their own interests in order to fulfill their duty to the family, "mother" is a position of servitude within the hierarchy that characterizes that traditionally gendered family. Critically, this hierarchy places men in a dominant position (delegation of privilege along the basis of gender), while promoting women;s subservience. As I have stated, the assumptions of motherhood also apply to women

generally. Women are frequently evaluated on these same qualities even if they are not mothers. If we understand the assumptions of the traditionally gendered family as the foundation for the construction of gender, then it is clear that the dynamics that exist within the family apply to all women (Okin 101). Therefore, the delegation of privilege that exists within the family corresponds to the patriarchal hierarchy that all of us exist within regardless of whether we have children. Flatly, the delegation of privileges that I point out in my definition is a recognition of the definite hierarchy found in the concept of gender. As presently constructed, gender is antithetical to the idea of equality between men and women.

Transitioning, in speaking of expectations, I must first point out that gender is an inherently social phenomena. It is an unending process that we all, at least passively, participate in. Unlike biological sex, which has a scientific basis (xx vs xy chromosomes), gender is constructed within collectives. There is no reason why gender *must* take the form that it does currently, other than the historical fact that we have given the concept a specific meaning collectively over time. Gender very well could have taken a different form. With this in mind, it is clear that gender cannot be separated from its expectations, as expectations are simply a manifestation of the fact that gender exists only through human sociality and judgements.

I should also differentiate between two types of expectations. There are the expectations that we have of others, and the expectations that we have regarding our own worth and what we deserve. These are two closely related concepts, with expectations of self frequently enforcing gender, and expectations of others underwriting distributive injustices. Understanding that expectations characterize gender is critical to both

understanding gender enforcement, as well as gender from the perspective of distributive justice. I will focus on enforcement shortly, but first I want to think about expectations as being “delegated.”

What relevance do gendered expectations have to distributive justice? Gender imposes on every human a normative conception of what constitutes a proper life. Put simply, gender tells everyone what their place in the world is and how they should live. This does not only include the actions that we should take, but also what responses our actions rightfully merit from others. Put another way, this means that gender shapes how we perceive what we deserve. In the context of distributive justice, this is important because it speaks to why different distributive disparities exist between men and women, and how they go unnoticed and unchallenged. The delegation of a specific expectations based on biological sex translates directly into material differences. In this way, gender based delegation of expectations facilitates the unjust distribution of social goods in a way that is to the benefit of men only.

Concretely, this translates to wealth given women’s overrepresentation within “caregiving” professions that are typically undervalued, and more vulnerable place within the workforce. This works on many levels. To give a few examples, as I mentioned in the section on privilege, one effect of gender is occupational segregation that is characterized in part by women occupying a disproportionately large share of caregiving jobs (Olin Wright). Here, expectations function within the individual by shaping people's ideas of what they should aspire to, based on the characteristics they are normatively expected to possess and develop according to gender. These careers are then consequently devalued because of the way that patriarchy places greater importance on typically male

professions (Olin Wright). In this case, expectations function by shaping individuals ideas of what they deserve. Men, who have historically had control of how the world is ordered, feel their occupations are more important. Simultaneously, women are conditioned to expect that their work is less valuable and that they deserve less.

Another reason for why women's economic position is weaker than men's on aggregate is the domestic burdens shouldered by women. This unjust burden makes it more difficult for women to participate in the workforce in a way that largely does not apply to men. Women may not choose to enter the workforce at all, particularly considering the fact that the traditionally gendered family implies a father in the formal labor market, while the mother handles the enormous amount of unpaid labor that exists within the household. Moreover, workplaces have historically been ordered around this assumption, as evidenced by office hours and parental leave policies, that allow workers little ability to handle domestic labor as well as wage labor (Okin 4). Additionally, women may choose to leave the labor force because of these very same burdens. In these cases, expectations determine what each member of the family's role should be. This is enforced by expectations that are imposed by others, but here I am only focusing on expectations of ourselves. Clearly, the implicit expectations present in gender hold great weight in determining the distribution of economic power between men and women.

Beyond economic power, expectations also impact self respect and our ability to prioritize our own desires. In *Feminist Contractarianism*, Jean Hampton cites a study by Carol Gilligan that concluded that gender creates distinct "interests," in the same way as the division of labor. Hampton uses the example of two children, Jack and Amy, to illuminate the way in which society creates distinct ways of thinking for men and women

from the time that they are children (Hampton 231). Jack's response to the question of balancing "responsibility to oneself and responsibility to others" prioritizes self-interest (Hampton 228). On the other hand, Amy's response shows much more deference to the needs of others. However, while this may seem preferable, Amy's answer fails to place weight upon her own desires (Hampton 230). Unlike Jack, she is not as confident about the value of her interests. These two contrasting responses signify two separate, gendered ways of constructing morality (Hampton 229). Hampton makes clear her support for the idea that gender influences our self-conceptions of morality stating that the children's respective answers serve to justify their future dominance/subservience (Hampton 231). This is an example of how the delegation of expectations on the basis of gender affects the distribution of social goods other than money - in this case self respect and agency.

## **ENFORCEMENT**

Shifting, I now want to focus on what I mean when I say that gender as a construct is socially and institutionally enforced. Socially, one major source of gender power is found within the family and between peers. What exactly do I mean by enforced? As stated in my definition, inextricably linked to gender as presently constructed is the idea that men and women have different normative expectations governing their behavior and presentation. Put another way, gender is a reflection of the reality that men and women have imposed upon them different conceptions of how they should live and behave. These conceptions of what qualifies as a proper life based on

gender roles are not toothless. As Erik Olin Wright writes in his paper, *In Defense of Genderlessness*,

*“for gender relations to exist there must be socially recognized norms that enforce these relations through various kinds of affirmations and sanctions... if there are no normative pressures to behave in particular ways because of one’s sex, then gender relations do not exist” (Olin Wright).”*

What do these affirmations and sanctions look like in our daily lives? I am sure that we can all think of instances from our childhood where a young boy was teased for interest in something that was perceived to be feminine. Similarly, I would assume that we all witnessed times where young girls were excluded from spaces or activities that are frequently conceived of as masculine. This is an example of social sanctions that work to enforce gender roles.

On the other hand, affirmations can be seen in parents encouraging certain activities over others, or the toys they buy for their children. These are just a few small examples of how virtually everyone encounters the force of gender throughout their development. Certainly, experiences and pressures like these can be very formative in what we come to believe is acceptable for us to desire. Our peers play a major role in shaping the people we become, from what we value to our self image. However, there are much more insidious examples of how the social enforcement of unjust gender roles limit individuals ability to live their most fulfilling life.

Susan Burton is an activist working to provide support to formerly incarcerated women. Her memoir, *Becoming Ms. Burton*, offers a lot of important, personal insight into the unique gender based obstacles poor black women face in pursuit of the best life

possible. In particular, her discussion of teen motherhood illuminates the oppressive force of the domestic duties that are central to the unjust construction of womanhood. For example, Susan Burton decided that she wanted to return to school in order to advance her career opportunities (Burton, 44). However, when she told the class that she had a baby over the summer, her teacher replied “then why are you here” in front of the entire class (Burton, 44). The shame Burton felt as a result of this comment pushed her to drop out (Burton, 44). Burton identifies that this experience is not unique to her stating, “too often, black girls like me were considered dropouts but were really “push-outs”—pushed out of opportunities that school should have provided (Burton 45).”

This excerpt exemplifies two separate levels of gender enforcement simultaneously, institutional and interpersonal. On an institutional level, it is important to note that there is no reason that parenthood and pursuing education must be incompatible in a just society. Nevertheless, the unequal, unpaid domestic labor that characterizes the traditionally gendered family, is one of the most important factors limiting women’s agency (Okin 4). One of the most fundamental assumptions of gender/the traditionally gendered family is that women will take care of children while men work. As Susan Moler Okin puts it in *Justice, Gender and the Family*, gendered society is organized in a way such that “serious and committed members of the workforce (regardless of class) do not have a primary responsibility or even shared responsibility, for the rearing of children (Okin 5).” This assumption, which is only one of the many implicit in gender, is evident of the ordering of virtually all of our institutions, not just the workplace (Okin). With background, it is evident that free, quality childcare would help take the force out of this particular aspect of gender. The fact that this is not a social good provided by the state

speaks is testament to the patriarchy that affords more weight to securing men's agency and interest than women's.

Education is another institution in which we see the very same consequences of gender left unchallenged. Okin argues that this is evidenced in schools lack of attentiveness to parents holding in jobs in scheduling matters (Okin 5). I want to make a slightly different, but related point. As I mentioned, if our government cared about promoting women's agency, free childcare would be a great step, and would also simultaneously erode that aspect of gender. Government's unwillingness to secure childcare as a right is one of the most profound ways that gender as currently constructed is maintained and enforced. In this way, gender takes women's subservience for granted and does not seek to promote their unique needs.

Returning to Susan Burton's experience of high school motherhood, if free childcare was seen as a right, it is far more likely that she would have been able to finish school.

Although, this is not only for the straightforward reason that it would be a burden off her shoulder.

Perhaps just as importantly, the normative gendered assumption that she was failing to fulfill her motherly duties by being at school would most likely be less powerful. On the interpersonal level, Burton's teacher's cruel statement exemplifies the way in which shame is weaponized to enforce the gendered expectation and duty of motherhood. Her teachers' words would not have had the same biting force if women were expected, like men, to seek to advance their career prospects, rather than prioritize their familial duties. But in a world where gender demands and assumes that women take

on far more than their fair share within the family, Burton's admirable act of returning to school despite all the obstacles was met with ridicule.

This perspective is supported by Erik Olin Wright who states, "gender norms impose real costs on people who violate those norms and this restricts access to the social means for a flourishing life for people whose gender-linked dispositions do not correspond to those normative expectations (Olin Wright)." In this case, Burton's teacher's enforcement of sexist expectations of gender created a hostile learning environment that drove Burton to drop out, which was one of the primary factors that left Burton vulnerable to prostitution and consequently incarceration. The importance of gender can not be understated in how Burton's life would develop over the foreseeable future.

At the same time, it is imperative to point out that, as a poor black woman, Burton faced gender oppression in a way that was distinct from what a rich, or a white woman would experience. Burton observed the dynamic between white-teen mothers who wanted to keep their child rather than giving it up for adoption. Burton recalled that the nurses tried to talk them out of it arguing that their baby would find a loving home (Burton, 43). The nurses would also emphasize all the things the mother would miss out upon by keeping the child such as a social life, college and marriage (Burton, 43). However, when Burton told the nurse she wanted to keep the kid, she did not receive any advice. As Susan Burton pessimistically observes, "apparently, in 1966, wonderful parents and wonderful homes weren't waiting for little black babies. Nor did I have a wonderful rest of my life full of opportunities to return to (Burton, 43)." This is an example of the unique way the burden of motherhood is felt by poor black women given

the way in which race and class compound with gender. Because of her race and class, motherhood was pushed upon Susan Burton more strongly than it would have been for a white woman.

For this reason, my definition would not be complete without the clause that states, “the burdens associated with gender are not felt equally by all women and compound with other forms of vulnerability (race, class positions, disability) to create unique challenges.” This sentence is included to account for the idea of intersectionality first articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her groundbreaking publication *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*. In this work, Crenshaw focuses on the failings of antidiscrimination law to adequately address the ways in which black women are uniquely vulnerable given that the “the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism (Crenshaw 1-2).” Crenshaw argues that the orthodox “single-axis” analysis of discrimination centers the most privileged subgroup within the larger body, thereby erasing the experiences of those with multiple identities through which they experience oppression (Crenshaw 1-2). In other words, the dominant mode of understanding sexism is based on the experiences of white women, resulting in black women’s unique burdens being left outside of the scope of discourse on gender. It is from this background that we arrive at the “Crenshaw imperative,” which asks of us to “focus attention on the predicament of the most disadvantaged classes of people (Martin 4-5).”

Why is intersectionality important? Without intersectionality, we would have an incomplete and inaccurate understanding of gender. As exemplified in Burton’s memoir,

without an intersectional perspective we are unable to understand the unique needs of black women, or poor women, or undocumented women for example. Not only would we be at an epistemological disadvantage, but the absence of an intersectional perspective is responsible for the failures of policies that attempt to remedy gender based burdens faced by women.

## **GENDER: “MORALLY ARBITRARY” AND ASSIGNED AT BIRTH**

In my definition, I refer to gender as a “morally arbitrary” characteristic. For context, this phrase has its roots in John Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice*. In considering distributive justice, Rawls asserts that, “no one deserves his place in the distribution of natural assets any more than he deserves his initial starting place in society (Rawls 274).” In Rawls’ view, the unearned advantages that some of us have, whether it be natural talent, familial heritage, or race just to name a few, should have no impact on the “distributive shares” that we receive in a just society (Rawls 274). As Rawls puts it, “the initial endowment of natural assets and the contingencies of their growth and nurture in early life are arbitrary from a moral point of view (Rawls 274).” Moreover, in the original position, behind the veil of ignorance, “morally arbitrary” characteristics are supposed to be obscured so that participants will make rational decisions informed by the recognition that they could potentially find themselves in the position of the most disadvantaged (Rawls 118-119).

In *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, Okin highlights the shocking lack of attention that gender receives in the rest of *A Theory of Justice*, which may escape those reading

the text with an inattention to gender and feminist theory (Okin 91). As Moller Okin points out Rawls fails to explicitly mention gender in his discussion of morally arbitrary/irrelevant characteristics (Moller Okin 91). Moreover, Rawls also leaves the family outside the scope of justice by assuming it to be a just institution (Okin 97). Consequently, by assuming the family to be a just institution, Rawls ensures that gender based injustice will persist even after the application of his two principles of justice (Okin 99). This assumption is particularly concerning in the context of Rawls' framework considering that he holds the family to be the primary institution responsible for the moral education of children (Okin 98). However, if the family fails to be just, then children are likely internalizing injustice from a morally corrupt source (Okin 100).

Nevertheless, Okin acknowledges that, "Rawls has made it clear that sex is one of those morally irrelevant contingencies that are hidden by the veil of ignorance (Okin 91)." However, she contends that it is possible that gender is not a morally arbitrary characteristic as understood in the context of the original position (Okin 102). This objection finds its roots in the idea that a "morally irrelevant characteristic" is one that exists "such that human beings really can hypothesize ignorance of this fact about them (Okin 105)." In line with other feminist thinkers, Okin asserts that women have a "distinct standpoint" that cannot be properly accounted for without the actual inclusion of women (Okin 106-107). For this reason, even if the family is subject to Rawls' two principles and gender is hidden by the veil of ignorance, it is entirely possible that gender injustice will persist (Okin 101-102). As Okin argues, dismantling this form of injustice requires that "those in the original position must take special account of the perspective of women (Okin 102). If this task is not one that men can accomplish and can only be

done by women because of the specificity of their lived experience, it would seem that holding gender to be “morally irrelevant” in the Rawlsian sense still presents profound challenges to the attainment of justice.

My inclusion of the term “morally arbitrary” is not a repudiation of this argument by Moller Okin. I certainly agree, and will specifically acknowledge multiple times in this paper, that one consequence of gender is the development of uniquely male and female standpoints. I use the phrase to make clear that gender should not dictate our life prospects, what we deserve, or what we receive. In other words, I use this term to further tie my argument to the broader discourse of distributive justice. Critically, “what we receive” does not only refer to wealth, but also respect, autonomy, and opportunities to define the ends we wish to pursue in life. If we accept gender as a “morally arbitrary” characteristic in this sense, then there is an injustice in using this characteristic as the basis for the distribution of social goods. Likewise, if gender is morally arbitrary, then using it as a basis for the delegation of “duties, privileges and expectations” is also clearly wrong.

Now turning to perhaps the most controversial part of my definition, I state that gender is based on “biological sex assigned at birth.” However, as I mentioned in my introduction, many readers may feel that this definition is uninclusive of transgender people. I again want to emphasize that this is because I have sought to give an operational definition of gender rather than a normative one. My intention has been to define gender in its most traditional sense, with a particular focus on the ways in which gender degrades agency and human dignity. My definition is a reflection of how gender has historically functioned and continues to operate, rather than what gender should be (if it should exist

at all). Undeniably, transgender people have been marginalized within the orthodox gender binary. Often times, this exclusion is accompanied by tragic, pervasive violence, particularly for transgender black women.

With this in mind, a historical, operative definition of gender that is inclusive of transgender individuals actually erases the struggles that this particularly vulnerable group faces. If discrimination and violence against transgender people is a product of our current unjust construction of gender, then this fact must be reflected in the definition. The most logical way to go about this is to create an operational definition that reflects the exclusion that transgender people face in their daily lives. Anything else would be ahistorical, as well as a disservice to all though that continue to face oppression under the gender binary. Once more, my definition of gender is intended to reflect an unjust history of patriarchy for the sake of theorizing on why and how we must deconstruct this understanding. Just as my recognition of gender's inherent power imbalance in favor of men does not mean that I believe this is just, my definition should not be understood to invalidate transgender people's identities.

It is with this context that I define one fundamental characteristic of gender as being the linkage with biological sex assigned at birth. To reiterate, biological sex is a scientific observation (despite the fact that many individuals exist outside of the binary of male/female), while gender is a socially constructed concept that normatively defines individuals positions within the world. The idea of assignment at birth is also reflected in Susan Moller Okin's understanding when she states that gender is the "ascriptive designation of positions and expectations of behavior in accordance with the inborn characteristic of sex (Okin 103)." Here the phrase "inborn characteristic of sex"

corresponds with my idea of “assigned at birth.” Based on this characteristic, individuals then have forced upon them a normative conception of their role in relation to all other humans. It is this coercive designation that is gender. In this way, gender as traditionally defined must be account for sex as the basis for the delegation of gender roles and expectations. Following this initial assignment of sex and subsequently gender, we are raised in ways that only enforce and entrench our gender identities.

As with other components of my definition of gender, if we erode the linkage between biological sex and gender, then we are actively participating in the deconstruction of gender. In this way, transgender people’s pursuit of their personal truth is a courageous, revolutionary act that erodes the linkage of sex and gender, and thereby gender itself. Challenging the automatic delegation of gender based on biological sex fundamentally undermines the idea that gender is based on sex assigned at birth, which is a central feature of gender more broadly. Clearly, the courage and societal acceptance of transgender and nonbinary individuals continuously moves us towards a less restrictive understanding of gender. The erosion described above is only one of the multiple ways that gender is being deconstructed. This process of deconstruction can also be termed “gender abolition,” and is the subject of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 2: Gender Abolition

Having established an operative definition of gender, it is now time to define gender abolition. In this chapter, I begin by establishing that, as a social creation, we have the ability to collectively deconstruct gender. I then establish that there are certain constitutive elements of gender without which gender ceases to exist in any recognizable form. I argue that achieving this amounts to genderlessness, which is the ultimate aim of gender abolition. When understood from this angle, gender abolition is not nearly as radical of a concept as it sounds, and in fact is identical to much more moderate notions such as egalitarianism. I then introduce the two different processes through, which I contend gender can be fully deconstructed.

Specifically, I posit that gender abolition can occur either through the erosion of the linkage of biological sex and gender, or by dismantling the delegative aspect of gender that assigns duties, privileges and expectations. Looking first at the uncoupling of biological sex and gender, I argue that, aside from questions of justice, the assignment of biological sex is a deeply flawed concept that fails to map onto gender in any coherent way, as is evidenced in the erasure of intersex and transgender people. For this reason, we should avoid gendering children at birth, while normalizing and affirming peoples' right to transition to live in accordance with their self identity. I conclude the chapter by focusing on abolition of the delegative aspect of gender drawing upon Cheryll Harris' *Whiteness as Property* and Angela Davis' *Women and Capitalism*. Ultimately, this chapter is intended to lay the foundations for my subsequent analysis of the implicit calls

for gender abolition found in Karl Marx and Amartya Sen's distinct visions of human development.

## **What is Gender Abolition?**

What precisely is meant by gender abolition? Recall in my previous chapter I defined gender as the societally and institutionally enforced construct that delegates duties, privileges, and expectations based on biological sex assigned at birth. I also emphasize that gender is taught and entrenched as children grow up, as failure to conform behaviors with gender-based expectations can have dramatic social, economic and legal ramifications. I bring up these two clauses because they clearly put forward the idea that gender is a social creation, rather than an inescapable fact of human existence. The first clause simultaneously distinguishes between and connects biological sex with gender, which is the attached normative set of duties and expectations created by humans. As a creation of humans, it is apparent that gender could be constructed in an entirely different way.

The implications of holding gender as a social construction are briefly explored by Oyèrónkẹ Oyèwùmí in *Visualising the Body*. Oyèwùmí argues that, because gender is created by humans, its construction must vary “across time and space (Oyèwùmí 463). Additionally, conceiving of gender in this way also suggests that there was a time before the existence of gender (Oyèwùmí 464). Perhaps most importantly to the overall aim of this thesis, with this recognition it would seem theoretically possible to transcend beyond gender and return to a state of genderlessness.

The second clause that I have restated above is intended to illuminate the primary mechanism through which the patriarchal construction of gender that has become nearly universal is maintained. As a social construction, gender must be maintained through affirmations and sanctions that enforce individuals' adherence to their assigned social roles. As Judith Lorber points out, this process begins at birth as exemplified in "the choice of names, blankets, and clothing (Hughes and Dvorsky 7). Critically, if there was no enforcement of gender, gender would no longer exist in any recognizable form.

Opponents of this perspective often point to physical differences between the sexes as evidence that gender is natural and does not necessitate maintenance, instead holding that it is an immutable biological reality. However, while biological variation certainly exists between the sexes, we should not mistake this as constituting gender in and of itself. As Brian D. Earp points out in *Abolishing Gender*,

*Even if there is some biological basis to the mental association people have between certain traits and masculinity or femininity, it wouldn't entitle us to jump from a descriptive "is" to a prescriptive "ought" (that is, to a socially enforced set of rules for how males or females should act, think, feel, or relate to others)."*

- (Earp 5-6)

In other words, the inequality of the genders is not found in difference between men and women alone, but instead within the normative force that underlies the concept. With this in mind, it is clear that a genderless society would not necessarily need to be androgynous. Instead, what is more important is people's ability to freely choose what they value and exercise free agency. To connect this back to my broader point, the

enforcement of gender from the time we are children is perhaps the greatest impediment to the realization of this worthy end.

Fundamentally, we exist within a gendered world, and more specifically a patriarchal world. This particular construction is what Earp refers to as the Dominant Gender Ideology (DGI) (Earp 3). As I mentioned in the previous chapter, this reality is reflected in everything from men's economic and social domination to the disproportionate delegation of domestic labor to women, as well as the different virtues that men and women are supposed to cultivate to name just a few manifestations. On a deeper level, Earp points out that living in a gendered world effectively means that "knowing what someone's genitals look like" has "predictive value for guessing their style of dress, their grooming habits, their physical mannerisms, sexual preferences, career ambitions, psychological profile, or ways of interacting with others (Earp 7)." I feel this point is extremely compelling in that it illuminates the absurdity of a concept that we largely take for granted assuming gender to be natural. What does someone's genitals have to do with their career ambitions? Nothing absent the construction of gender.

Now, if our society failed to be gendered, then we could say that gender has been "abolished (Earp 2)." This is the sense in which I use the term gender abolition. To have abolished gender is simply to live in a genderless society. In other words, the construction of gender has been dismantled. In the following pages, I argue that this occurs in two distinct ways. Gender can be deconstructed either through the erosion the linkage between biological sex assigned at birth and gender, or by changing the relationships of dominance and subservience and their respective duties and expectations that characterize

the traditional gender binary. I will explore this topic in greater depth in the following pages, but here I must make explicit an intimately related point.

With this understanding of the nature of complete gender abolition, it follows that any act that moves us towards genderlessness is an act of abolition. More specifically, whatever deteriorates the force of the linkage between biological sex and normative societal expectation (gender) constitutes gender abolition. In the same way, altering the specific duties, privileges and expectations in a way that subverts our present construction of gender qualifies as abolition. Perhaps the most important takeaway here is that abolition does not require an immediate, total departure from gender. This uncharitable view is somewhat understandable given the history and power associated with a word like abolition. Nevertheless, abolition in the context of this thesis refers to the gradual process of degendering society. If this process is completed to its fullest extent, then the result is genderlessness and thus complete gender abolition.

As I have alluded to above, the idea represented by the phrase “gender abolition” can be expressed with different language. Gender abolition is perhaps the most radical way of expressing this ideal, however more moderate articulations such as “gender egalitarianism” still express essentially the same message (Olin Wright). This is the core contention in Erik Olin Wright’s *In Defense of Genderlessness*. Wright argues that

*“while promoting gender equality moves us in the direction of egalitarian ideals, ultimately these ideals involve the dissolution of gender...policies which effectively neutralize the inegalitarian effects of the gender relations will also tend to undermine the norms which reproduce those relations. In the long term,*

*therefore, serious gender egalitarian policies will also undermine gender” - (Olin Wright)*

Here, Olin Wright’s argument hinges on the fact that gender is necessarily incompatible with the concept of egalitarianism. If we desire equality between the sexes, this cannot exist so long as gender endures. This fits neatly with my definition which emphasizes that one of the constitutive components of gender is normative differentiation between the sexes with regards to expectations, duties and privileges to the benefit of men. Although Olin Wright never uses the term abolition explicitly, his point largely mirrors my contention in the preceding paragraph that abolition is any act that furthers the end of genderlessness.

With this in mind, it is apparent that gender abolition and gender equality/egalitarianism are merely different ways of articulating the same goal, insofar as gender equality is an oxymoron. To reiterate, gender abolition is the complete cultivation of a genderless society. Keeping this in mind, full realization of gender equality/egalitarianism is impossible given that gender is inseparable from inequality definitionally speaking. Opponents of this view may object that it is possible to have a construction of gender that is equal, or at the least more equal than the present manifestation. However, if gender failed to be unequal it would no longer exist in any recognizable form. Moreover, any partial realization of gender equality (meaning progress from our current position) would be an act of abolition in that the subsequent construction of gender would more closely align with the ultimate goal of genderlessness.

Before delving more deeply into my view on the process of gender abolition, I want to briefly touch on a few more terms that closely relate to and resemble this

concept. Throughout this thesis, I speak of the deconstruction of gender. By deconstruction, as with abolition, I am referring to a process that leads us in the direction of genderlessness. Here, my rationale is largely based upon Oyèrónkẹ Oyèwùmí contention that if gender is a social construct, there was once a prior time during which gender existed in a radically different form. This brings me to my next term. In this context, to deconstruct is also to dismantle gender. In subsequent chapters, I will use these two terms interchangeably. As with deconstruction, dismantling gender furthers the achievement of the genderless society that abolition requires.

While I will not use the next two terms, they are still worth bringing up given their relevance to feminist discourse broadly. Gender eliminativism, referring to the elimination of gender, mirrors the concept of abolition. Not to belabor this point, if gender is eliminated it no longer exists and thus genderlessness has been achieved. In this way, gender eliminativism is indistinguishable from gender abolition. Similarly, postgenderism is focused on exploring what exactly a completely genderless world would look like, but is distinct in the sense that proponents of this view would emphasize the importance of controlling for the physical differences between the sexes (Hughes and Dvorsky 2).

As Hughes and Dvorsky articulate in *Postgenderism: Beyond the Gender Binary*, “postgenderism confronts the limits of a social constructionist account of gender and sexuality, and proposes that the transcending of gender by social and political means is now being complemented and completed by technological means.” This is slightly different from the view of abolition that I put forward in that my framework is based upon acceptance of the idea that gender can be dismantled while allowing physical

difference to persist. Referring to physical/biological difference, perhaps the most important consideration from a postgenderist perspective is women's capacity for childbirth, while attention is also given to issues such as aggressions' relation to testosterone (Highes and Dvorsky 10-13).

Overall, the main point that I have been trying to drive home thus far is that gender abolition is not as radical of a concept as it sounds (not that there is anything wrong with something being radical). Gender abolition could equally be termed gender equality or gender egalitarianism. Very few people would have any problems with these terms. However, I eschew the use of these terms given their internal logical inconsistency rooted in the reality that gender cannot exist absent inequality. At the very same time, my analysis suggests that gender equality may require much more than what people typically think. Certainly, many proponents of gender justice believe that the categories of "man" and "woman" can continue to persist while people with these identities are treated equally. However, this is antithetical to the understanding of gender put forward in this thesis. The categories of man and woman inherently imply both inequality and hierarchy. Therefore, approaching any semblance of equality necessitates the deconstruction of gender. While concrete steps towards abolition may be much more mundane than we typically believe, full actualization of the end of gender equality requires a radical shift in how we order society.

The primary aim of gender abolition is the creation of a genderless society, which does not mean an androgynous one. Instead, a genderless society would be one in which people interact as equals without force of normative expectations assigned based upon genitalia. While the use of the term "abolition" certainly calls to mind legal action, this

does not mean that identification with gender will be punished in the courts. This is not to say that we cannot move towards abolition through legal avenues, but rather the process of abolition also occurs in much more diffuse and subtle ways within social institutions.

## **Uncoupling Sex and Gender**

As I see it, there are two primary processes through which gender may be dismantled. Firstly, gender abolition can occur through the erosion of the linkage between assigned biological sex and the normative social roles associated with gender. If assigned biological sex no longer serves as the basis of gender roles, people would theoretically be able to freely choose what gender role to inhabit. Beyond the fact that the imposition of gender based upon assigned biological sex represents a significant form of unfreedom, assigning sex at birth and linking it to gender is also flawed in its erasure of intersex people. Critically, with this understanding of gender abolition, transgender people are a part of a fundamentally revolutionary act of deconstruction.

It is also important to recognize that this assignment and linkage does not only occur at birth. Instead, the linkage between sex and gender is entrenched over time as gender is enforced throughout childhood, which brings me to my second point. Abolition can also function through weakening the delegative/distributive aspect of gender. In other words, if gender no longer functions as the basis for the delegation of duties, expectations, and privileges as I mention in my definition, then what is left no longer constitutes gender. This can occur through deconstructing the norms and expectations associated with gender directly.

As I mentioned in the preceding chapter, one of the fundamental components of gender is its linkage to biological sex assigned at birth. While I explicitly drew upon the work of Susan Moller Okin in the last chapter to support the fact that this is a key part of gender, this view is widely accepted throughout feminist literature. To further support this position with the work of an author cited in this chapter, Brian D. Earp defines sex as “roughly, the physical or biological distinction between females and males,” which is “linked to socially enforced gender roles that prescribe how people should be and behave (Earp 1).” While phrased slightly differently, this fits neatly with my definition of gender and more specifically with my discussion of this very subject in the final paragraphs of chapter one. To briefly reiterate, gender connects individuals’ biological sex with social expectations and positionality. At its core, gender holds biological sex as the foundational way of ordering the delegation of gender roles and expectations.

Critically, individuals initially have no choice what gender they exist in within the world. It is not until people have the vocabulary to articulate their feelings and interests that this immediate linkage can be challenged in any way (absent remarkably unconventional parents). Problematically, people generally embrace the gender they are assigned (there are more cisgender than transgender or nonbinary people), given the years of conditioning we receive. This is particularly concerning given that, as I have argued, gender is inherently hierarchical. This means that around half of our population has been assigned a position of servility based on the morally arbitrary characteristic of sex. The enforcement of this injustice is so pervasive that we often fail to question and critique the basis of this designation.

As Susan Moller Okin states, the Rawlsian idea of fair equality of opportunity mandated by his second principle which states that, “Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are...attached to positions and offices open to all (Rawls 53)” is incompatible with our current construction of gender (Okin 103). Moller Okin points out that “positions and offices” must include gender positions such as “husband and wife [or] mother and father (Okin 103).” No one would dispute that these gender roles form the basis of significant “social and economic inequalities,” particularly considering the domestic burden women shoulder under the traditional construction of gender (Okin 103). Recognizing this fact, adherence to Rawls second principle requires “choice of occupation of both sexes (Okin 103).” This choice does not truly exist within the current coercive definition of gender that ascribes different conceptions of a proper life for men and women as defined by their biological sex assigned at birth.

Another crucial reason we have to reject the linkage between biological sex and gender relates to the erasure of intersex individuals. In its most restrictive yet pervasive form (what Earp terms DGI), gender exists within a binary with the categories of man and woman (Montañez). However, we must recognize that, despite what we have been conditioned to believe, sex is not actually a binary (Montañez). Instead, as Amanda Montañez points out in *Beyond XX and XY: The Extraordinary Complexity of Sex Determination*, “determination of biological sex is staggeringly complex, involving not only anatomy but an intricate choreography of genetic and chemical factors that unfolds over time (Montañez).” She then follows this statement by defining intersex individuals as “those for whom sexual development follows an atypical trajectory (Montañez).” This

can range from differences in hormonal levels to “ambiguous genitals” to the presence of both male and female reproductive organs (Montañez).

It is important to note that intersex individuals are not merely a medical anomaly. In fact, as Hughes and Dvorsky point out, nearly 1.7% of the population may be intersex depending on what definition is used (Hughes and Dvorsky 3). If we take a more narrow view of intersexuality, defined as “conditions in which the person's chromosomes are a different sex than their phenotypic sex characteristics, or in which they have truly ambiguous genitalia,” the number is likely closer to 0.02% or roughly one in every 5,000 children (Hughes and Dvorsky 3).

Nevertheless, sex is generally assigned based on genitalia at birth which is an incomplete picture at best (Montañez). As Montañez points out, this often leads to individuals having a gender chosen for them that does not align with their ultimate identity (Montañez). It is evident that the automatic linkage of assigned biological sex and gender is extremely problematic. At the most basic level, the concepts of sex and gender do not even map onto one another cleanly. We have far more than two sexes, yet we try to fit everyone into a gender binary at birth.

One particularly dire consequence of this imposition of the gender binary is the reality that many intersex children have surgery at birth in order to literally mold their bodies to fit a “normative version of one or the other gender (Hughes and Dvorsky 3).” Many intersex activists vehemently oppose this inherently unconsensual practice for a wide variety of reasons ranging from “reduce[d] adult sexual sensitivity” to the reality that many individuals will be “assigned a gender at variance to their chromosomal sex or adult psychological gender identity (Hughes and Dvorsky 3).” Additionally, perhaps the

most relevant reason from an abolitionist perspective is the contention that “there is no need to encourage children to ever choose either male or female gender roles (Hughes and Dvorsky 3).”

Here, it is essential that I point out that not every culture has conceived of the linkage between gender and sex within a restrictive and inaccurate binary. Oyèrónke Oyèwùmí reminds us that throughout human history a variety of cultures have included a “third” or “alternative” sex/gender (Oyèwùmí 465). Evidence of this phenomena exists as far back as Mesopotamian and ancient Egyptian society (Hughes and Dvorsky 4). One prominent example of a “third gender” among non western cultures cited by both Oyèwùmí as well as Hughes and Dvorsky is the Berdache. As Hughes and Dvorsky explain, “both males and females became berdache by cross-dressing, and there was no necessary relationship of their status to their physiology or sexual preferences (Hughes and Dvorsky 4). Within these cultures, the third sex/gender typically had their own unique social roles (Hughes and Dvorsky 3). While we certainly have reason to object to the delegation of social roles in this way on its own, leaving space for a third sex/gender is undeniably more inclusive for intersex individuals.

However, it is also imperative that we recognize that under my definition, the presence of a “third gender” would actually mean that the three social categories would not actually constitute gender. This contention is supported by Oyèwùmí who reminds us that “the Western cultural system, which uses biology to map the social world, precludes the possibility of more than two genders because gender is the elaboration of the perceived sexual dimorphism of the human body into the social realm (Oyèwùmí 465).” In other words, because Oyèwùmí recognizes that the dominant gender ideology imposed

by the west (what I refer to as simply gender) is based on a linkage with a binary conception of biological sex, a schema that accomodates three genders cannot consitute gender as such. What exists in these cultures is not gender as I have defined. The existence of a third gender fundamentally undermines the binary conception of gender that is linked to biological sex.

Of course, one may object that it is possible that something that resembles gender could be constructed in a hierarchical, trinary manner. While this sort of construction would likely be objectionable in its own right, it would also lack some of the binding force that makes gender such a restrictive concept. The existence of a third gender would weaken the force of the linkage between biological sex and gender, and could allow for men and women to more easily opt out of their assigned social roles. This is particularly true if the third gender was not attached to any biological indicators. If the third gender could be freely inhabited by any individual, then there would immediatly be much greater fluidity and choice in how people live their lives.

However, this third gender could certainly be reserved for intersex people specifically. Still, even in this case, the very existence of a third gender would complicate society's reliance on visual cues in the practice of gendering. There are many intersex people whose appearance embodies our paradigmatic view of what women and men should look like. If these people are suddenly sorted into a third gender, many people's eyes would be opened with regard to how flawed our reliance on visual cues is for gendering. Here, it is worth pointing out that, in this scenario, we could rapidly head down a dystopian path where genital examinations are used to assign gender as recent legislation in Florida reminds us. This certainly would not be the liberatory shift that I

mention above. Yet, absent this invasive policing of bodies, a third gender that acknowledges the existence of intersex people would fundamentally alter the way most people understand the constructed categories of woman and man.

Keeping in mind my stated definition of gender abolition, it is clear that attempting to account for and stop the erasure of intersex people within the gender binary is an act of abolition. Eroding the linkage between assigned biological sex and gender is a deconstructive act leading us to a point more near to genderlessness. In affirming the existence of intersex people, the linkage aspect of gender begins to fall apart. If we cease to assign intersex people a binary sex at birth, there is no basis for the subsequent assignment of gender and its associated duties, expectations and privileges. So, it follows that one way that we can move towards abolition in a relatively small way is by breaking from the reductive, inaccurate binary conception of sex.

More robustly, if we come to accept that we should not impose gender on intersex people in this way, we must question why it is permissible to gender children even when there is no sexual ambiguity. Some may argue that intersex individuals are an exceptional case because through surgically imposing one sex where there exists ambiguity we may “get it wrong” and choose a sex that will not align with individuals future identity. However, the existence of transgender people affirms that sex itself is an imperfect predictor of peoples’ gender identity. Accordingly, we should not only avoid gendering intersex individuals, but all children.

As I mentioned in my previous chapter, the increasing acceptance and visibility transgender people, like intersex people, represents a brave and revolutionary act of gender abolition. Recall in the previous chapter, the fact that my definition of gender

assumes a linkage with biological sex in a way that marginalizes transgender people is not a normative statement, but rather a reflection of the historical reality of transgender peoples social exclusion. Also, I should add that I do not intend to suggest that trans peoples' gender identity is any less "real" than cisgender people. Instead, through affirming transgender peoples identities we are offered a new way of imagining gender that is closer to genderlessness than the patriarchal order that characterizes the contemporary dominant gender ideology.

With this being said, it is undeniable that the existence of transgender people challenges the linkage of biological sex and gender. Transgender people transition from their originally assigned gender to embrace an identity that aligns with their internal self (Hughes and Dvorsky 6-7). As gender is initially determined on the basis of biological sex, to transition is to erode the linkage between the two concepts. Because this linkage is at the core of what defines gender, transitioning must be understood as an act of gender deconstruction. Unfortunately, as I mention in my definition, deviations from the established construction of gender imposes real costs on those who fail to conform, as we see tradically exemplified in the incredible amount of violence faced by transgender people.

To sum up my overall argument in this section, I argue one major avenue towards gender abolition involves the erosion of the linkage between sex and gender. We can deconstruct this aspect of gender by either ceasing to establish the linkage in the first place, or by rejecting the linkage once life is already in progress. My example of intersex individuals demonstrates that biological sex does not even map onto gender, so this linkage unsound from a purely scientific perspective. Moreover, even when there is no

ambiguity with regards to biological sex, this concept is still an inaccurate predictor of gender identity, so it would follow that we should refrain from gendering all babies, not just intersex babies. On the side of things, transgender people are at the forefront of dismantling the linkage of sex and gender after the initial assignment at birth.

Transgender peoples' bravery moves us in the direction of genderlessness in the sense that gender assumes the linkage of biological sex and gender. In both cases, we see clearly that abolition can occur through dismantling the assumed linkage of biological sex and the assignment of gender roles.

### **Deconstructing Gendered Delegation**

The second way we can progress towards gender abolition is by dismantling the unequal assignment of distinct duties, expectations and privileges implied by gender. This effectively amounts to weakening the delegative aspect of gender. If gender ceases to serve as the basis for the delegation of social roles as explained in the previous chapter, then what remains no longer fits with the patriarchal construction of gender. For example, if the gendered concept motherhood no longer implies a disproportionate share of domestic labor to the detriment of women (and the opposite for fatherhood), then what we are left with is the gender neutral concept of parenthood.

The most direct path towards abolition requires the dismantling of the delegation of duties, privileges and expectations that define gender. Even if we weaken the automatic linkage of biological sex and gender, the social roles assigned by gender still perpetuate unjust inequality between men and women. This may cease to be true if the

linkage of biological sex and gender was entirely eradicated as individual's social position would be more consensual as people would be free to choose their gender as they please. However, because gender is still deeply ingrained globally, if we accept genderlessness as a worthy end then, pragmatically speaking, we should not limit the scope of our efforts to one avenue alone. Instead, it is essential that we detach normative conceptions of what constitutes proper behavior from gender.

Essentially, this means that whether someone identifies as a man or woman should have no correlation with how they are expected to order their lives. As is the case with uncoupling sex and gender, if gender roles were entirely deconstructed the result would be genderlessness because even if we still relied on a faulty conception of biological sex it could not be assigned to any tangible gender roles. In this way, any act that detaches external social expectations from gender, and to humanity generally, is an act of abolition.

To offer a parallel argument in support of this conclusion, consider the construction of race in America. As is the case with gender, race is a social construction as opposed to an immutable biological fact (Gannon, *Scientific American*). In fact, members from different races may share more genetic similarities than with other members of their own race (Gannon). As a social creation, in the same way as with gender, race necessarily varies in its construction across cultures and throughout history. Yet, in the cases of both race and gender, phenotypic differences obscure and legitimate the inequalities engendered by the degrading constructions of these two social categories (Harris 1778). For this reason, it is easy to overlook the various components of the construction of race and gender, particularly for those who benefit most.

What are the defining features of whiteness in the American context? As Cheryl Harris argues in *Whiteness as Property*, whiteness in the United States is rooted in exclusivity, power, domination as well as immense privilege that the courts have long protected as a property right (Harris 1714-1715). This closely mirrors the functioning of the delegative aspect of gender mentioned above. Harris explores the historical evolution of the American construction of whiteness which, as the title makes clear, is intimately connected with property. Harris points out that, at the inception of colonial America, race was a radically different concept compared to today, or even 100 years later (Harris 1715-1716).

Racialization, which is tantamount to the construction of race, served to justify atrocities like slavery and genocide (Harris 1715). Undoubtedly, “the construction of white identity... [was] intimately tied to the evolution and expansion of the system of chattel slavery (Harris 1717).” This is exemplified in the fact that whiteness came to be synonymous with freedom, while blackness “marked who was subject to enslavement (Harris 1718).” Critically, the construction of whiteness in the United States has evolved over the centuries, yet significant aspects of whiteness endure (Harris 1778). As Harris puts it, "Over time [whiteness] has changed in form, but it has retained its essential exclusionary character and continued to distort outcomes of legal disputes by favoring and protecting settled expectations of white privilege (Harris 1778)." Harris holds that this is clearly seen in the legal repudiation of affirmative action cases that challenge the unjust “baseline” of white privilege (Harris 1778).

Nevertheless, over time whiteness and attached delegation of social position has been deconstructed, even if only to a minimal degree. For example, the literal abolition of

slavery deconstructed whiteness in the sense that whiteness could no longer be understood as a “shield from slavery (Harris 1720).” This is not to say that slavery was truly abolished at this moment as the prison industrial complex reminds us every day. However, slavery was no longer explicitly tied to race, but instead to criminality and thus indirectly to race. More powerfully, Harris posits that affirmative action has the potential to deconstruct whiteness by “de-legitim[izing] the assumptions surrounding existing inequality (Harris 1778).” In this way, to delegitimize the property interest in whiteness is to dismantle whiteness itself as constructed in the United States (Harris 1779). To apply this more specifically to the case of gender abolition, the dismantling of constitutive, delegative elements of a social construction like race necessarily erodes the force of the social category in question.

If we fully dismantle whiteness in this sense, what is left? If whiteness no longer serves no longer serves to reify power and privilege then all that remains is a pseudoscientific category based on the predominance of skin color over all other traits. While people might hear “abolish whiteness” and be freaked out (especially in the context of culture wars) the core message, as is the case with gender abolition, is that if racial justice is attained it requires the deconstruction of the constitutive aspects of race, which is privilege as opposed to skin color. Certainly, in this case there will continue to be people who physically possess the characteristics associated with whiteness. However, without the attached property interests and social privileges, these individuals would not be “white” and instead just human. The phenotypic associated with their “whiteness” would have no bearing on their social position.

Returning to my argument regarding the abolition of gender via the deconstruction of the delegative aspect of gender, as I previously established gender is socially constructed in very much the same way as race. Moreover, as I have established in my definition offered in chapter one, gender, as is the case with race, is intimately related to domination, privilege and expectations of self and others. In *Women and Capitalism*, Angela Davis explores women's oppression and their potential for liberation through a Marxist lens. However, as my next chapter puts forward my own feminist reading of Marx's work, here I will limit my focus to Davis's suggestions for the women's movement, rather than her specific analysis of Marx. Overall, I aim to illustrate the nature of abolition in the context of the gendered assignment of social roles

I want to begin by highlighting some important similarities between Davis's observations and my definition of gender. First, Davis certainly conceives of gender as a social construction. This is evidenced by her statement that "human beings are not inexorably yoked to their biological constitution... The woman-man union, in all its dimensions, is very much mutable and always subject to social transformations (Davis 151)." Here, the fact that the relationship between men and women is "subject to social transformations" essentially rejects determinism with regards to the meanings and values associated with "man" and "woman." Critically, this also implies that it is possible to achieve a more equal, just relation between the two by altering the construction of gender itself. This point is made even more clearly when Davis asserts "the man-woman union will always be disfigured unless the woman has liberated herself as woman (Davis 152)." The phrase "liberated herself as woman" here represents a call for the fundamental reimagining of gender.

Davis centers the economic subordination of women and its association with the traditionally gendered family as a core constitutive element of gender. Interestingly, she offers more support for this prominent feminist position by citing Engels, who was surprisingly attentive to gender dynamics and injustice within the family for a man of his time (or any time for that matter) (Davis 161). Davis reminds us that, “Engels was essentially correct to link the inferior status of the female to the hierarchical makeup of the family... [and] woman’s dependent rank within the family unit (Davis 161). She also focuses on the domestic duties shouldered by women which entrenches this asymmetric distribution of economic power stating that women “must bear the major responsibility for the internal labor guaranteeing [the families] preservation. These private domestic duties preclude more than marginal participation in social production (Davis 163).” She also highlights that women’s labor outside on the market is typically undervalued and held in disesteem relative to the work of men (Davis 163). I bring this up to say, Davis’s conception of gender largely offers support to my own definition and analysis.

However, unlike a philosopher like Okin, Davis goes further in holding that women’s oppression is inextricably linked with capitalism (Davis 150). According to Davis, reform within the existing system is not possible, given that women’s participation in the formalized economy has had “reaffirming and amplifying effects on their oppression” for many women (Davis 170). It is with this background that Davis offers the most manifestly abolitionist passage of the paper. She states,

*“the demand for job equality - equal jobs and equal pay for the same jobs - is one of the indispensable prerequisites for an effective women’s liberation strategy. Such a demand, it need not be said, loses much of its meaning and can fall back*

*into the orbit of person unless it is accompanied by the fight for childcare centers, maternity leaves, free abortions and the entire complex of solutions to the uniquely female needs...these efforts must be seen as an essential ingredient of a broader thrust: the assault on the institutional structures which perpetuate the socially enforced inferiority of women (Davis 171-172)”*

It is here that we see more clearly what abolition through the deconstruction of the delegative aspect of gender looks like. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the gendered expectation that men will have a wife at home who is not engaged in the formalized economy affects the structuring of the workplace such that it fails to be responsive to the needs of parents (mothers) who are responsible for childcare. In this context, a policy promoting genderlessness is one that dismantles the force of gendered expectations and duties. If the state provides accessible childcare to all people, motherhood need not be associated with a disproportionate share of childcare (the traditionally gendered family necessitates that one parent sacrifice their professional ambitions if the family cannot pay for childcare).

Obviously, gender would still endure as this is only one specific aspect, but policies like this deconstruct the delegative aspect of gender. Therefore, this constitutes an act of abolition. Moreover, by linking women’s oppression to capitalism (and specifically women’s position under capitalism), Davis also effectively connects women’s liberation to the abolition of capitalism and thus also women’s position within capitalist society. To extend this argument further, to eliminate women’s position within capitalism is to dismantle the gendered delegation of economic positionality for women, which is undoubtedly an act of abolition.

To briefly review the content and argumentation within this section, perhaps the most direct avenue for gender abolition is through deconstruction of the delegative aspect of gender. To be clear, what I am referring to here is the section of my definition where I position gender as a social construct that delegates duties, privileges, and expectations based on biological sex assigned at birth. I hold that the delegative aspect is a constitutive element of gender such that any deconstruction is an act of abolition that furthers the end of genderlessness. To support this conclusion, I offered a parallel argument focused on race, another analogous social construct. Using Cheryl Harris's *Whiteness as Property*, I established that, given the fact that race has even less of a biological basis than gender, pursuing racial equity necessitates the erosion of property interest in whiteness and thus the abolition of whiteness. I then turned back to gender focusing on Angela Davis's *Women in Capitalism*. I offer an interpretation of Davis's work that frames her writing within the context of gender abolition. I argue that her critique of women's position in capitalist society is effectively an attack on one part of the delegative aspect which is a constitutive aspect of gender.

## CONCLUSION

To review the chapter, my argument began by establishing the idea that gender is a social creation. As such, it follows that gender can be deconstructed. Just as there was a time before gender, it is theoretically possible that there could be a time postgender. Subsequently, I define gender abolition in exactly this way. While gender abolition is certainly a very provocative term, it is really referring to the deconstruction of gender.

Critically, terms like gender egalitarianism actually imply gender abolition if they are to be realized to their fullest extent. In this way, gender abolition is anything that moves us towards a genderless world. This process occurs through the erosion of the constitutive elements of gender, such as genders delegative aspect and its linkage with biological sex. If these elements are deconstructed, what is left is not gender. Consequently, it is apparent that gender abolition can occur either through these two avenues.

I first challenged the justice of the linkage of assigned biological sex and gender. As I demonstrated, the way biological sex is conceived of in relation to gender is reductive and unscientific. This is evidenced by the existence of intersex individuals, which should make us reconsider gendering children in the first place. With this in mind, refusing to accept an inaccurate picture of biological sex moves us in the direction of abolition as the two concepts no longer map cleanly onto one another. Moreover, we can also choose to reject the linkage of biological sex and gender further along in life. It is in this sense that transgender people are actively engaged in the revolutionary process of gender abolition. I then shifted my concentration to the process of dismantling the delegative aspect of gender. I held that any act that detaches external social expectations from gender, and to humanity generally, is an act of abolition. To illustrate what this would look like, I used examples from Cheryll Harris' *Whiteness as Property* and Angela Davis' *Women and Capitalism*. With this common understanding of abolition, I am now able to transition to my broader argument that both Marx and Sen's visions for human advancement imply gender abolition.

### **CHAPTER 3: Marxist Argument for Gender Abolition**

Would a Marxist utopia be a genderless society? In the following section, drawing upon both *On the Jewish Question* or *The German Ideology*, I hold that Marx offers two visions of human advancement that both strongly imply the abolition of gender.

Beginning with *The German Ideology*, I will argue that Marx's call for the abolition of the division of labor equally applies to gender. Turning to *On the Jewish Question*, I will establish that the existence of gender stands in the way of Marx's ideal of human emancipation. Based on his condemnation of the division of labor, and his standards for human emancipation, I argue an ideal Marxist society would require the abolition of gender.

Karl Marx views the division of labor as the root of all inequality. Fundamentally, the division of labor creates an unequal distribution of material goods, power, and status. Relationships of dependence, originally created by the division of labor, over time translate into a difference in "material power (German Ideology 197)." It is evident that within a market higher value is placed upon certain goods and services. As society develops, exchanges between individuals within a market will inevitably give rise to a particular distribution of goods. At this point, the market-based inequality between individuals creates a class-based social hierarchy (German Ideology 170). Here, we see that the division of labor is not only the basis of distribution but inevitably creates an "unequal distribution... of labor and its products, hence property (German Ideology 159)."

Marx characterizes the first form of property as "tribal ownership," which involved a minimal division of labor beyond that which exists within families (German

Ideology 151). As the population rises and different families begin to interact, "ancient communal" ownership develops with the birth of the first cities (German Ideology 151). It is at this stage where we can observe the first instance of private property, though Marx notes that this is an exception to the communal ownership that characterizes the era (German Ideology 151). Additionally, class distinction develops between master and slave (German Ideology 151). Next comes the emergence of the feudal system, which replaces "the directly producing class" of slaves with serfs (German Ideology 153). Through control of the land and military might, the nobility is able to maintain their position of control over the serfs (German Ideology 153). Gradually, monarchs acquired larger and larger kingdoms (German Ideology 154). In the towns, guilds were beginning to form to protect the interests of "craftsmen" who, through the accumulation of small levels of capital, came to replicate the hierarchical structure present in the country (German Ideology 153).

Through the accumulation of capital, we arrive at a scenario where only a certain subset of individuals have the means to create a business, which enables them to appropriate the labor of others, thereby amassing even more capital. The result of this process is "the division between capital and labor (German Ideology 190)." No longer is the laborer entitled to the products of their effort. Before humans entered into tribal ownership the isolated individual could accumulate capital through their labor. Under capitalism, the products of the workers' labor are alienated to the industrialist. Work no longer translates to capital. Instead, only capital can produce capital. Clearly, the division of labor creates a fundamentally unequal distribution of material goods within society.

Beyond the profound economic inequality caused by the division of labor, this practice constrains and directs individuals' thinking in a way that is incompatible with human advancement. Marx emphasizes that the division of labor by its very nature shapes an individual's conception of self. He explicitly states, "the division of labor only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labor appears (German Ideology 159)." Initially, humans have only a rough "herd consciousness (German Ideology 158)." As our productive capabilities increase, so too does our consciousness (German Ideology 158). Because each individual's consciousness reflects their means of material production, as the division of labor emerges individuals are set at odds with each other. The way our social class position affects our consciousness is evidenced in the differentiation between class interests, as exemplified by the antagonism of town and country (German Ideology 176). The division of labor creates specific interests situated in a particular class based context.

Similarly, the division of labor prevents individuals from living in the way they wish. Marx argues that "each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape... if he does not want to lose his livelihood (German Ideology 160)." In this way, individuals become trapped by their mode of production. Although they may desire to live a more dynamic and fulfilling life, a society characterized by the division of labor only allows humans to become accomplished within the narrow confines of what is delegated to them by the market and class position. No longer are humans able to choose for themselves what matters, and what is worthwhile to pursue.

Based on this split of material and mental labor and the division of intellectual production, the dominant class is able to impose their values, thereby creating a society that is ordered to work to their advantage. Marx argues that the elite class, which controls society in terms of material wealth, also controls the intellectual development of society (German Ideology 172). The importance of this phenomenon cannot be understated. Critically, "the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to" the value systems put in place by the dominant class. Here, we must recognize that the intellectual production of the elite has the effect of supporting the dominant material relationships that already exist (German Ideology 173). The dominant classes ideology serves to justify and legitimate their position of dominance.

What does this power look like in real life? In the context of feudalism, Marx argues that the value placed on "honor" and "loyalty" serves to perpetuate and justify a system that would be less likely to endure otherwise (German Ideology 173). However, typical analysis tends to neglect the context of the roots of these created values. Failing to recognize the way that the position of the intellectual class informs their production leads to the faulty belief that their ideas are in the "common interest of all the members of society (German Ideology 174)." As long as class differentiation endures, the least advantaged will be unable to order society in accordance with what they value.

Marx also argues that the division of labor is incompatible with the development of a world suitable for human life because it sets individuals at odds with the communal interest, while simultaneously necessitating their cooperation. According to Marx, the division of labor leads individuals to seek "only their particular interest, which for them does not coincide with their communal interest (German Ideology 161)." Not only do

humans prioritize their self-interest over the communal interest, but the division of labor even stifles our ability to identify with the communal interest. Marx makes this explicit when he states that communal interest "will be imposed on them as an interest "alien" to them, and "independent" of them (German Ideology 161)." Importantly, this dynamic necessitates state control over individuals to maintain order.

Paradoxically, despite the divisiveness of the division of labor, it also makes a community a necessity. Unsurprisingly, because individuals no longer capable of producing all their material needs every individual must cooperate with others for their sustenance. As Marx puts it, "the individuals themselves are entirely subordinated to the division of labor and hence are brought into the most complete dependence on one another (German Ideology 190)." It is evident that, for Marx, a society that prioritizes and respects humans' well being is impossible with this fundamental discord existing within every citizen. Recognizing our interdependence, the division of labor is incompatible with a society based in substantive communal cooperation. Accordingly, Marx argues that the division of labor must be abolished if humans hope to reach a communist utopia (German Ideology 197).

Given that Marx argues that the division of labor must be abolished to advance the human condition, it is clear that gender also must be overcome. Gender is the societally and institutionally enforced construct that delegates duties, rights, privileges, and expectations based on biological sex assigned at birth to which an individual is expected to conform their actions and behaviors. My definition aims to keep in mind both the legal and social dynamics that entrench and build upon the biological differences between the sexes. Additionally, the phrase "delegates expectations, duties, rights, and

privileges” aims to situate my definition in the context of the discourse of distributive justice.

There is no question that Marx believed gender to be an example of the dehumanizing practice of the division of labor. Marx states that the division of labor "was originally nothing but the division of labor in the sexual act (German Ideology 158).” After this initial division based on the act of reproduction, it follows that the subsequent birth of a child further entrenches the division of labor between partners within the traditionally gendered family (German Ideology 151). Importantly, as Marx views the family as the first relationship in human history, gender is fundamentally rooted in the division of labor. At their core, gender roles assign and enforce a conception of what work should be reasonably expected and required from an individual based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Specifically, traditional conceptions of womanhood are based on societally enforced domestic duties such as raising children. Importantly, unlike other philosophers such as John Rawls, Marx does not assume the family to be just. On the contrary, Marx explicitly states that within the traditionally gendered family “wife and children are slaves of the husband (German Ideology 159).”

In the same way as the division of labor in general, the division of labor based on gender roles creates deep inequality between men and women based on unequal ability to create capital. In *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, Susan Moller Okin supports this position by stating that the division of labor within the family creates “economic dependency and restricted opportunities of most women (Okin 9).” Women's enforced domestic roles restrict their economic horizons given that their labor takes place outside of the market. This is a fundamental way in which gender leaves women with asymmetric

power and agency within particular relationships, as well as society as a whole. Moller Okin argues that marriage obscures women's disproportionate vulnerability, while at the same time "gender structure marriage makes women vulnerable (Okin 5)." This vulnerability becomes most apparent during divorce (Okin 5). Marx certainly recognizes the way the enforced division of unpaid domestic labor advantages men at the expense of women. The traditionally gendered family assumes that men have a wife at home that takes care of all child-rearing as well as other domestic labor. This leaves men free to devote their time to pursuing material wealth in a way that would not be possible if they had to contribute their fair share to the family. Marx calls this "the power of disposing of the labor power of others (Marx 159)."

In her book *Why Some Things Should Not be for Sale*, Deborah Satz offers yet another example of how the division of labor based on gender leaves women with less material power than men born into the exact same situation. Like both Marx and Okin, Satz is clear that the traditionally gendered family cannot be assumed to be just (Satz 158). This underlying injustice is exemplified in the case of nowhere children, who are forced to do unpaid domestic work instead of attending school or taking a job on the market (Satz 164). Nowhere children are typically women whose unpaid domestic work allows for her brothers to attend school without having to work (Satz 168). This is one of the clearest manifestations of the gendered division of labor. Critically, this example shows that women's domestic positions are not simply chosen by mothers after they have a baby. Rather, the expectation that women should provide unpaid labor at home is central to the traditional conception of womanhood. Satz' discussion of nowhere children exemplifies how gender-based expectations and duties serve the purpose of empowering

men through "disposing of the labor power" of women. As a result, the division of labor implicit in gender creates material inequality between men and women.

Gender, perhaps more so than the division of labor in general, shapes individuals' consciousness in a way that is incompatible with a society fit for human life. This social phenomenon is highlighted by many feminist thinkers including Susan Moller Okin and Jean Hampton. Specifically, gender shapes women's thought process to be more collective in aim than men who typically are more individualistic. This is supported by Moller Okin's statement that "the socialization and role expectations of women mean that they are generally more inclined than men not to claim their fair share, and more inclined to order their priorities in accordance with the needs of their families (Okin 31)." While we often think that saying there is no difference between men and women is a nonsexist statement, this false neutrality fails to recognize one of the most significant effects of gender.

In *Feminist Contractarianism*, Jean Hampton cites a study by Carol Gilligan that concluded that gender creates distinct "interests," like the division of labor. Hampton uses the example of Jack and Amy to illuminate the way in which society creates distinct ways of thinking for men and women from the time that they are children (Hampton 231). Jack's response to the question of balancing "responsibility to oneself and responsibility to others" prioritizes self-interest (Hampton 228). On the other hand, Amy's response shows much more deference to the needs of others. However, while this may seem preferable, Amy's answer fails to put much weight on her own desires (Hampton 230). Unlike Jack, she is not as confident about the value of her interests. These two contrasting responses signify two separate, gendered ways of constructing

morality (Hampton 229). Hampton makes clear her support for the idea that gender influences our self-conceptions of morality stating that the children's respective answers serve to justify their future roles as dominant/subservient (Hampton 231). Clearly, like the division of labor in general, gender shapes the way individuals conceive of their interests. Moreover, gender justifies and perpetuates the unequal distribution of material power between men and women.

As Marx describes regarding the division of labor, the ruling class (in the context of gender, men) controls intellectual production within society. Susan Moller Okin and Jean Hampton both highlight the historical lack of representation of women in the field of political theory (Hampton 227, Okin 8). Unsurprisingly, male-centric theories of justice typically fail to critically engage with the question of whether gender and the traditionally structured family can possibly be just. For example, Susan Moller Okin critiques John Rawls' theory of justice on the basis that it leaves the family outside the scope of justice, thereby falling into the "public domestic dichotomy (Okin 92)." By permitting the traditionally gendered family, we can be certain that an ideal Rawlsian society would still be plagued by sexism.

Perhaps more importantly, male domination of intellectual production has the effect of ordering society in a way that is unresponsive to the needs of women and undervalues the roles into which they are coerced by gender. In his work, *In Defense of Genderlessness*, Erik Olin Wright describes a phenomenon called the care penalty (Olin Wright). Wright begins by establishing the fact that gender influences women to enter into certain fields. Specifically, the socially exaggerated stereotype that women have a greater propensity for nurturing behavior than men has the effect of causing careers in

care work to be disproportionately occupied by women (Olin Wright). These careers tend to be severely underpaid as compared to their importance. Wright argues that this is in large part because of the “cultural value,” or rather the lack thereof, placed on care work (Olin Wright). The devaluing of this work is directly tied to misogynistic philosophical constructions of the importance and value of different types of work. If the division of labor had not excluded women from the intellectual production of establishing the “cultural value” of different jobs, it is unlikely that care work would be seen as less valuable than other forms of labor. With this in mind, it is clear that the gendered division of labor, and the consequent limitations placed on who could engage in intellectual production, has ordered society in a way that disadvantages women and devalues their contributions. Clearly, in order to advance the human condition, more and more women must engage in the work of intellectual production. In order for this to be realized, gender, and its implied division of labor must be abolished.

Gender, in the same way as the division of labor, sets individual interest and communal interest in opposition. Surely, the general interest cannot be interpreted to enforce the servility of half of the population. In *On the Jewish Question*, Marx goes into greater depth regarding the need for all humans to meaningfully internalize the communal interest as inseparable from their own. This idealized human is referred to as a "species being in contrast to "egoistic man (Jewish Question 43)." Overall, this process is called human emancipation, which I will focus on in greater depth in the next section. Gender, because of the way it creates a distinct egoistic psychology in men, stands in the way of a society occupied by species-beings. For now, I will delay my analysis to more fully explain the concept of human emancipation and its relation to gender.

In summation, the dismantling of gender is implied and required to reach Marx's ideal society, which requires the abolition of the division of labor. Firstly, gender by its very nature implies the division of labor. Marx recognizes this fact in his analysis stating that, during tribal ownership, the division of labor grows within the family starting with reproduction (German Ideology 151). As Marx observes of the division of labor in general, the gendered division of domestic labor leads to an unequal distribution of power, autonomy, and capital. Once again mirroring the broader division of labor, gender creates distinct interests for men and women that serve to reinforce relationships of dominance. On top of this, the dominant gender, as with class, gains the ability to control intellectual production. Therefore, gender is one particularly pervasive example of the division of labor. Accordingly, true abolition of the division of labor requires dismantling gender, as gender implies and perpetuates a division of labor founded within the family that now extends far beyond the household.

Beyond the call to abolish gender implicit in Marx's critique of the division of labor, his writings in *On the Jewish Question* suggest that, like religion, gender abolition is necessary for human emancipation. In *On the Jewish Question*, Marx differentiates between political emancipation and human emancipation. Currently, Marx would accept that we live in a politically emancipated society, yet he would be disgusted to see how far we are from true human emancipation. According to Marx, human emancipation is incompatible with divisive social constructs such as religion. These institutions require abolition to attain human emancipation as they perpetuate a wide array of divisive tendencies, which prevents individuals from uniting their sense of collective good with their self-interest.

Marx defines political emancipation in opposition to the feudal order. Marx argues that under feudalism, the whole of an individual's identity was politicized in order to determine political rights and status (Jewish Question 44). Critically, the feudal order limited the right to political action to the “ruler and his servants (Jewish Question 45).” Understanding this historical context, political emancipation as defined by Marx is best understood as the separation of the right to participate in politics from social status of an individual within civil society. In principle, political emancipation simply delegated equal rights under the law to all citizens, regardless of their class position or identity (Jewish Question 45). After the political revolution, restrictions on political participation based on culturally defined criteria, such as religion, occupation, and gender, are removed. Instead, politics became a “matter of general concern” for every citizen (Jewish Question 45).

However, Marx argues the state of political emancipation is far from perfect and creates unique problems apart from those present in feudal society. By making "public affairs...the general affair of each individual," politics is reduced to a stage for the competing interests of every egoistic individual within the state (Jewish Question 45). Underlying this problematic phenomenon is the creation of a dichotomy between the political community and civil society, which creates within each human a sort of dual consciousness of citizen and private individual (Jewish Question 34). Marx's idealized political citizen, or species being, is capable of thinking in terms of the genuine interests of society as a whole (Jewish Question 43). In contrast, the "egoistic man" that is found within civil society thinks only in terms of self-interest. This point is made clear when Marx states, "the only bond between men is natural necessity, need and private interest, the preservation of their property and their egoistic persons (Jewish Question 43). Thus,

political emancipation removed from humans, in their practical form, any sense of a "general good (Jewish Question 45)." Given that Marx acknowledges that political emancipation made egoistic man the "foundation and presupposition of the political state," politics at this stage does not aim to achieve the ideal of species life.

Moreover, Marx argues that in a politically emancipated state, all the divisive and destructive elements that prevent human liberation are still present within civil society (Jewish Question 34). Under political emancipation, characteristics that once determined an individual's relation to the state are not abolished. Rather, these characteristics such as religion, property, and gender continue to exist in significant ways within civil society (Jewish Question 46). In fact, as exemplified in North America, the region Marx considered to have attained the highest degree of political emancipation, religion's separation from the realm of politics did nothing to diminish its influence (Jewish Question 31). Critically, Marx states, "the political revolution dissolves civil society into its elements without revolutionizing these elements themselves or subjecting them to criticism (Jewish Question 46)." The effect of this is freedom under the law without true freedom for the conditions of humans on the ground. As Marx put it, "a state may be a free state without man himself being a free man (Jewish Question 32)."

On the other hand, Marx argues that human emancipation is achieved when humans live as species-beings, as opposed to self-interested individuals. With regard to politics, human emancipation is achieved when every individual internalizes the mentality of the "abstract citizen (Jewish Question 46)." Here, Marx invokes Rousseau, arguing that human emancipation occurs when individuals recognize, fully accept, and operate as if they are "a part of something greater than [themselves] (Jewish Question

46)." Within a society elevated to the status of human emancipation, every individual is a species-being. This means that within every individual there is universal recognition of the fact that every other member of society is equally valuable and deserving of respect (Jewish Question 34).

Achieving human emancipation requires the dissolution of constructs that divide society and encourage individuals to operate from a position of self-interest. As we have seen, during political emancipation, all of the components of civil society continue to influence humans' relations to one another. Moreover, during political emancipation, these divisive characteristics are left in place without any substantial critique. So long as these divisive features are left in place, humans cannot interact as equals. While in *On the Jewish Question* Marx primarily considers religions compatibility with human emancipation, any cultural practice that divides and perpetuates humans' egoistic, insular nature, is antithetical to this end. Clearly, religion is not the only institution that has to be dismantled during human emancipation. Any institution that creates a class of exclusively self-interested individuals is against the aim of human emancipation. Here, I argue that gender is exactly the type of social construction that must be overcome in order to achieve human emancipation.

Currently, the status of women in the US most closely resembles political emancipation. Although women have an equal right to political participation and protection under the law, we still live in a deeply gendered society. While gender does not entirely define an individual's relationship with the state, its enduring significance within civil society largely mirrors Marx's observation regarding the prominence of religion with the United States despite political emancipation. Because gender continues

to function within civil society, humans are fundamentally still bound by the societal expectations attached to gender, which has the effect of limiting their freedom to define and choose what their life will be. Despite the fact that political participation is not tied to gender, we still live in a deeply sexist society. Clearly, political emancipation does relatively little to address the issue of gender inequality.

So long as gender exists, human emancipation will be incomplete as gender is antithetical to the concept of species-beings. As previously noted, the socially enforced expectations and duties tied to gender, which are placed upon individuals from early childhood, create distinct psychologies between men and women. Recall the study by Carol Gilligan referenced by Jean Hampton in *Feminist Contractarianism*. Hampton specifically references two responses to the question of how to balance self-interest and responsibility to others (Hampton 228). Here, it is worth noting that this question is central to what it means to be a species-being. While we cannot be certain exactly what Marx would say, we can be fairly sure that the appropriate response would not unduly prioritize individual interests at the expense of communal wellbeing. Human emancipation requires that individuals do not act only out of self-interest, but instead view themselves as a part of a larger collective that must be taken into account during any decision making.

With this in mind, Hampton's analysis of Carol Gilligan's study suggests that distinct psychologies between men and women created socially through gender norms cannot exist under human emancipation. Specifically, the male perspective as exemplified by Jack's response fits neatly with Marx's critique of the egoism that exists within individuals in a politically emancipated society. Most immediately, Jack's

response is problematic because he affords his interest three times the weight as other individuals (Hampton 228). The egoism present in Jack's archetypically male response is exemplified in the statement that, "the most important thing in your decision should be yourself (Hampton 228)." Critically absent from Jack's response as compared to Amy's is any deference to the "needs of others (Hampton 229)." This type of statement exemplifies the type of thinking that Marx believed prevented individuals from inhabiting a world of human emancipation.

Hampton goes on to point out that the two responses reflect "the voice of a child who is preparing to be a member of a dominating group and the voice of another who is preparing to be a member of the group that is dominated (Hampton 231)." Here, Hampton makes clear that the differences between Jack and Amy's responses are fundamentally tied to their gender. Fundamentally, gender enforces behavioral expectations and duties that shape how individuals view the world and their place within it. More specifically, gender creates different ways of thinking between men and women that work to legitimate, and at the same time are byproducts of, their relative positions of dominance and subservience. As Hampton posits, gender creates within men an egoistic psychology of entitlement. This way of thinking, as exemplified by Jack, is incompatible with the ideal of human emancipation based on individuals' development into species-beings. For this reason, gender abolition is necessary to attain the ideal of human emancipation.

On top of this reason, political emancipation on the basis of gender fails to question whether gender is compatible with a society fit for human life. As Erik Olin Wright points out, the idea of a society with gender equality is an "oxymoron" (Olin

Wright). Inherently, the socially enforced behavioral norms, duties, and privileges that define gender materially restrict the paths in life an individual can choose without suffering social repercussions (Olin Wright). As Wright explains, "gender norms impose real costs on people who violate those norms and this restricts access to the social means for a flourishing life for people whose gender-linked dispositions do not correspond to those normative expectations (Olin Wright)." Therefore, as Wright reasons, even if all differences in power and wealth attached to gender are removed, the fact that deviation from accepted gender roles is stigmatized and discouraged means that gender still stands in the way of individuals pursuing their most fulfilling life. In this way, political emancipation still leaves women within an oppressive system given that, within civil society, operates to restrict women's actions. Moreover, attempts at remedying the inequality implicit in gender are ineffective as long as the expectations and duties that define gender endure. With this in mind, given that gender dramatically restricts an individual's capacity to achieve a "flourishing life," reaching human emancipation requires a genderless society. If not, then we must question whether a society characterized by human emancipation is even truly fit for human life.

One may argue that it is possible to achieve equality without dismantling gender through policies that dismantle the barriers faced by women to achieve material success. An adherent of this perspective may contend that it is possible to dismantle the power imbalance between men and women without totally abandoning the gendered identities of men and women. This perspective mainly takes issue with the premise that gender is inseparably connected to the gendered division of labor, and subsequently duties and behavioral expectations. Importantly, this objection does not imply that gender has not

been constructed in a deeply unequal way that advantages men at the expense of women. Erik Olin Wright identifies this perspective as gender egalitarianism (Olin Wright).

Wright argues that, like class, gender at its core implies inequality (Olin Wright). Recall our previously established definition of gender. How can biological sex, a morally arbitrary characteristic that one cannot deserve, be used to determine the distribution of power, rights, and duties in a society committed to respecting human dignity? I argue that just as there cannot be a society with class distinction that is truly equal, neither can there be a society with the concept of gender in which the material prospects of men and women are indistinguishable (Olin Wright). Here, one can certainly object from a Rawlsian perspective that inequality may be permissible if it is to the benefit of the least advantaged. However, I maintain that ideal, Rawlsian society would still be characterized by class distinction and inequality. This does not mean that equality is an unworthy goal. Often, gender abolition is strawmanned as requiring that "everyone would be androgynous in their identities and practices (Olin Wright)." In reality, gender abolition is the process of moving towards a society in which rights and duties are not distributed on the basis of biological sex.

In this way, policies that advance equality between men and women directly undermine the foundations of the institution of gender (Olin Wright). For example, Wright argues that policies that work to promote equal participation in raising children devalues the character of domestic labor (Olin Wright). This is particularly important considering the way in which unpaid domestic labor has historically prevented women from being able to participate within the workforce in the same way as men. By promoting equal participation between partners in child rearing, whether one is born with

the ability to produce a child has a significantly reduced impact on the expectations surrounding the proper balance between labor at home or on the market. Importantly, gendered behavioral expectations will continue to inhibit women's ability to lead a satisfying and fulfilling life even if economic discrimination rooted out by policies promoting gender equality (Olin Wright). For this reason, it is important that we strive not only to dismantle the unequal distribution of material wealth, but also the system of expectations attached to gender that unfairly define what constitutes a proper life for an individual based on sex (Olin Wright). Detaching biological sex from the distribution of rights, duties, and expectations is literally the act of transcending past gender.

With this in mind, the idea that gender can endure while men and women interact as equals is deeply flawed. While the goal of gender egalitarians is in line with that of gender abolitionists, they fail to recognize that gender is fundamentally incompatible with a nonsexist society. Humans cannot interact equally as long as gender continues to define our development. Gender is constructed in a way that constrains what life is normatively appropriate for an individual to pursue in a way that undermines men and women's ability to interact as free and equal moral persons. Therefore, gender egalitarians favored policies would actually work to degender society, as they would erode the linkage between biological sex and a defined mold of how to occupy the world properly. Understanding this, the idea that we can achieve equality while maintaining gender is absurd. In fact, every move towards equality slowly dismantles gender as constructed.

Without once commenting on the concept we understand today to be gender, in *On the Jewish Question* and *The German Ideology* Karl Marx offers us a powerful, genderless vision of what the future of humanity could be. In *The German Ideology*,

Marx calls for the abolition of the division of labor based on the way in which it inevitably creates deep economic, social and intellectual inequality. Critically, Marx points out that the division of labor has its origins within the family, an institution that cannot be assumed to be just. What Marx is referring to here is gender, which normatively establishes expectations of duty and behavior on the basis of biological sex. As I argue, gender functions in the same dehumanizing way as the division of labor as a whole. Therefore, the division of labor cannot truly be abolished without dismantling the concept of gender, which inherently defines a socially coercive division of labor between men and women.

The idea of Marx supporting gender abolition is not only found in *The German Ideology*. In *On the Jewish Question*, Marx puts forward a concept called human emancipation, which is a step beyond human emancipation in the course of human development. Human emancipation requires that all individuals transcend divisive social constructs and become species-beings who are capable of genuine communal thinking. While this piece describes the reasons why religion must be abolished, gender functions in very much the same way. The way that gender influences individuals thinking to maintain relationships of servility would prevent humans from becoming species-beings.

The process of dismantling gender is far less radical and abstract than it sounds. As Erik Olin Wright puts it, "degendering would be a side effect of the pursuit of gender equality (Olin Wright)." Clearly, many of our current policies that seek to combat sexism are already working to create a more genderless society. Additionally, increasing acceptance of gender fluidity exemplifies the way in which society at large is moving towards a more genderless collective consciousness. On the surface, it may seem that

gender fluidity still reaffirms the existence of gender. However, the idea that an individual can detach their gender from their biological sex is deeply liberating. While gender abolition may sound like a far fetched ideal born out of a culture of political correctness that is often vilified as ridiculous, it seems that we are already moving towards a genderless world, albeit inadvertently.

## CHAPTER 4: Sen

In this chapter, I focus on a different vision for human advancement. Namely, Amartya Sen's *Development as Freedom*. I begin by reconstructing Sen's argument with particular attention to the "process" and "opportunity" aspect of freedom. These two concepts map cleanly onto the "effectiveness" and "evaluative" reasons for the promotion of freedom. Based on this understanding of freedom, I point out that full realization of Sen's vision for human development requires the elimination of forms of unfreedom. I then establish that gender would qualify as a form of unfreedom according to Sen's definition. In this way, we again find in *Development as Freedom* an implicit argument for gender abolition, given that, if gender ceased to be a form of unfreedom it would no longer be recognizable as gender. I also demonstrate that promoting women's agency does not only benefit women, but also uplifts others. This is what is referred to as the effectiveness reason, and lends support to the idea that gender is a form of unfreedom in an of itself

### RECONSTRUCTION OF SEN'S ARGUMENT

As the title cleanly sums up, the foundation of Amartya Sen's *Development as Freedom* is the idea that development should be understood as the process of increasing the degree of "real freedom" that individuals enjoy within a particular society (Sen 3). To say that a society is developing, according to Sen's definition, has less to do with economic growth and more to do with the increasing presence of substantive freedom.

According to this understanding, a poorer society may have achieved a higher level of development if their citizens' lives are characterized by a more comprehensive set of freedoms as compared to their relatively more wealthy counterparts. This more complete, holistic way of conceptualizing development stands in stark contrast to more traditional notions of development that tie development to factors such as “growth of gross national product...rise in personal incomes,... industrialization,... technological advance, or with social modernization (Sen 3).”

Having addressed Sen’s conception of development, the question arises: what exactly does Sen mean by “freedom?” Sen argues that freedom consists of both a “process aspect” and an “opportunity aspect (Sen 17).” By “process,” Sen is referring to the presence of individual agency in “actions and decisions (Sen 17).” This type of freedom is exemplified by “political and civil rights” such as the ability to vote or to freely enter into contracts and more broadly to choose what ends one wishes to pursue (Sen 17). Additionally, the process aspect also refers to the ability to exercise autonomy in civil society. This is what Sen refers to as “social choice (Sen 291)” However, as Sen points out, the procedural aspect is not sufficiently broad to encompass freedom on its own. Instead, we must also consider “opportunity,” which refers to the material conditions individuals exist within such as the presence of poverty and mortality (Sen 17). The opportunity aspect of freedom also refers to individuals abilities to achieve the outcomes that they desire. These two aspects make clear that Sen’s definition of freedom does not simply mean survival, but is also connected to Aristotilian notions of human “flourishing,” as well as “capacity (Sen 24).”

Sen also distinguishes between the “constitutive and instrumental roles of freedom (Sen 36).” While his primary focus is the instrumental role, Sen regards the constitutive role as framing freedom as the “primary end” of development (Sen 36). Put simply, freedom is a worthy goal because it leaves humans better off than they would be in its absence. In its constitutive role, freedom represents the “removal” of “deprivations” such as hunger, violence, and political unfreedom (Sen 37). The removal of these deprivations *constitute* the promotion of freedom. On the other hand, the instrumental role of freedom views freedom as “the principle means of development (Sen 36).” While it may seem self evident that if freedom is the end of development then it must also be a part of the means, Sen focuses on freedom as an instrument in order to effectively illustrate that seemingly unrelated kinds of freedom are actually intimately connected (Sen 37). For example, as Sen points out the fact that there has never been a famine within a functioning democracy is evidence that political freedom helps secure the freedom from starvation, even though these may seem unrelated (Sen 51). This perspective informs Sen’s more broad statement that “free and sustainable agency [is]... a major engine of development (Sen 4).”

Closely related to these two roles of freedom are Sen’s two main reasons to value freedom in promoting development. He distinguishes between the two as the “evaluative” and “effectiveness” reasons (Sen, 4). Sen defines the evaluative reason as, “assessment of progress has to be done primarily in terms of whether the freedoms that people have are enhanced (Sen 4). More importantly, central to Sen’s argument is the idea that advances in individuals’ material freedoms in certain areas of life promote the development of greater freedoms in seemingly unrelated domains (Sen 4). In this way, actions that

enhance a particular group's freedom as an agent simultaneously engender advances in human freedom generally. This is what Sen refers to as the “effectiveness reason (Sen, 4).” In this way, the effectiveness reason for promoting freedom is linked to the instrumental role of freedom. Similarly, the evaluative reason for promoting reason, which holds that “assessment of progress has to be done primarily in terms of whether the freedoms that people have are enhanced,” is inseparable from the constitutive role of freedom (Sen 4).

Sen then shifts his focus to five different categories of instrumental freedoms, “(1) political freedoms, (2) economic facilities, (3) social opportunities, (4) transparency guarantees and (5) protective security (Sen 10).” While these freedoms are all worthy ends on their own given the constitutive role, Sen argues that these five freedoms are also critical in promoting development (Sen 38). To briefly touch on the meanings of these separate categories, political freedom encompasses concepts such as democracy broadly, as well as civil rights, lack of censorship, and the ability to dissent (Sen 28). Economic facilities refers to individuals ability to “utilize economic resources for the purpose of consumption, or production, or exchange (Sen 39).” Critically, this freedom also demands that national economic growth is not limited to only a particular class, so distributive justice is central to the fulfillment of this instrumental freedom (Sen 39). Social opportunities comprises the institutions within a society that facilitate a flourishing life, both mentally and physically, such as health care and education to name two formal institutions (Sen 39). Next, transparency guarantees are meant to protect against corruption and predatory economic practices through securing “guarantees of disclosure and lucidity” between individuals (Sen 39-40). Lastly, protective security refers to the

presence of institutional arrangements that are intended to ensure the survival of the most vulnerable members of society such as the poor, unemployed, disabled, elderly, as well as the victims of natural disasters (Sen 40).

While Sen is correct in pointing out that freedom may frequently be correlated with these factors, there are also cases where the promotion of freedom comes into conflict with these specific measures (Sen 3). Hypothetically, consider an authoritarian government where utilizing central planning has caused widespread poverty (just an example). In this context, deregulation of the labor market could enhance the freedom citizens enjoy by allowing greater agency for individuals to pursue whatever they define for themselves as fulfilling work. Additionally, it is possible that deregulation could uplift the country economically thereby alleviating the unfreedoms that accompany poverty. However, in the United States, deregulation of the labor market could leave people less free by eliminating protections/benefits such as minimum wage, health insurance, as well as parental leave.

It is with this basis that Sen implores us to always remember that freedom is the proper end of development, and not to get fixated or overly attached to “particular means, or some specially chosen list of instruments (Sen 3).” That is to say, we should focus on promoting freedom directly rather than indirectly. We must recognize that the means we use to achieve this end may vary depending on context. For example, while in some cases the promotion of free markets may lead to greater overall freedom this does not necessarily mean that the maintenance of markets absent governmental regulation should be what we strive for. Free markets are only a worthy aim insofar as they advance the more important end of promoting individuals’ substantive freedom (Sen 6). With this

being said, Sen acknowledges that “freedoms are not only the primary ends of development, they are also among its principal means (Sen 11).” I only use free markets as an example, the larger point is, in Sen’s eyes, we are only developing if we are increasing freedom, regardless of the means or institutional arrangements that get us to that point.

With this background, it is evident that Sen’s assertion that “development requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom” flows logically from his definitions of development and freedom (Sen 3). On the most fundamental level, unfreedom can take the form of existential threats such as hunger, violence, as well as the lack of healthcare, sanitation, and clean water (Sen 15). These types of unfreedom are not limited to only poor nations. As Sen highlights, “Even within very rich countries, sometimes the longevity of substantial groups is no higher than that in much poorer economies of the so-called third world (Sen 15).” Importantly, Sen recognizes that gender is one form of unfreedom that can also qualify as an existential threat to women’s lives through violence as well as restriction of substantive freedom (Sen 15).

Beyond these forms, Sen also focuses on the abridgement of political and civil rights as unfreedom, which he argues can be a major cause of economic insecurity (Sen 16). Sen also includes factors like “systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance (Sen 3).” However, one factor I feel he fails to adequately address is unfreedom institutionalized within our interpersonal relationships, like gender (perhaps this would fall under systematic social deprivation). Regardless of whether Sen has named every type of unfreedom (which is not a particularly realistic expectation), the

main takeaway here should be the idea that if an unfreedom exists, then development requires that it be dismantled.

This brings me to my argument concerning gender and its incompatibility with Sen's conception of development. If we understand development as promoting freedom, then the most developed society would be the one that has achieved freedom to the highest degree. In order to realize this objective, Sen makes clear that we must dismantle the sources of unfreedom that stand in the way of development. In the paragraphs that follow, I intend to demonstrate that gender as I have defined for the purposes of this thesis constitutes a major source of unfreedom. For this reason, Sen's framework would require that we dismantle the aspects of gender that qualify as forms of unfreedom if we intend on maximizing human development. However, given that these unfreedoms are exactly what defines gender, the process of development is also a process of dismantling/abolishing gender. Any move towards development as freedom with respect to gender erodes the patriarchal construction of gender. Theoretically, if a society was to fully achieve the end of development, this society would necessarily be genderless according to the definition of gender put forward in my first chapter. Therefore, implicit in Sen's *Development as Freedom* is a powerful argument for the dismantling/abolition of gender.

## **GENDER AS UNFREEDOM: OPPORTUNITY ASPECT**

In establishing gender as a form of unfreedom I want to first examine genders' relationship to the opportunity aspect of freedom. Sen defines this component as

individuals “opportunity to achieve outcomes that they value and have reason to value (Sen 291).” Sen ties this aspect of freedom to both health and safety, as well as economic outcomes (Sen 17, 291). In the following paragraphs, I will make clear the ways in which gender is a major source of unfreedom as it relates to Sen’s opportunity aspect.

Specifically, I will focus on the way in which gender’s delegation of unpaid domestic labor to women stands in the way of women achieving the same economic outcomes as men. In this way, gender is an obstacle to the realization of the opportunity aspect of freedom.

As I mentioned before, Oyèrónkẹ Oyèwùmí observes in *Visualising the Body*, the fact that gender is a social construction means that there must be variation depending on context (time and place), given that not every society is constructed identically (Oyèwùmí 464). However, despite Oyèwùmí’s contention that gender cannot then be uniform across all societies, I, along with other significant feminist thinkers, still hold that gender has several central features that vary in degree but are still present across all patriarchal societies (Oyèwùmí 462-464). As Awa Thiam observes in *Feminism and Revolution*, the delegation of domestic duties to women is one of the most prominent features of gender that cuts across cultures (Thiam 119). Thiam points out that the delegation of unpaid domestic duty that defines gender within patriarchal societies leaves women unfree relative to men (Thiam 119). As I have previously mentioned, this idea is central to much of contemporary feminist theory.

Here, I argue that gender’s inherent delegation of the burden of domesticity to women limits their ability to achieve the outcomes that they desire relative to men. One major reason for this is the fact that women’s labor within the household is typically

uncompensated, yet assumed and enforced. Conversely, the expectation and duty that men should participate in the formal labor market positions men advantageously to pursue and achieve whatever ends they define as worthy. Interestingly, the main contention of Thiam's paper is the idea that full liberation for colonized people requires the liberation of women, which in turn requires a "sexual revolution (Thiam 116)." This effectively mirrors my argument in this chapter that in order to achieve Sen's definition of development to the greatest degree, gender must be abolished/dismantled.

First, let us consider the way in which the burden of unpaid domestic labor inhibits the opportunity aspect of freedom for women. At the most basic level, the traditionally gendered family's main assumption is that the wife/mother stays at home and does domestic labor while the husband/father works in the labor market (Okin 5). On the most basic level, it is apparent that when the family is ordered in this way women are isolated from the formalized economy, and are therefore less able to make money. Given Sen's recognition that, although wealth cannot properly be an end in itself (having only instrumental value), it is extremely useful in helping people achieve "freedom to lead the kind of lives we have reason to value (Sen 14). Logically, it would follow that the unequal distribution of wealth caused by gender as traditionally constructed leaves women with diminished means to pursue the opportunities they value relative to men. For this reason, when the family is structured in this way, women have less freedom in achieving desired outcomes, which inhibits the opportunity aspect of freedom

Even today as women increasingly participate in wage labor outside of the household, the assumptions regarding the division of labor within the household implied by the traditionally gendered family still hold incredible weight. Here, the burden of

gender's inherent delegation of domestic duty to women allows less freedom relative to men in achieving valued outcomes, both professionally and socially/privately. For example, Susan Moller Okin states that within "households with two full-time working parents," the mother often "does, at the very least, twice as much family work as the father (Okin 22)." Despite the fact that Okin made this assertion over 30 years ago, analysis of the American Time Usage Survey published by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics suggests that very little progress has been made (ATUS). In other words, this component of the patriarchal construction of gender has remained constant. According to Data from 2015-2019, in families with two full time working parents women spend around 45 minutes on housework a day compared to 15 minutes for men (ATUS 7a). Interestingly, the data set is broken down into three categories: both spouses work full time, mother employed part time and father employed full time and mother not employed and father employed full time (ATUS 7a). Notably absent is the possibility that the father works part time or only the mother is employed. If not for gender, these would be equally likely possibilities.

This unequal distribution of domestic labor within families with two working parents restricts women's ability to pursue their own professional goals to the same extent that men gain, while still having time for necessary leisure. On average, within families with two parents working full time, men have 3.6 hours of leisure time per day compared to 2.86 for women (ATUS 7a). This issue is compounded by the fact that the ordering of the modern workplace assumes that employees are part of a traditionally gendered family. To tie these two ideas together, not only does the unequal distribution of domestic labor within the family make it difficult for women to participate in the labor

market in the same extent as men, but the patriarchal ordering of the workplace ignores this burden while simultaneously undervaluing women's work.

Looking first at the way the unequal distribution of domestic labor affects women's ability to achieve their desired professional goals, Susan Moller Okin points out that "employed wives still do by far the greatest proportion of unpaid family work (Okin 5)." This is an obstacle to women's economic and professional advancement. For instance, Okin reminds us that women are more likely to sacrifice their professional commitments in order to fulfill their enforced domestic duties than men (Okin 5). This contributes to the overall reality that women "advance more slowly than their husbands at work and thus gain less seniority (Okin 5)." Because the delegation of domestic labor is a constitutive part of gender, this reality is best understood as a direct consequence of gender. This observation is supported by Adrienne Martin who states, "meeting expectations of domesticity reduces women's ability to pursue, occupy, and succeed in more highly valued social roles, especially those that directly affect the distribution of social goods (Martin 12)." Similarly, women, more often than men, tend to sacrifice their own careers to accommodate the professional opportunities of their husbands as is the case when families move for new jobs. Considering inextricable connection between these dynamics and gender, it is clear gender is an impediment to working mothers/wives' professional advancement, and therefore inhibits the opportunity aspect of freedom for women.

Another example of this dynamic is exemplified by the consequences of parental leave and the unequal distribution of child rearing duties. First of all, it is important to point out that parental leave in the United States is conceived of in a deeply gendered

manner. However, this is not the case to the same degree in Nordic countries with significant protections for paternity leave such as Finland (Haataja 2009). Beyond the delegation of domestic duty that I have focused upon at length, the linkage of biological sex and gender is used to support the unjust idea that maternity leave is far more important than paternity leave, even in Nordic countries (Okin 36). For example, Allan Bloom states that paternity leave is "contrived and somewhat ridiculous," arguing that women's biological capacity for breastfeeding justifies the pattern that working mothers take time off work to care for newborns rather than fathers alone or both parents (Okin 36). The underlying implication of this idea is that by virtue of biology, women have distinct normative expectations relative to men. This is the very notion of gender that my definition aims to reflect.

The expectation that, within a family with two wage earning parents, women will take maternity leave while men will continue working prevents the equal achievement of desired professional outcomes between the genders. Let us consider Okin's example of top law firms (Okin 126). Women who want to maximize their professional achievement and make partner must sacrifice having children or risk being placed on the "mommy track (Okin 126)." This leaves women within these law firms with a choice between having a family and pursuing their career goals (Okin 126). However, men need not sacrifice their professional careers to have children. As Okin points out, plenty of high level male lawyers have children. The difference is, there is no expectation that they will hurt the firm by taking time off for the birth of a child (Okin 126). Here, we clearly see the way in which women's delegated domestic duties stand in the way of the opportunity to achieve valued outcomes, and thus the opportunity aspect of freedom. Because this

expectation is inherent to gender (domestic duty justified through biological appeal linking sex and gender) it is clear that the opportunity aspect of freedom is diminished for women by virtue of their gender. In order to fully realize the opportunity aspect of freedom, gender as presently constructed must be dismantled.

As I mentioned in my first chapter, the centrality of the traditional division of labor within the family to the construction of gender means that even women without children are still subject to these same assumptions. This is the result of the patriarchal manner with which the modern workplace is ordered, as well as the individual biases against women. The modern workplace is ordered in a way that assumes each worker is a member of a traditionally gendered family. For example, the schedule of the work day makes it difficult to maintain a home and/or raise children (Okin 155). Okin points to the “vast discrepancy between normal full-time working hours and children's school hours and vacations,” as well as travel demands required by many jobs as evidence (Okin 155-156). On the surface, this may seem only relevant to working mothers. However, women without children may still be passed over for job opportunities because employers are worried that their potential to become a mother will interfere with their work. Critically, this does not apply to men as gender does not assume that men will prioritize their domestic responsibilities over work, this is expected only for women. In this way, sexist employers may see hiring a childless woman as a greater risk than hiring a childless man. This is one example of the way that the expectations associated with motherhood are connected to gender generally, not just the experiences of mothers.

Perhaps more importantly, as I mention in my first chapter, because gender is something that is continually enforced and taught from birth through adulthood, the

effects of the assumption of the traditionally gendered family are felt before women choose whether or not to have children. Regardless of whether a woman chooses to become a parent, the force of gender raises women with the normative assumption that they should one day become mothers, which shapes how people think. This is exemplified in the reality that “occupational aspirations and expectations of adolescents are highly differentiated by sex . . . [and this] differentiation follows the pattern of sexual segregation which exists in the occupational structure (Okin 141-142).” Tangibly, this amounts to women being taught from a young age to have more modest professional ambitions in which they have less confidence as compared to young men (Okin 142). This largely stems from the fact that gender ascribes motherhood as a more proper life for women as opposed to professional achievement (Okin 142). Here, it is evident that the burden of motherhood is very influential in the development of young women who may never become mothers.

The astounding extent of this gendered assumption is revealed in the Grandmother hypothesis, which suggests that women have evolved to live longer than men because of the role of grandmothers in the raising of children (Lambert 2019). Based on data from colonial Quebec, researchers observed that adult daughters' proximity to their mothers was correlated with substantially increased family size (Lambert 2019). Although 400 year data from Canada might seem irrelevant, we must remember that at the time “about half of a woman's offspring died before age 15. Such harsh conditions led to a range of reproductive success (Lambert 2019).” For this reason, the utility of grandmothers' labor to the success of the family is more apparent in this context than it would be today. Proponents of this theory believe that the assumption that women, and

therefore grandmothers, provide uncompensated domestic labor helps explain why humans are one of the only species where “females live on long past the age of reproduction (Lambert 2019).” What I want to emphasize here is that the gendered domestic duty shouldered by women is so pervasive that it may have created an evolutionary change reflected in all women.

With this in mind, it is clear that the assumptions of the traditionally gendered family (mainly that women will not take part in wage labor) informs the paths that all women take to some degree. As a result, one of the most important forces behind the economic disparities between working men and women is the careers that individuals choose to pursue (Okin 145). Examples of female-dominated industries include teaching, nursing, administrative support and service/care work (Okin 144). Okin suggests that women may choose these fields because they allow for greater flexibility in fulfilling domestic duties associated with motherhood (Okin 144). However, it goes without saying that many within these fields are not mothers and chose these professions for other reasons. In this way, the gendered expectations that accompany motherhood exercise power during young women’s development that endures whether or not they choose to have children.

Critically, these fields are underpaid as compared to male dominated professions, and offer limited prospects of upward mobility (Okin 144). This is another consequence of the patriarchal ordering of the workplace (Olin Wright). The main takeaway here should be that all women are subject to the force of the assumptions of the traditionally gendered family, as these assumptions are inextricably connected to gender broadly. In this way, as I have demonstrated, gender inhibits women’s ability to realize the outcomes

they desire compared to men. Additionally, we should question desires that are a byproduct of the unjust construction of gender. We cannot treat these desires in the same way that economists treat preferences. We must consider the manner in which our social arrangements shape these desires in a way that replicates existing forms of unfreedom and domination.

On the other side of things, Awa Thiam claims that, by virtue of their gender privilege, men have “access to the world at large, [and] the opportunity to develop his intellectual and physical faculties in a range of experiences (Thiam 119).” While my previous few pages have focused on the way in which gender diminishes women’s ability to achieve valued outcomes economically, I must point out that gender works to men’s advantage in attaining their economic goals. As Thiam posits, because gender assumes that men will primarily work outside of the household, men are able to develop skills and connections that are highly valued economically. Because of this, as Elizabeth Anderson holds in *Unstrapping the Straitjacket of ‘Preference,’* men are more able to develop “human capital,” thereby increasing their ability to achieve desired outcomes (Anderson 33). As Okin and Anderson both observe, the resulting disparity in earning potential is further used to legitimate men’s advantageous position thus creating a positive feedback loop (Anderson 33 and Okin 5). However, it is critical to note that this level of economic output for men within the traditionally gendered family is only possible through the unpaid labor that women perform (Anderson 33). Evidently, gender offers men increased opportunity to achieve their desired outcomes by enforcing the servility of women. As a result of their gender, men experience the opportunity aspect of freedom more fully than women.

In tandem, these statements from Martin, Thiam and Anderson support my contention that gender leaves women at a disadvantage in achieving desired professional outcomes relative to men. Both genders certainly have expectations and duties placed upon them, but these do not function equally. The fact that gender has traditionally delegated the household as the proper place for women's labor has isolated women from the formal economy and civil society generally. As I have demonstrated, it is clear that the domestic expectations that characterize gender act upon all women to some degree, not only mothers. These expectations stand in the way of women being able to capitalize on the same opportunities that men are afforded. Now recall, the definition of the opportunity aspect of freedom, which requires that individuals be able to "achieve outcomes that they value and have reason to value," including but not limited to economic achievement. If gender stands in the way of women's ability to achieve desired outcomes compared to men, then evidently gender is incompatible with the full realization of the opportunity aspect of freedom.

## **GENDER AND THE PROCESS ASPECT OF FREEDOM**

Shifting now to the process aspect of freedom, as I mentioned earlier, the process aspect of freedom relates to the individual's ability to exercise "freedom of actions and decisions (Sen 17)." Sen emphasizes the importance of freedom in decision making specifically in relation to " participation in political decisions and social choice (Sen 291)." He also asserts that "unfreedom can arise...through inadequate processes (Sen 17)." As I will demonstrate, gender is an impediment to the exercise of free agency in

decision making for both genders, but particularly for women. Beginning with, political participation, gender has traditionally left women on the margins of political life.

Historically, women have been explicitly excluded from political participation, and at the very least consistently underrepresented within governing bodies. As a consequence, political philosophy has treated politics as the exclusive domain of men. In the social sphere, gender leaves women with less decision making power within the family, as well as the community more broadly. Moreover, gender also unjustly dictates what sort of life is normatively appropriate for an individual to pursue based on the delegation of duties, privileges and expectations according to gender and their enforcement. In terms of In this way, gender constitutes unfreedom when considering the process aspect of freedom.

Historically, gender has been tied to political participation with men, specifically white men, being regarded as the sole beings capable of political thought. In *The Struggle for Reason in Africa*, Mogobe B. Ramose asserts that the dehumanizing characterization of Africans and indigenous people as lacking rationality “is the foundation of racism (Ramosé 3).” Through the active process of the construction of whiteness, the recognition of seemingly neutral concepts common to all humans, such as rationality, was made conditional upon phenotypic characteristics as well as heritage (Ramosé 3). More concretely, the linkage of reason and humanity was weaponized against Africans as well as indigenous people globally in order to justify claims of white superiority (Ramosé 1). The linkage of reason and humanity also effectively implied that anyone who was not regarded as “rational” was not fully human (Ramosé 1). This is what Ramosé refers to as the “struggle for reason (Ramosé 1).” The notion that only white men possessed reason was used to legitimate colonialism and missionary activity as beneficent acts given that

black and indigenous people supposedly lacked the rationality required for self determination (Ramose 1). Clearly, the capacity for reason has long been intimately connected to the right of political participation

Critically, Ramose holds that the “struggle for reason” is rooted in Aristotle’s statement that “man is a rational creature (Ramose 1).” Aristotle's choice to refer to “man” as rational had the important implication characterizing women as incapable of reason (Ramose 1). As Ramose describes the consequences of the struggle of reason for African’s rights, the notion that rationality is unique to men has also been used to justify the exclusion of women from political participation (Okin 8). Moreover, Okin states that Aristotle’s regarded women as “not fundamentally equal to the free men who participate in political justice, but inferiors whose natural function is to serve those who are more fully human (Okin 14).” Here, again we see that the characterization of women as lacking rationality dehumanized women similarly to how the same statement regarding African’s supported the white supremacist idea that African’s were not fully human. Undoubtedly, the struggle for reason has led to the exclusion of both black people and women from full participation in political life.

Recall that a central component of my definition of gender is the idea that biological sex serves as the basis for normative assumptions and expectations for a person. Put differently, any assumption that is made based only upon an individuals perceived biological sex constitutes gender. As I pointed out two paragraphs ago, the recognition of rationality was made contingent on the presence of certain phenotypic characteristics. In the case of black people, this was most notably skin color, while for women sex served as the basis for these unjust judgements. With this in mind, it is clear

that this characterization of women is not merely a form of sexism. Instead, the idea that women lack reason is inseparable from the historical, patriarchal construction of gender. This supports my contention that gender is incompatible with the full realization of the process aspect of freedom.

Aristotle is not alone in his exclusion of the possibility of women's participation in politics. For example, the writings of Saint Augustine position women as equal to men "in their capacity to share in the divine life," but hold that women should be controlled by men and "restricted to the domestic sphere" and thus excluded from political life (Okin 57). Similarly, Saint Thomas Aquinas believed that women, unlike men, did not have the capacity for reason and should be excluded from politics (Okin 57-58). This articulation of the struggle for reason was used by Aquinas to justify male domination of women as being for their own good (Okin 58). Likewise, Rousseau believed that no harm was done by denying women political participation given his belief that husbands could adequately represent the family as a whole (Okin 26-27). While the struggle for reason was used to exclude Africans from political participation, the concept served the same purpose in relation to women, while simultaneously justifying the hierarchical structure of the patriarchal family.

Okin highlights the fact that nearly all theories of justice "have assumed that the "individual" who is the basic subject of the theories is the male head of a patriarchal household (Okin 14)." For example, this same assumption is made by John Rawls in *A Theory of Justice* in stating that those in the original positions are "heads of families (Okin 92). The importance of this assumption is not simply rhetorical. Instead, adoption of the value of patriarchal household has directly resulted in women's marginalization

from political life. For example, Okin points out that *Bradwell v. Illinois* prevented women from practicing law based on the rationale that the patriarchal family, “that was held to require the dependence of women and their exclusion from civil and political life” was essential to the United States’ “stability and order (Okin 19).” This is an example of the “public/domestic dichotomy” that delegates women’s proper sphere of activity to the home only (Okin 110-111).

With this background, it is clear that the idea that women lack rationality has been entrenched over time to justify women’s exclusion from the political process. This is most evident when considering women’s explicit exclusion from voting. Women did not gain the right to vote in the United States until 1920 with the United Kingdom following suit eight years later (Infoplease). France and Switzerland, both considered relatively progressive nations, did not grant women suffrage until 1944 and 1971 respectively (Infoplease). Most recently, women were allowed to vote for the first time in the United Arab Emirates in 2006 and in Saudi Arabia in 2011 (Infoplease).

However, just because women have the right to vote on paper does not mean that they are able to participate in the political process equally to men. For example, in Afghanistan women’s ability to vote is significantly restricted by the requirement that they obtain a male family member's permission to leave the house (Aspinal). This has not stopped many brave women from voting and running for office even, when faced with violent threats from the Taliban as well as protests from religious conservatives (Aspinal). Similarly, in Pakistan women are frequently “barred from voting by their husbands and village elders,” again often suffering public scorn and violence as a result (Aspinal). Additionally, nations like, but not limited to, Uganda and Kenya fail to

consider the expectations of household labor that women are subject to which make it difficult to take the time out to vote (Aspinal).

Beyond these examples, even in more developed nations (under Sen's definition) women are unfree when considering political participation and its relation to the process aspect of freedom. This is exemplified in women's underrepresentation in elected offices in most "developed democracies." At the time of writing this thesis, there are currently 101 women in the United States' House of Representatives (23.2 %), and 26 in the senate (26%) (CAWP Rutgers). While this is certainly an improvement from 1989, the year that Okin's *Justice, Gender and the Family* was published, when there were only two female senators, there is no question that women still do not hold the same political power that men do. In fact, according to Pew Research Center data, the US is very average in terms of women's representation in national legislative bodies (Atske 2020). Globally, 24% of all national legislative seats are occupied by women (Atske 2020). In fact, only three nations, Cuba, Rwanda, and Bolivia have at least a proportionate share of women within their legislatures (Atske 2020). Based on this evidence, it is an empirical fact that globally women do not hold the same political power as men. Put differently, across the world, women do not equally participate in the process of political decision making. Unquestionably then, gender is a form of unfreedom when considered from the process aspect of freedom.

One of the main reasons for women's underrepresentation in national legislative bodies is related to the traditionally gendered family. Firstly, as Okin would suggest, "until there is justice within the family, women will not be able to gain equality in politics (Okin 4)." Here, once more the assumed domestic burden shouldered by women

makes it more difficult to run for office than it would be for a man within a traditionally gendered family. Okin theorizes that if men and women shared equally in domestic responsibilities then women would likely be more evenly represented in political offices (Okin 171, 179). This is because often women are forced to choose between having children and “attaining positions of the greatest social influence” such as a congressional representative (Okin 171). Because of their gender, men do not face this same predicament. This perspective is supported by British politician Shirley Williams who expressed the sentiment that until men bear their fair share of familial responsibilities, the vast majority of women will be unable to pursue a “job as demanding as politics (Okin 104).”

To anticipate a potential objection, an opponent of my perspective may claim that whether women are equally represented in government is not an issue as long as women’s perspectives are accounted for by male representatives. However, as Okin argues men cannot adequately embody women’s views in politics such that actual representation is not necessary (Okin 102). As I have previously mentioned regarding Carol Gilligan’s Jack and Jill example, and as Okin articulates, “the different life experiences of females and males from the start in fact affect their respective psychologies, modes of thinking, and patterns of moral development in significant ways (Okin 106). As a result, there is significant evidence to support the claim that women’s perspectives are unique from men’s, who are unable to truly put themselves in women’s shoes (Okin 106-107). Accordingly, Okin holds that women’s underrepresentation in politics prevents the creation of a “fully human moral or political theory (Okin 107).” Recognizing this, it is impossible to claim that women can participate fully in the process of political choice

through voting alone. True realization of the process aspect of freedom for women requires gender parity within legislative bodies.

Briefly summarizing my argument in this section so far, one critical component of the process aspect of freedom is the ability to participate in the political process. However, gender has been constructed in a way that affords men much greater agency politically. Historically, the concept of “reason” and its limitation to white males legitimized women’s exclusion from political life, as seen in the Rousseau, Aquinas, Augustine and Rawls examples. As with the struggle for reason generally, the presence of reason was tied to physical characteristics, in this case sex. Based on my definition given in the first chapter, the linkage of sex with rationality makes clear that the phenomenon I am describing is an example of gender and not sexism. The consequences of this component of gender are still felt to this day, most notably in women’s disenfranchisement and underrepresentation within government. As I have shown, women certainly have less of an ability to make their voices heard through the political process than men. Given that the process aspect of freedom requires the ability to participate in the political decision making process, it is clear that women are unfree relative to men due to their gender with regards to the process aspect of freedom.

Another crucial part of the process aspect of freedom is the ability for people to exercise free agency in their social/private lives. Here, the process aspect of freedom is reflected in individuals’ ability to make decisions for themselves within their family and community and influence others (Sen 5, 110, 286). This is what Sen refers to as “social choice.” While impediments to the process aspect of freedom may take the forms of laws that seek to control individuals actions explicitly, free agency is also affected by informal

institutions, as is the case with gender. Informal institutions have the ability to dictate the way in which people conceive of their position/role within society, which in turn shapes individuals actions as a result of the normative force that lies within the collective enforcement of social constructs like gender. In the following paragraphs I argue that gender is incompatible with true social choice given the hierarchical structure of the family. Furthermore, gender leaves women with less influence in the broader community, even further diminishing the possibility of social choice. On top of this, gender's inherent delegation of a particular "proper life" based on sex is incompatible with the free agency that social choice requires. Accordingly, it is clear that gender stands in the way of the process aspect of freedom as it relates to social choice.

As prominent feminist thinkers like Susan Moller Okin argue, the traditionally gendered family is necessarily hierarchical with the father/husband occupying the dominant position (Okin 19, 134-135). As Okin observes, this hierarchy is intimately related to the economic advantage that men receive as a result of the gendered division of labor (Okin 95). For example, Okin points out that fathers/husbands are often able to use "the fact that he is the wage earner to "pull rank" on or to abuse his wife (Okin 22)." This example demonstrates the way in which gender leaves women with less decision making power within the family. In fact, thinkers like Louis de Bonald argued that structural similarities of the family informed and were crucial to the maintenance of totalitarian governments (Okin 18-19).

Somewhat similarly, "Rousseau, Hegel, Tocqueville...all defended the hierarchy of the marital structure while spurning such a degree of hierarchy in institutions and practices outside the household (Okin 19)." With this in mind, it is indisputable that the

traditionally gendered family leaves women with significantly less agency than the male head of household. So much less agency, in fact, that the most accurate comparison with another institution is with a totalitarian government. Importantly, these characterizations of the traditionally gendered family were articulated by proponents of this institution, not radicals calling for its abolition. If the family is a dictatorship with the father at the head, then women have less social choice by virtue of their gender. In this case, when I say social choice I am referring to the capacity for decision making within the family. Consequently, it is evident that gender as traditionally constructed cannot exist if we desire to realize the full extent of the process aspect of freedom for all people.

As Adrienne Martin articulates even more strongly in *Against Mother's Day and Employee Appreciation Day*, domesticity “represents a form of slavery,” which entails prioritizing familial duties over self interest (Martin 2, 4). Martin points out that oftentimes mothers’ actions in service of their family are motivated by fear and prevent mothers from attaining “more highly valued social roles (Martin 6,7,12).” We again see that gender diminishes women’s free agency and social choice. First of all, the enforcement of the burden of domesticity within the family often prevents women from acting in their own self interest. One important example of this is the fact that women often do not have the same ability to enjoy leisure time as their male partners (Okin 95). Additionally, the enforcement of domesticity can hinder mothers ability to pursue meaningful commitments outside of the home (Martin 14). This can prevent women from achieving highly valued and prestigious opportunities that would allow for greater influence within the family and community more broadly. Here, the enforcement of the gendered division of labor diminishes women’s agency within the family, and therefore

their ability to pursue and define their desires, as well as exercise influence over their communities, both of which are central to the process aspect of freedom and social choice.

Perhaps most importantly, definitionally gender is diametrically opposed to the idea of free agency in social choice. Recall my definition of gender given in chapter one. I state that gender delegates duties, privileges, and expectations and ascribes onto every individual a binary conception of what constitutes a proper life. Moreover, I point out that deviations from gendered expectations carries very real consequences for those who choose to challenge these established conventions. For example, as I have discussed at length, gender delegates the duty of domesticity to women based on sex assigned at birth. This social role is not freely chosen, it is assigned. Additionally, this ascription of what constitutes as “proper life” may frequently stand in the way of women’s ability to pursue and define their desires. As Martin reminds us, “deviations from these expectations are seen as, at best, surprising and, at worst, a source of shame and opprobrium (Martin 4).” To sum up these two related ideas, gender from birth defines what actions, behaviors and desires are appropriate for a person based on a physical characteristic. Here, the individual has no choice but to comply or else face social repercussions.

The process aspect of freedom requires that each individual have the ability to exercise freedom in their actions and decisions (Sen 17). However, this is impossible living under an institution that delegates duties and expectations on an arbitrary basis to which individuals are expected to conform their lives or face significant consequences. We do not get to freely choose our gender and its connected roles. Additionally, simply because someone *can* break a rule does not mean that the enforcement of that rule does

not constitute a violation of the individuals freedom to choose. Plainly, whatever stands in the way of people's ability to freely make choices for themselves is an obstacle to the full exercise of the process aspect of freedom. With this in mind, gender clearly constitutes a significant unfreedom in this respect alone.

To sum up my argument put forward in this subsection, gender prevents true social choice and therefore the process aspect of freedom. The hierarchical structure of the patriarchal family implied by gender is frequently compared to a dictatorship. If one accepts, as I believe Sen would, that social choice cannot exist under dictatorship then it is clear that the process aspect of freedom cannot be realized within the traditionally gendered family. Others compare the structure of the traditionally gendered family to slavery. As is the case with slavery, uncompensated labor and the fear of violence prevent the existence of freedom. Moreover, the concept of gender as I have defined it is entirely incompatible with social choice, as the duties and expectations implied are delegated along a totally arbitrary basis and actively enforced. Given that gender is incompatible with social choice, it is apparent that gender constitutes a significant form of unfreedom in that it violates the process aspect.

## **EVALUATIVE AND EFFECTIVENESS REASONS**

As I established in the past two sections, gender qualifies as a form of unfreedom when considered from both the prospect and opportunity aspects of freedom. With this in mind, I want to turn to the evaluative and effectiveness reasons to prioritize freedom in development. Briefly looking first at the evaluative reason, Sen states that “assessment of

progress has to be done primarily in terms of whether the freedoms that people have are enhanced (Sen 4). This point is intimately connected to the constitutive role of freedom, which holds that freedom is the “primary end” of development given the fact that increased freedom improves the lives of all people (Sen 36). As I mentioned in my reconstruction of Sen’s argument, the constitutive role of freedom relates to the removal of various forms of unfreedom. With this in mind, the evaluative reason is simply based on Sen’s definition of development. Sen defines development as the process of increasing the degree of “real freedom” that individuals enjoy within a particular society. The evaluative reason merely states that prioritizing the expansion of freedom is necessary because it is required by the definition of development.

To connect this to gender, given that I have established gender as a form of unfreedom, the evaluative reason would imply that development is inseparable from the process of dismantling/abolishing gender. Critically, this statement rests upon the idea that if gender was no longer a form of unfreedom, then it would no longer exist as we know it. For example, if gender is no longer tied to the delegation of domestic duty, then we have significantly moved towards genderlessness. If all such ascriptions of social roles are dismantled, then we have achieved genderlessness. With this being said, considering the constitutive role of freedom, it is clear that because gender stands in the way of individuals’ agency in pursuing, achieving and defining their goals, then dismantling gender *constitutes* the promotion of freedom and therefore development. In this context, the evaluative reason holds that progress requires that gender must be dismantled in order to achieve development to the highest degree. Because unfreedom is inextricably linked to gender, the removal of these unfreedoms that development

necessitates is to move towards dismantling/abolishing gender. To reiterate, Sen's evaluative reason makes clear that if full development is to be realized a complete deconstruction of gender must occur.

Turning now to the effectiveness reason, Sen's observation that the effects of increasing women's agency is not limited to improvements for only women, but society as a whole, confirms that gender functions like all other forms of unfreedom (Sen 191). As Sen argues, empowering women economically and through education does not only address the specific challenges faced by women. Instead, giving women increased agency also uplifts others as exemplified by decreased child mortality. This example of the positive consequences of the promotion of women's agency on non-women illuminates Sen's "effectiveness reason," which has the implication of revealing the way in which gender's negative effects are not limited to only women.

Amartya Sen mainly chooses to focus on two ways by which women's capacity as decision making agents is increased. Specifically, through increased participation in the formalized economy, and through education. Critically, economic and educational empowerment do not simply promote the wellbeing of women, but allow for women to better advocate for, and pursue what they identify as being in their interest (Sen 189-190). This is what Sen refers to as the "agency aspect of women's movements" that allows women to be "the dynamic promoters of social transformations that can alter the lives of both women and men (Sen 189-190)." Sen makes clear that increasing agency amounts to increasing "decisional power," which is central to the process aspect of freedom (Sen 195, 291)."

As Sen points out, within the family, part of the reason for the asymmetric agency between men and women is the economic power that men tend to possess as the “breadwinner (Sen 194).” On the other hand, the traditionally gendered family typically assigns domestic labor duties to women that reduce their ability to participate in the formalized economy (Sen 194). Critically, the ability to earn money and support the family financially elevates women’s relative position within the family (Sen 194). In this way, the freedom to seek employment outside of the household increases women’s agency which, in turn, “seems to help to foster freedom in other [areas of life] (Sen 194).”

Similarly, Sen points out that education is a powerful channel through which women’s agency can be elevated. Education is central to promoting freedom in “social opportunities,” which contributes to “the individual's substantive freedom to live better (Sen 39).” Looking specifically at illiteracy, the inability to read diminishes individuals ability to participate fully in the economy, as well as the political process (Sen 39). Specifically, individuals who cannot read are unable to work in jobs that “require production according to specification or demand strict quality control (Sen 39).” Likewise, illiteracy leaves individuals unable to access the information contained in newspapers, and the internet, or advocate for their interests through writing (Sen 39). In terms of the gendered effects of illiteracy, the inability to read or write reinforces relationships of dependence and asymmetric agency between men and women.

Of course, increased agency allows for women to better advocate on their own behalf, however, it is crucial to recognize that promoting women’s agency also leads to the development of greater freedoms for all. The promotion of women’s agency

through education and economic empowerment encourages the development of what Sen calls “protective security” for children, not only women (Sen 40). Protective security encompasses the “freedom to survive (Sen 52).” As Sen states, “There is considerable evidence that women's education and literacy tend to reduce the mortality rates of children (Sen 195).” Sen argues that increasing agency for women within the family results in greater emphasis being placed on the wellbeing of children (Sen 195). In particular, increasing women’s agency through literacy seems to be the most significant force in promoting child survival as opposed to “male literacy or general poverty reduction (Sen 197-198).” Though, the relationship is not so clear with regards to economic participation, given the fact that women may not be able to actually gain better child care for their children when faced with the “double burden” or domestic and economic labor (Sen 196). Nevertheless, what this example shows us is that the promotion of women’s free agency (in this case primarily through education) contributes to the development of freedom for all people, not only women. Evidently, the abolition/dismantling of gender is not only a women’s issue, but uplifts all humans.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this chapter focused on Amartya Sen’s vision of human development based on freedom, which consists of an “opportunity” and “process” aspect. As I argue, the economically vulnerable position of women, and their exclusion from political life are constitutively tied to gender and inhibit the “opportunity” and “process” aspect of freedom respectively. Because Sen asserts that development requires the

elimination of forms of unfreedom, and given that gender constitutes a form of unfreedom, I established that implicit in Sen's theory is an argument for gender abolition. We have significant reason to believe that gender is a form of unfreedom because it acts in very much the same way as other forms of unfreedom, as evidenced by the fact that the promotion of women's agency uplifts those around them. This is an example of the effectiveness reason for promoting freedom. If gender no longer constituted a form of unfreedom, this would require the dissolution of the constitutive elements of gender including the linkage of biological sex and gender, as well as the attached set of duties, privileges and expectations.

## CHAPTER 5: How Gender Harms Men

Up to this point, my analysis has focused almost exclusively on the ways in which gender harms women. It is undeniable that women are relatively worse off under patriarchy than men. However, this does not mean that men are not also harmed by gender. Even from the perspective of men, who are generally privileged by gender, abolition would still improve the human condition. Flatly, gender does not serve men or women's interest. In the following pages, I explore the negative effects that the patriarchal construction of manhood has on men themselves. I begin by arguing that gender harms men from an epistemic perspective. Here, I draw on the work of Briana Toole on standpoint epistemology to advance the argument that men's social position in patriarchal society hinders their ability to come to understand some core realities of human relations. Moreover, as Robin Dembroff's work demonstrates, many men suffer gender oppression based on the presence of other marginalized identities that exclude them from the true dominant category of "real men." In this way, many men actually suffer gender based oppression, which undermines the idea of unqualified male privilege. Additionally, as I will make clear through my discussion of these two different frameworks, these harms inevitably take an emotional and physical toll on men to the detriment of their emotional and bodily health.

## Epistemic Harm

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that focuses on the “study of the nature, origin, and limits of human knowledge (Britannica).” As Briana Toole points out, in a normative sense epistemology aims to bring humans closer to truth (Toole 2019, 598). In this context, epistemic harm can be defined as the “subver[sion]” of the end of knowledge acquisition (Toole 2019, 598). In other words, anything that keeps humans from advancing their understanding of the nature of the world, or their place in it relative to others, constitutes an undesirable harm from an epistemic perspective. As I will explore in this section, gender constitutes an epistemic harm, not only for women but also for men.

Standpoint epistemology holds that social positionality and identity are of central importance to understanding the way that agents come to know the world (Toole 2020, 1). Interestingly, standpoint epistemology has historically proceeded from a Marxist focus on the “proletarian standpoint,” and has until recently, in recognition of the work of philosophers like Patricia Hill Collins, eschewed critical analysis of gender in favor of power differential more generally (Toole 2020 1-2). One key component of standpoint epistemology is the idea that identity-based “nonepistemic features” affect “what an epistemic agent is in a position to know (Toole 2019, 598-599).” This is what is known as the “situated knowledge thesis (Toole 2019, 599).” However, we are left with the question: what exactly is a (non)epistemic feature?

As Toole explains, concepts such as “evidence, justification, reliability” are epistemic features in the sense that they give credence to the truthfulness of a belief (Toole 2019, 600). Toole argues that these features can be understood as “accessible” to any epistemic agent; a position which is attributable to the “aperspectival” view of epistemology (Toole 2020, 4). Nonepistemic features, on the other hand, would seem to be an immeasurably larger category. Although I suppose everything from preferences to physical descriptors could be considered a nonepistemic social fact, what is of the greatest importance to standpoint epistemology in this context is social positionality and identity (Toole 2019, 599). Here, to reiterate, the situated knowledge thesis advances the idea that some knowledge is only available to certain epistemic agents by virtue of their social position within society (Toole 2019, 599).

This concept is reflected in the closely related concept of “epistemic privilege,” which holds that members of oppressed groups gain knowledge as a result of their social position (Toole 2019, 600). In the case of epistemic privilege, members of the dominant group may fail to develop the insights into their “social situatedness,” which is a necessity for the powerless (Toole 2019, 600). In contrast to epistemic features, the knowledge acquired as a result of nonepistemic features is not easily accessible (Toole 2020, 4). Opponents of this view may hold that these features are irrelevant to what someone can come to know. After all, the aperspectival view would suggest that provided evidence any epistemic agent can come to know what another knows (Toole 2020, 4). However, the concept of “achievement” stands in stark opposition to this position. The thesis of “achievement” holds that some forms of knowledge are produced only through lived experience that is dependent on social identity coupled with diligent

“consciousness-raising (Toole 2019, 600).” Thus far, the main takeaway of this section should be that social positionality affects the epistemic condition of individuals based on their social position. Going forward, I will focus specifically on gender as a nonepistemic feature that deeply shapes the epistemic condition of virtually all humans for the worse.

Professor Toole’s feminist analysis of epistemic oppression rightly centers the experiences of women. Here, Toole’s analysis offers us deep insights into the way in which the continuous enforcement of gender specifically is connected to knowing. Toole states that “feminist-material accounts argue for the emergence of a distinctly feminist standpoint (Toole 2019, 601).” Here, I wish to begin by pointing out that this statement supports my previous assertion that gender creates distinct perspectives in men and women from childhood as evidenced in the Jack and Jill example I discussed in my chapter on Marx. Importantly, Toole’s analysis goes beyond a narrow focus on only reproductive labor to incorporate more modern, intersectional issues (Toole 2019, 602). For example, Toole focuses on “emotional and cognitive labor” that is often forced upon women, particularly women of color, within the family and within the modern workplace (Toole 2019, 602). This type of labor can include disproportionate, uncompensated mentorship or an assumed duty to take the lead in diversity training (Toole 603). Critically, Toole holds that, as with the more traditional assumptions that characterize the feminist-material account, these gendered and racialized forms of uncompensated labor are also translated into epistemic difference (Toole 2019, 604).

However, Toole does not limit the scope of her analysis to labor only. Instead, the social position of agents generally, detached from labor, is also relevant to standpoint epistemology (Toole 2019, 604). Citing Gaile Pohlhaus, Toole tells us that the oppressed

must “develop a body of conceptual resources so as to understand the experiences they have in virtue of their marginalization (Toole 2019, 604).” The development of these “conceptual resources” is exactly what enables marginalized groups to develop “epistemic privilege” through achievement. In this case, achievement and the development of new conceptual resources occurs “when our conceptual resources are inadequate” to understand a particular experience or set of experiences “we reform, “revise” and create new resources (Toole 2019, 604). Accordingly, the presence and level of development of various conceptual resources are central to the epistemic condition of different actors. By gaining conceptual resources through which to understand the world, marginalized groups acquire knowledge that is not readily accessible to those within the dominant group.

With this in mind, it is apparent that women have achieved conceptual resources that men generally have not needed to in order to survive and make sense of their experiences in a patriarchal society. However, as Toole points out, and as I have mentioned in the past, women have been excluded from the intellectual production or “meaning generation” that shapes the material conditions of our world (Toole 2019, 604-605). For example, the criminal justice system has long failed to not only care about issues of sexual violence but even generate the necessary language and terminology to conceptualize the lived experiences of women (Toole 2019, 605). This is because men, as “dominantly situated knowers” have not needed to develop the conceptual resources to address the pervasive gender-based violence carried out against women (Toole 2019, 606). As a consequence, men are unable to perceive the issues that affect women by virtue of their oppressed social position within the patriarchy. Even if well-intentioned,

an exclusively male perspective cannot hope to adequately represent women's interests fully. Clearly, patriarchal control of major institutions like the legal system codifies men's epistemological blind spots into the law in a way that harms women. This is one example of what thinkers like Toole and Kristie Dotson would call epistemic oppression (Toole 2019, 608).

With this background, I now want to transition to thinking about men's epistemic position within patriarchy. Firstly, I should acknowledge that although I argue that gender is a source of epistemic harm for men, this does not mean that men are not the beneficiaries of patriarchy. As Professor Toole addresses at length in *From Standpoint Epistemology to Epistemic Oppression*, women still suffer significant epistemic oppression, even if they are epistemically privileged relative to men in one sense. Nevertheless, as I will demonstrate, gender still epistemically harms men insofar as we accept epistemology and truth as normative ends worth striving for. In other words, if we believe that humans should value and pursue truth and knowledge, then we must recognize that gender subverts these ends for both men and women. In this way, gender is definitionally an epistemic harm when considered from the perspective of either men or women. Furthermore, even though gender constitutes an epistemic harm in and of itself, this is inevitably translated into more concrete emotional and physiological issues.

The existence of gender creates epistemic harm for men as, by virtue of their dominant position, men fail to fully understand the true nature of social relations under patriarchy in the same way that women must. This amounts to a fundamental ignorance of certain truths of human existence and social relation. As I have covered, the situated knowledge thesis holds that individuals' social position influences the knowledge that

they have access to. On the one hand, women's social position enables them to gain insights that men may never have. However, the reverse is equally true. Men's social position stands in the way of the acquisition of knowledge.

Here, I want to pause for a moment to reflect on some specific features and consequences of men's dominant social position within patriarchy. First of all, gender generally serves the interests of men in a way that it does not for women. As I will discuss, there are plenty of reasons for men to be dissatisfied or object to our assigned gender roles, but undoubtedly our assigned social roles offer more freedom, agency, and opportunity compared to women. In this way, I argue it should be unsurprising to any observer if men fail to question the legitimacy of gender itself in the same way that women do. Flatly, because gender generally advantages men it would make sense that there is less incentive to question the concept at all.

However, gender is unquestionably one of the main social constructions that shapes human interaction. Nevertheless, in my experiences men have been far less likely to have considered opinions on gender compared to women, and are more likely to put forward essentialist arguments claiming there is a fundamental biological difference between men and women that legitimizes many parts of gender. This is certainly not to say that no men question gender (or that all women do). Increasingly, particularly from what I have seen on college campuses, many men are really putting in the time and effort to examine some of the fundamental tenets of masculinity that hurt men themselves as well as society more broadly. Still, it is much easier for men to dismiss the impact of gender and leave this immensely powerful concept unexamined and unquestioned given their position as a dominant knower (Toole 2019, 606, 610).

Since many men fail to interrogate this crucial social construction that dictates so much of our lives, it seems apparent that the unconcerned man that makes little effort to learn more about these issues is left epistemically disadvantaged. Thus, gender leaves many men with a very inadequate and incomplete picture of human social relations, the world, and their position in it. This is very similar to the way in which people who claim to “not see race” remain deeply ignorant to one of the most potent concepts structuring social relations in our country. Fundamentally, failing to question and reflect upon the legitimacy of gender leaves individuals in an epistemically harmful position. Because of their social positionality, in this case gender and specifically maleness, men are not forced to question gender in the same way as women. Therefore, gender harms men from an epistemic perspective by obscuring realities that are accessible to individuals with a different social identity.

Transitioning, to return to the issue of sexual violence against women that I touched on in my reconstruction of Toole’s argument, I hold that men’s social position can lead to profound naivete with regards to human nature. One place where this is incredibly evident, in my personal experience, is on college campuses. A lot of men, by virtue of their dominant social position in patriarchal society, have not ever had to be concerned about, or subject to, violence, or had to really consider the idea of evil. This is even more apparent when we consider the privileged background that many students come from on-campus. However, the same is not true for even the most economically privileged women on campus. Tragically, according to a 2018 survey of students across the Claremont Colleges, 15% of participants (nearly 1 in 6) have reported being sexually

assaulted during their time on campus (Empower Center). Clearly, sexual assault is a pervasive issue on all college campuses including Claremont Mckenna.

Personally, one of the most shocking realizations of college for me was figuring out how many of these perpetrators appear to be normal, upstanding members of our community. One major reason this was shocking to me was my male privilege. As a man, I have never needed to consider my safety on campus. As a result, it took me a while to recognize the true scope of this issue. Importantly, while a lot of men on campus do recognize this reality, I believe many also fail to consider this violently gendered aspect of the college experience. Here, men's blindness to the plight of women leads to a fundamental misunderstanding about a fact of human nature in a way that contributes to the maintenance of rape culture. Men, particularly privileged men, have not had to learn the lesson that even the most unassuming people are capable of evil actions. In this way, many men are incredibly ignorant to not only the reality of violence that over half of our peers face on campus on a daily basis, but are also incredibly naive to the potential for evil that lies within every person. Men, by virtue of their social position, have not had to learn this grim reality in the same way that women have. This amounts to a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of the world and humanity, or in other words, an epistemic harm.

To focus on the material issues posed by failing to critically evaluate gender, many men fail to identify, and subsequently challenge, a lot of the most destructive aspects of masculinity. In the end, this epistemic failing hurts men both emotionally and physiologically. As Barbara Eireneich describes in *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment*, as early as the 1950's cardiologists were

beginning to realize that masculinity presented a serious health risk for men (Eireneich, 70). Within the traditionally gendered family, men generally assume the role of the breadwinner, providing for the family economically. This unchosen social role carries an enormous amount of stress, which scientists were increasingly realizing was a major contributing factor in coronary disease that disproportionately killed men (Eireneich 74).”

During this same period, women increasingly engaged in wage labor within the formalized economy, but did not suffer increased mortality from heart disease (Eireneich 73-74). Additionally, just because men do more work outside the household in the traditionally gendered family, it does not follow that women do less work overall (Eireneich 74). Moreover, this is not to say that women do not experience stress as a result of their gendered social position, but rather “that there is a special, lethal kind of stress associated with the breadwinner's role” that has widely been recognized by the medical community (Eireneich 78). In tandem, these three realities suggest that the causation of heart disease was not work or stress generally, but instead the specific stresses associated with the gendered delegation of certain crushing responsibilities to men (Eireneich 74, 79).

Critically, even recognition of the gendered prescriptions of masculinity can be “enough to make many men feel tense and anxious at all times (Eireneich 77).” In this way, it is not enough for men to attempt to limit their stress by making minute lifestyle changes, such as eating healthier or meditating. These insignificant changes would not substantively challenge men’s assigned gender role. Instead, what is necessary from a health perspective is for men to rebel against their assigned social role, and therefore

gender itself. While I have suggested that men often fail to critically interrogate gender given their dominant position within patriarchy, I must point out that many men actually do precisely this as Eirenreich describes of the beatniks. It is with this background that Eirenreich describes “male deviants,” like the beatniks, as rebelling not only against their unchosen, gendered social roles, but also against a system that presents a profound threat to their physiological wellbeing (Eirenreich 80).”

To relate this discussion back to standpoint epistemology and the situated knowledge thesis, men’s tendency to leave their ascribed social roles unchallenged is a direct consequence of the epistemic harm inherent in gender. This is then translated into negative health outcomes in a way that can only be remedied by deconstructing gender itself, which in turn requires attention to gender’s epistemic characteristics. In this way, the epistemic harms associated with masculinity quickly become physiological harms. Gender has assigned to men a social role that is bad for their health. This reality goes beyond Eirenreich’s example of coronary heart disease. For example, given that violence is central to our patriarchal construction of gender, it is unsurprising that so many men die violent deaths.

As a result of men’s dominant position within patriarchy, many men fail to develop a precise understanding of gender and its social components and instead focus only on essential biological characteristics. Consequently, men are relatively unequipped to make sense of the disastrous effects that gender has on their mental and physical wellbeing. Here, the epistemic harm’s of gender prevent men from being able to respond in the right way to the deadly effect of unchosen gender roles. With this in mind, we see clearly that it is critical that men begin to challenge their gender roles, which will lead to

positive epistemic changes. For example, if men challenge the assumptions of the traditionally gendered family, then they will likely uncover some crucial truths regarding the scope and function of patriarchy. Challenging these norms, and even the process of becoming more aware of gender's true nature, are concrete steps towards abolition (and therefore constitute acts of abolition) that will improve the mental and physical health of men.

## **PATRIARCHY BENEFITS “REAL MEN,” NOT ALL MEN**

Shifting away from epistemic harms, in this section I draw upon Robin Dembroff's *Putting Real Men on Top* to advance the broader claim that men can also be oppressed by virtue of their gender. Dembroff begins her discussion by showing how the construction of gender varies across time and place, as I have noted in many different spots, in an intersectional way (Dembroff 2). That is to say that what it means to be a heterosexual white man is distinct from being a gay black man in a way that cannot be accounted for by simply looking at these intersecting identities in isolation.

Dembroff argues that the “binary view of patriarchy” is fundamentally flawed (Dembroff 2). Under the binary view, patriarchy exclusively benefits all men and harms all women (Dembroff 2). However, as Dembroff observes, this notion is plainly false when we consider the fact that, for example, black men have often been the “targets, rather than beneficiaries, of patriarchy (Dembroff 2).” Dembroff then posits that the idea that men always benefit from patriarchy in a binary manner represents an essentialist notion within intersectionality and post structuralist philosophy, both of which claim to

be anti essentialist (Dembroff 2). In this way, Dembroff is critiquing the concept of “unqualified male privilege” by suggesting that the “bearing physical markers of maleness does not, of itself, make a person or group unqualified recipients of so-called ‘male privilege’, nor does it make them immune from gender oppression. (Dembroff 2).”

This perspective shines clearly through in Dembroffs analysis of two quotes from Marilyn Frye and MacKinnon. On the one hand, Frye claims that “men are not oppressed as men” and that being male is something that a man will always “have going for him (Dembroff 3).” Similarly, MacKinnon makes a slightly different but closely related claim that men generally speaking have not been subjected to patriarchal violence, although she does acknowledge that some subcategories of men have (Dembroff 3). Importantly, this privileges a particular version of man as the default, generic form, an important assumption that I will cover in the following paragraph. However, to restate Dembroff’s position, they maintain that thinking of gender oppression in purely binary terms is reductionist in that it ignores “the fact that many marginalized men also are targets of systemic gender injustice under patriarchy (Dembroff 4).” Furthermore, a binary view of gender oppression fails to give sufficient attention to the intersection of gender with “features such as race, class, sexuality, and disability (Dembroff 4).” Consequently, thinking about gender oppression through this essentialist lens obscures “the substantial impact that these features have on the experiences and social positions of various men and women (Dembroff 4).”

This raises the question: who exactly are the beneficiaries of patriarchy? With this background, Dembroff gives us an alternate framework that helps elucidate the distribution of gender-based oppression considering that careful analysis reveals that this

type of oppression does not actually occur cleanly along gender lines. More specifically, “real men” function to delineate between the beneficiaries and victims of patriarchy (Dembroff 13). Offering a specific definition of “real men,” Dembroff asserts that real men are those the men “who primarily benefit from dominant ideals of manhood, and the systemic subordination of women and marginalized men (Dembroff 4).” Dembroff reminds us that because gender is a social construction, the category of “real men” is dynamic and varies temporally (Dembroff 5). In theory, Dembroff acknowledges that this means that currently marginalized men could become “real men (Dembroff 5).” Given the variability of this term, Dembroff declines to attempt to offer a concrete definition of “real men,” but offers guidance by suggesting that we evaluate “which features, in a given place and time, result in persistent and systemic gender-based injustice (Dembroff 5).”

Those who are not considered to be “real men” are marginalized and face gender-based oppression. With this in mind, it is clear that these marginalized men are also victims of the way that patriarchy functions. Here, Dembroff accounts for three different ways in which men who are excluded from the category of “real men” are disadvantaged because of their gender identity. Specifically, victims of gender oppression, including marginalized men, find themselves subject to “double standards” in “double binds” and are forced to “double down (Dembroff 5).”

Perhaps the most easily recognizable of these three concepts, double standards in Dembroffs view refers to the way in which gendered assumptions, duties and expectations are applied “inconsistently, in a way that censures marginalized men and excuses “real men” for the same behavior (Dembroff 5).” For example, violence is

intimately connected to the patriarchal conception of masculinity. From childhood, young boys are frequently encouraged to assert their masculinity through physical domination. This component of masculinity is also readily apparent in the media that we consume. However, as Dembroff points out, this normative conception of masculinity is a double standard. While violence is “excused or encouraged as proof of manhood” for white men, Black men are judged by a very different standard (Dembroff 29). In contrast, violence committed by black men has been used to justify oppression in the form of mass incarceration, lynching, and police brutality (Dembroff 29). In this way, men excluded from the category of “real men” face gender based oppression through the imposition of double standards.

Relatedly, double binds are scenarios in which any action an individual takes will be met with social sanctions (Dembroff 5). In double binds, no matter what choice someone makes they will be faced with either “penalty, censure or deprivation (Dembroff 5)”. To put it simply, double binds leave people in positions of “damned if you do, damned if you don’t (Dembroff 31).” Critically, in the case of double binds any action taken will reinforce oppressive social norms (Dembroff 31). In the case of gender based oppression of those excluded from the category of “real men,” one example of a double bind is found in the social policing of gay men’s affection. Here, there is a social norm that gay relationships are improper and should be kept behind closed doors. Gay men can either choose to comply with this standard that is not applied to heterosexual relationships thereby reinforcing the strength of the norm, or actively rebel against the norm and face social sanctions often in the form of violence (Dembroff 32).

Lastly, Dembroff defines “doubling down” as “the use of violence to punish men who are perceived as violating or otherwise threatening the prevailing ideals of manhood (Dembroff 5).” To use the above example, gay men are often subjected to violence given heterosexuality’s connection to patriarchal manhood. Similarly, this violent form of gender based oppression is also externalized onto transgender men. As is the case with gender broadly, the boundaries of “manhood” are enforced with violence to the detriment of those excluded from the category of “real men.” Clearly, in these cases, men can face gender based oppression for their failure to conform with the traditional notion of what it means to be a man.

Importantly, Dembroff makes clear that they have no intention of establishing a definite hierarchy of oppression (Dembroff 7). Instead, their intention is to demonstrate that patriarchy situates a small group of “real men” in the dominant position (Dembroff 36-37). Those excluded from the category of “real men” including but not limited to black, gay and transgender men, as well as women, all face gender based oppression. In this way, Dembroff challenges the idea of “unqualified male privilege” by showing that women are not the only victims of patriarchy (Dembroff 2). With this perspective, it is clear that gender abolition will also benefit men along with women.

While most of Dembroff’s analysis focuses on the ways in which marginalized men face gender oppression, they also readily acknowledge that even those within the category of “real men” may be harmed by gender (Dembroff 7). As Dembroff points out, just because “real men” occupy a “dominant” social position does not mean that their unchosen social role is conducive to a happy or fulfilling life (Dembroff 7). Dembroff

reminds us that “even (or especially) the most gender conforming men hugely suffer psychologically under patriarchy (Dembroff 8).”

## CONCLUSION

In sum, while we often think of gender oppression in a simplistic, binary manner (benefiting all men and harming all women) the reality is much more nuanced. Although men are certainly advantaged by virtue of their gender *relative* to women in patriarchal society, this does not mean that gender actually benefits men in absolute terms. As I have shown this chapter, gender disadvantages men from an epistemic perspective. Given men’s dominant position within patriarchal society, men do readily develop some of the more complex understandings of social relationships that women must develop as a result of gender based oppression. This epistemic harm is evident in even the most well intentioned men’s lack of awareness regarding issues such as sexual violence. One consequence in these gaps in knowledge is that men develop with a flawed understanding of human nature. This includes a general lack of awareness of gender itself, which enables passive acceptance of sometimes fatal gender roles. Moreover, as Dembroff demonstrates in *Putting Real Men on Top* many men are, in fact, subject to gender based oppression. In reality, only a narrow segment of men fit within the category of “real men,” which has historically excluded men of color, gay men and transgender men. Clearly, gender is not even defensible from the perspective of those who it should theoretically advantage. Even from the perspective of a purely self interested man, gender abolition would improve the human condition.

## **CHAPTER 6: Abolition in practice**

Recall that in my previous chapter on gender abolition I argued that there were two principal avenues to abolition. Specifically, I argued that it is possible to move towards genderlessness by either eroding the delegative aspect of gender, or it's linkage to biological sex. This two pronged approach offers a natural framework for this chapter. Here, I must point out that I do not intend on offering a comprehensive account that's full realization would result in the total abolition of gender. Rather, this chapter seeks to advance a few concrete examples of what gender abolition looks like in practice. In the first section of this chapter I examine some of the forms of gender that we find most natural and question the least. Critically, these are some of the most profound manifestations of gender. I will first focus on abolition of the delegative aspect of gender focusing on the establishment of parental roles and the promotion of women's physicality. I will then shift to abolition of the linkage of biological sex assigned at birth and gender, focusing on transgender and intersex people and the issue of gendered bathrooms.

### **DEGENERATING THE FAMILY**

Looking first at the abolition of the delegative aspect of gender, I begin my analysis by focusing on the category of mother and father in contrast to genderless

parental roles. As I have made clear in the preceding chapters, the structure of the traditionally gendered family carries rigid, well-defined, yet unquestioned, duties, expectations, and privileges. In the family, perhaps more so than in any other institution, gender roles are legitimized as a natural extension of the biological order, given the reproductive capabilities of women. I choose to start here because the assumed division of labor in the family that delegates greater domestic responsibility to women is foundational to the broader construction of gender within patriarchy, thus affecting virtually all women. In this way, the abolition of gendered parental roles would necessarily lead to fundamental changes in how our society conceives of what it means to be a man or woman more generally. In very much the same vein, many philosophers have held that the family as an institution is responsible for the moral development of children (Okin 95-97). Thus, within the traditionally gendered family young boys are learning to inhabit a dominant social position while young girls are taught that their subordination is natural. If you accept my argument to this point that gender is an injustice that stands in the way of human advancement, then it is evident that the traditionally gendered family is failing in one of its primary aims - the moral development of future generations. For this reason, focusing on gender abolition within the household is a logical starting point that will have profound effects on how gender manifests itself for future generations.

What would degendering the family look like? In her dissertation *Recognizing Social Subjects: Gender, Disability and Social Standing*, Filipa Melo Lopes states that “degendering foregrounds some of these other forms of social identification as alternative bases for social coordination (Melo Lopes 153-154).” While my conception of gender abolition offered in chapter two is different than Melo Lopes’, this statement is central to

my understanding of what degendering the family would entail. The concepts of “mother” and “father” mean much more than female parent and male parent within the traditionally gendered family. Instead, these categories delineate different normative conceptions of the proper distribution of labor and decision-making power within the family. For example, within the traditionally gendered family, the mother is expected to do a greater share of domestic labor while the father is assumed to be engaged in wage labor outside of the household as the primary breadwinner. Of course, there are plenty of cases where the family is not structured this way, just as there are gender-nonconforming individuals, but the point is that when the general public speaks of motherhood and fatherhood they have two separate but unequal concepts in mind.

With this background, we see that under Melo Lopes’ framework degendering the family involves the dissolution of the concepts of mother and father and instead requires the ‘foregrounding’ of parental responsibility. In accordance with Melo Lopes’ framework, social coordination around parenthood seeks to find commonality in social position rather than distinction, thereby reducing our reliance on gender (Melo Lopes 154). Coordination around this concept would likely eschew differential responsibilities in child-rearing duties for a more even distribution of domestic labor. In this scenario, which parent is caring for the children at a particular moment would have more to do with their different availability both temporally and emotionally, as opposed to a normative notion of duty based on the parents’ biological sex. Moreover, as I have mentioned in previous chapters, implicit in gender is the notion of hierarchy, which is particularly pronounced within the family. Here, the necessity of substituting parenthood

for mother/fatherhood again aligns with Melo Lopes' conception of gender reinvention as replacing hierarchal concepts with more egalitarian ones (Melo Lopes 155).

However, as Melo Lopes points out, this task is much easier said than done considering the fact that gender's often unquestioned legitimacy limits our ability to conceive of modes of social organization outside of the notion of gender (Melo Lopes 155). In other words, Melo Lopes holds that "anything that looks like a gendered mode of social relations to us is going to encode hierarchy in some way or another (Melo Lopes 154)." Despite the difficulty, this is a strong argument for the abolition of gender within the family. Even if what it means to be a mother in the 21st century is different than even 50 years ago, this does not change the fact that motherhood still subordinates women within the traditionally gendered family. Therefore, if we value egalitarianism and resent hierarchy then the furthest advance of this end must be the abolition of gender. In order to create a more just familial structure, the concepts of mother and father must be abolished in favor of a parenthood that makes no distinction between men and women.

What are some of the concrete steps a well intentioned couple could take to degender their relationship within the traditionally gendered family? At the most basic level, couples can try to model justice within the family for their kids by equally sharing in domestic responsibilities. Critically, the couple should also seek to make sure that there is not just an even distribution with regards to time, but that their responsibilities are not gendered. For example, from an abolitionist point of view it would be preferable for young children to see their mothers doing her fair share of traditionally masculine jobs like repairing the house, while the dad is also able to do more feminine jobs like cleaning. Additionally, it is crucial that the couple also share equally in decision making power

within the household. One main assumption of the traditionally gendered family is that the father holds the most power. In other words, the traditionally gendered family is patriarchal, so couples seeking to degender their household should be sure to challenge this norm.

However, it is worth pointing out that gender's force would likely endure even with a well-intentioned couple attempting to degender their familial relations. Beyond the imaginative limitations mentioned above, the couple would likely still be limited by their social circumstances. What I mean by this is even if the couple degenders their relationship as much as possible, we still live in a gendered world. With regards to child rearing, this difficulty is evidenced in the gendered structure of the workplace. To this day, many workplaces assume that each, presumably male, worker has a wife back home to take care of children. This allows the male worker to have children while simultaneously working hours that would not otherwise allow for them to be adequately cared for. Additionally, women's professional commitment is often underestimated due to the gendered assumption that women will be less dedicated to their paid jobs, because of familial and caregiving responsibilities. With this in mind, it is clear that even if both parents intend on degendering their relationship, they are still constrained by the external world that assumes a gendered division of labor within the family. Importantly, this limitation will be felt more acutely by poor families that cannot pay for childcare while both parents work and families that have less job flexibility.

In recognition of this fact, it is undeniable that governmental institutions have a major role to play in the abolition of gender. While Rawls may leave the family outside the scope of justice, and while this may fit with our intuitions of what overreach looks

like, we are confusing the issue. In reality the family does not exist within a bubble, instead, its form is actively shaped by institutional arrangements that exist outside of the household. In this way, the family is already within the scope of governmental reach, but how this happens is much less invasive than we act sometimes. If the family is already within the scope of governmental policy, we should create the most just policies. Here, through public policy, the government has the ability to promote greater freedom for everyone within the family, rather than trying to police what goes on within the family.

For example, paid and enforced parental leave for both parents would help promote justice within the family. Presently, women are penalized in professional environments for the choice to have children in a way that men are not. The assumption that mothers will take maternity leave while men continue working is one factor contributing to the gender pay gap, and presents a major obstacle to women's hiring and advancement within companies. This reality further legitimizes the patriarchal ordering of the traditionally gendered family by legitimizing the patriarchs domination through greater economic power. If men were forced to take paternity leave, there would be an immediate shift towards generalized parental roles as both parents would be present for the intense child rearing responsibilities associated with infants. Additionally, this would likely change power dynamics within the family by promoting women's economic power over time. Another closely related policy would be accessible child care. As with enforced parental leave, accessible childcare would degender the family by making it easier for women to pursue their professional as well as personal interests and goals. Given that the imposition of domestic labor upon women is one of the main characteristics of gender, accessible child care would fundamentally alter our current

construction of gender. All of these policies located outside of the household have the ability to create a more just familial structure through abolitionist steps towards degendering.

## **DEGENDERING MOTION**

To examine another aspect of gender where difference between men and women is assumed to be natural, consider physical activity. As Iris Marion Young describes in *Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality*, refusing to acknowledge the differences between how men and women move and occupy space amounts to pretending to be blind to gender (Young 29). As Young argues, this difference that is often assumed to be biological and essential is instead a consequence of the enforcement of gender on all children (Young 30, 42). Of course, Young is careful to acknowledge that this observation is both a generalization with many outliers, and specific to our contemporary social context (Young 29). Yet, Young holds that this contextually situated generalization reveals a great deal about the nature of gender itself (Young 30).

I am sure that we have all heard the phrase “throw/punch/run like a girl.” While this statement is often used to degenerate the subject, Young holds that the difference between men’s and women’s movement is observable in many cases (Young 28). Most generally, Young says that typically women and girls tend to not use the full range of motion of their body during physical activity (Young 32). Women and girls are also less likely to make full use of the space surrounding them, and thus exist within a more

constricted space (Young 32). These two observations are not limited to actions like throwing but are also noticeable in how women and girls walk, stand, sit and carry their belongings (Young 32). Moreover, women and girls are often more hesitant than men to use the full power of their body when faced with tasks that require physical exertion (Young 33). To give an example offered by Young, when lifting a heavy box women tend to not fully utilize their legs and instead rely on their arms too much (Young 33). Overall, Young holds women physically interact with the surrounding environment “timidity, uncertainty, and hesitance” rooted in a lack of belief in the capability of their bodies (Young 34). This then leads to “feelings of incapacity, frustration, and self-consciousness (Young 34).”

While typically this variation between men and women has been interpreted as biological, Young posits that a better explanation centers the way in which women are “conditioned by their sexist oppression in contemporary society (Young 34).” Examining this quote, I must point out that the social conditioning of women in an oppressive manner could be offered as a succinct definition of the patriarchal construction of gender, despite the fact that Young never once uses the word gender in her essay. To tie this statement back to my definition of gender, “conditioning” reflects the learned and enforced aspect of gender, while “sexist oppression” exhibits the hierarchical component of my framework. Moreover, the phrase “in contemporary society” embodies the constructed, and context-dependent nature of gender. In other words, Young’s main thesis could be reformulated to state that the physical differences in men’s and women’s movement are a result of gender rather than biological sex. A strong piece of evidence in support of this conclusion is the fact that the gap between men and women with regards

to “motor skills, movement [and] spatial perception” is a byproduct of age (Young 44). Until elementary school, boys and girls are indistinguishable in this respect, with the gap widening until adulthood (Young 44). This suggests that this difference is learned as children grow older, as we would expect if gender was the cause rather than biology.

Young argues that gender “physically handicaps” women by delegating and enforcing a social position in which they are “physically inhibited, confined, positioned, and objectified (Young 42-43).” Partially, this is a result of the fact that young girls are not encouraged to develop these capacities in the same way boys are (Young 43). Instead, women are taught to be fearfully cautious to avoid injury and maintain their femininity (Young 44). Simultaneously, Young contends that women’s existence within a culture of objectification also effects body movement and posture in a unique way. Specifically, one explanation for women’s relatively closed, confined posture and movement is that more “outwarddirectedness” would be to “invite objectification (Young 44).” Beyond the degradation inherent in objectification, this also represents a very tangible safety concern given the prevalence of sexual violence perpetrated by men against women (Young 44).

Why are the gendered differences in movement and spatial positioning significant? I hold that these differences between men and women are linked to deeper and more pernicious characteristics of gender. For example, gender teaches women to doubt their physical capabilities (Young 34). Because the cultivation of these capacities is not encouraged, women internalize a notion of their fragility that leads to decreased confidence and greater timidity (Young 34). Critically, the notion that women are more fragile than men has served to legitimize current gender roles in a significant way. A major component of the patriarchal conception of gender is the idea of the man as the

protector of the woman. One need look no further than any fairy tale that centers on a knight coming to the rescue of a woman in distress to see the cultural significance that this gendered trope holds. Indeed, we are fed this social script again and again through television, film. Implicit here is the notion that women are in need of protection and are incapable of fending for themselves. This is then used to justify the control of women by men. With this in mind, it is clear that the way women are conditioned to think about their movement and physical capabilities serves to further their own oppression by legitimizing a form of gender that disguises oppressive control as beneficent protection.

This dynamic is seen clearly in Young's example centering on the responses of young boys and girls questioned about risks (Young 43). Both genders believed that "girls are more likely to get hurt than boys are, and that girls ought to remain close to home, while boys can roam and explore (Young 43-44)." These statements are particularly shocking given the way in which it parallels more complex adult relationships, despite the fact that the respondents are only children. It is not hard to see how "ought to remain close to home," could be rearticulated 15 years down the line as "forego professional opportunities in favor of raising a child" or "should not be overly ambitious" or any other deeply gendered statement. Here, we see that notions of differential physical capability can be quickly translated into much deeper prescriptive norms that ultimately reinforce gender.

With this in mind, we see that the difference in movement between men and women conditioned by gender is linked to concepts such as confidence, self image and perceived social positionality. In this way, there exists a feedback loop whereby women are conditioned by gender to doubt their physical abilities, which then reinforce gender.

Young also embraces a more expansive view of the implications of these observations of gendered physical movement and spatial relation stating, “I have an intuition that the general lack of confidence that [women] frequently have about our cognitive or leadership abilities is traceable in part to an original doubt of our body’s capacity (Young 45).” Though she is cautious to make definite claims given that there is a lack of empirical evidence as this topic is relatively understudied.

What is the relevance of this example in the context of gender abolition? If gender and attached concepts like self image are really linked to movement in a reciprocally causal way, then our analysis thus far has revealed a very concrete avenue towards the abolition of gender. Though it may seem mundane in comparison to the term abolition itself, one significant way of dismantling gender is by challenging the gendered difference in movement. Empowering women physically has the consequence of undermining the notion that women are fragile or helpless. As I just mentioned, this notion is intimately linked to one prominent legitimizing myth of gender that women need to be protected and therefore controlled by men. This myth is directly tied to the subjugation of women insofar as the hierarchical structure of gender is a byproduct of this assumed “biological” difference. In this way, overcoming the gendered difference in movement is an act of abolition. The empowerment of women physically necessarily weakens the legitimizing myth of women’s helplessness, and therefore erodes the force of gender itself in a not insignificant way.

What does this look like in practice? To offer some thoughts on raising a daughter, it is important that parents pay attention to the gendered dimensions of how their children play. While parents should certainly always have the health of their child at

the forefront of their mind, parents must also critically examine whether or not they are encouraging their daughter to be careful in a distinct way from their son. As Young describes, this creates within children a gendered idea that women should take fewer risks and remain closer to home than boys who should be afforded greater freedom. Moreover, parents should avoid giving heavily gendered toys. While boys and girls alike may love stuffed animals and dolls, it is important that young girls also be given the opportunities for athletic achievement that are often forced upon young boys. Athleticism for boys is held as a virtue in a way that it is not for girls thus laying the groundwork for the gendered difference in movement described by Young. By encouraging children to play in a less gendered way, we enable kids to grow in a way that is less subject to gender.

From the perspective of a benign planner, it is apparent that a crucial component of gender abolition should be to encourage women to express their power physically. This could take the form of investing in and promoting women's sports. Critically, in order to be most effective this must occur from an early age, so that young girls are able to reap the benefits to confidence and self esteem that come with increased belief in bodily power. However, this is not to minimize the importance of professional athletics for women. Because women's sports are so undervalued relative to men's from both a monetary and social standpoint, there is less incentive for young girls to competitively participate in athletics relative to young boys. Here, I must point out that men's willingness to make jokes to demean women's sports is quite pernicious. These jokes serve to reinforce patriarchy by instilling a sense of physical inferiority in women, and reinforce gender by relying on essentialist notions of men and women's differential

capabilities. With this in mind, it is crucial that abolitionists vocally identify these types of digs as the misogyny that they are.

While advocates for equity between women and men's sports may not realize it, by enabling women to develop their physical power they are actively engaged in the process of deconstructing gender. First of all, women's sports directly undermines the gendered notion that women are physically fragile. As I mentioned above, this legitimizing myth of fragility is intimately connected with gender hierarchy. Additionally, physical differences between men and women's movement is often pointed to as evidence of the essentialist differences between men and women. In this way, working to undermine the social basis for the gendered difference in movement would over time weaken the broader notion that men and women's differential position within society is a natural consequence of our biologies. Clearly, one fruitful yet simple path towards gender abolition is to promote women's physicality through sport.

## **ABOLITION OF THE LINKAGE ASPECT**

As I mentioned in my chapter on gender abolition, transgender people's very existence challenges the restrictive construction of gender that exists under patriarchy. As I have stated, my definition of gender is an operative definition rather than a normative one. In other words, the fact that transgender people are marginalized by this definition, in the sense that their gender identity is separate from their biological sex assigned at birth which is a constitutive element of gender, is a reflection of the very real alienation that transgender people experience within patriarchal society. By choosing their gender

identity, rather than accepting the assignment based on linkage as cisgender people do, transgender people push against the boundaries of gender in a meaningful way and are exposed to severe violence as a consequence.

In this way, all transgender people are engaged in a revolutionary, abolitionist act that fundamentally challenges the dominant gender ideology. Through living their truth, transgender people pave the road for those in the future who wish to rebel against the injustice that is gender. Critically, the beneficiaries of transgender individual's trailblazing are not only other transgender individuals. Virtually all humans would benefit from the erosion of the linkage between biological sex and gender. If this linkage and subsequent involuntary assignment at birth is abolished, then people would be truly free to choose to live in whatever way they see fit for themselves.

Surely, social roles would persist, but by detaching these roles from an unchosen characteristic like sex humans would begin to be able to enter into these roles consensually without coercion. This would certainly result in a radical change to whatever remaining gender roles that there would be. Because gender today is coercive, it is possible to maintain a deeply oppressive hierarchical system. However, if people were able to freely choose their gender role then it is likely that over time the category of "woman" would be characterized by subjugation to a lesser extent, as people would theoretically reject an unequivocally harmful social role. Even if the resulting social roles did have some component of dominant vs submissive behavior, this would no longer constitute a hierarchy in any recognizable way as the roles would be both consensual and fluid.

With this in mind, it is apparent that one of the most direct ways to promote the abolition of gender is through the promotion of transgender people's rights. Clearly, the plight of transgender people is intimately connected to that of those who suffer any form of gender oppression. In recognition of this deep connection, gender abolitionists should seek to increase the visibility and social acceptance of transgender people. While this certainly requires greater media exposure and education for the general population, gender abolitionists may find their interest are best served by directing their attention to parents. In recognition of the millions of transgender individuals whose gender identity does not align with their sex assigned at birth, abolitionists should advocate that parents should avoid gendering their child at birth. Clearly, this process of gendering is often wrong; a mistake that imposes significant costs on the child through their development. If parents ceased to gender their kids in such a rigid way, then the process of transitioning would likely be far less tumultuous as transitioning individuals would be making a much less radical change. This increasingly genderless world would also likely result in a decrease in violence against transgender individuals.

This example is extremely interesting as it exemplifies the reciprocal nature of transgender liberation and gender liberation generally. It is as if there is a feedback loop, whereby degendering in a general way advances the wellbeing of transgender individuals, while at the very same time actions that uplift transgender people also promote degendering. For example, on the surface, the practice of displaying personal pronouns, a key component of transgender inclusivity, may seem to reinforce gender. However, in reality displaying pronouns is an act that is undertaken in recognition of the idea that individuals should be free to choose their gender identity. Clearly, this is a direct

challenge to the linkage of biological sex and gender. As the two previous examples show, transgender liberation and full gender abolition are inseparably connected.

Another method for weakening the linkage of biological sex and gender is through the creation of social conditions and institutions that do not force people to police the boundaries of gender. For example, in her dissertation Filipa Melo Lopes argues that one important site of gender contestation is bathrooms (Melo Lopes 157). Melo Lopes argues that instead of attempting to fix the inherent logical tension at the heart of gender and equality, we should instead attempt to create a less gendered world (Melo Lopes 157). In the context of gendered restrooms, Melo Lopes argues that “when a security guard, or even another user, finds themselves in the position to police segregation, they have to think quite consciously about what men and women are like (Melo Lopes 157).” In this way, the gendered design of restrooms strengthens the social enforcement mechanism linking biological sex and gender by bringing to the forefront the question of who fits within the categories of man and woman.

By placing individuals into positions to police the boundaries of gender, people are encouraged to make judgement calls about others’ sex regardless of their gender presentation, and more explicitly their inborn genitalia. Melo Lopes argues that one common but flawed approach to the issue of gendered bathrooms is “to educate and train employees and bathroom users about the nuances of masculinity, femininity, the need to respect transgender people, or masculine women (Melo Lopes 158).” However, this approach is still problematic in that it still relies on individuals’ enforcement of gender boundaries merely in a more benign way. These types of reforms continue to legitimize gender in a way that naturalizes an inherently unjust social construction. Just because

restrooms may be policed in a more inclusive manner does not change the fact that bathrooms will continue to act as a site that links gender and exclusivity in the minds of every participant. With this in mind, Melo Lopes suggests that a superior approach would be to degender bathrooms in a way such that no one is put into a position to monitor the actions of others (Melo Lopes 158). This type of reimagining would have the effect of removing the “centrality of gender to certain social contexts (Melo Lopes 158).” In Melo Lopes’ word, this is an example of “degendering,” or alternatively abolition.

## CONCLUSION

As I have argued, there are two primary ways to approach gender abolition - through deconstructing the delegative aspect of gender or by eroding gender’s linkage with biological sex. First, I examined the abolition of the delegative aspect of gender, offering two examples of features of gender that are thought to be most natural. Looking first at the gendered social categories of motherhood and fatherhood, I held that abolition in this context would require eschewing these two social roles for the gender neutral concept of parenthood. Critically, while I offered some suggestions for parents seeking to degender their family dynamics, I also highlighted the central role that governments’ have in facilitating gender abolition in this context. While many philosophers have held that the family is beyond the scope of justice, my analysis suggests that in order to create a world with gender justice, it is necessary that the government attend to the institutional consequences of the patriarchal construction of gender. In this way, policies such as

enforced paternity leave and accessible child care are central to the broader mission of gender abolition.

I also put forward the gendered differences in movement as an example of gender that is often taken to be natural. However, I demonstrated that this phenomenon is a byproduct of the patriarchal construction of gender that serves to legitimize male domination. In this way, the perception of physical difference in men and women creates a feedback loop that deepens this differential and then uses this to legitimize the unjust delegation of social goods such as self determination and power. With this background, I hold that one seemingly mundane but profound path towards weakening the delegative aspect of gender is to encourage women's motility in the same way as is the case with men. Therefore, promoting women's physicality is an important avenue towards gender abolition.

Additionally, gender abolition can occur through the weakening of the linkage between biological sex and gender. As I have discussed in previous chapters, perhaps the most visible example of this process of abolition in this context is the brave, revolutionary action of transgender people who eschew their assigned gender in favor of self determination. Here, the brutal force of gender is readily apparent in the amount of violence faced by transgender individuals for their deviation from what is socially acceptable. In this way, the struggles of gender abolitionists and transgender individuals are inextricably linked with each groups activism overlapping and serving the same ends. With this in mind, it is apparent that gender abolitionists should focus on promoting transgender peoples rights. I also put forward the idea that gender abolition requires the creation of a world that does not police the boundaries of gender through, for example,

the existence of transgender restrooms. These both represent important ways that gender abolitionists can seek to undermine the linkage of biological sex and unchosen social roles inherent in gender.

## SUMMARY OF ARGUMENTS

To briefly take stock of my overall argument put forward in this thesis, I began by offering an operational definition of gender. My definition, which focused on gender as the basis for the distribution of social expectations and its linkage with biological sex, was intended to reflect gender's restrictive and hierarchical nature. I then clarified precisely what I meant by abolition. In short, my view of abolition is the full realization of genderlessness. We move towards genderlessness through abolitionist acts that weaken either the delegative aspect of gender or the force of gender's connection with biological sex.

I then put forward two contrasting theories of human advancement and showed that both imply gender abolition. First, I looked at Marx's ideas regarding human emancipation and the abolition of the division of labor broadly. Human emancipation requires the dissolution of social constructs that create antagonisms between humans that prevent our flourishing. I argued that gender is exactly this type of social construct, and thus human emancipation requires the dissolution of gender. Similarly, Marx calls for the abolition of the division of labor, so given that gender has been constructed upon the division of labor here we again see that gender abolition is implied. In contrast to the Marxist perspective explored in chapter three, chapter four focused on Amartya Sen's *Development as Freedom*. Sen's vision of human development mandates for the removal of sources of unfreedom, and as I established in this chapter gender is certainly one of the

most profound sources of unfreedom that we often leave unchallenged. With this in mind, Sen's vision of human development taken to the furthest extent would necessarily have an element of gender abolition.

In chapter five, I transitioned slightly arguing that gender not only harms women, but also men. Drawing upon Briana Toole's work on standpoint epistemology, I posited that from an epistemic perspective gender constitutes a harm for men. Gender hinders men's ability to accurately understand themselves, the world, and their position within it. Critically, these epistemic harms also lead to negative physiological and emotional outcomes such as high rates of mortality from heart disease driven by the stress of their unchosen social roles. Additionally, I draw upon the work of Robin Dembroff who argues that gender oppression is more complex than a binary view that asserts that all men benefit from patriarchy. Instead, they argue that patriarchy is built around the exclusive notion of the category of "real men." In this way, men that are excluded from this category, for example black men or gay men, can face gender based violence by virtue of their maleness. These two arguments are intended to show that gender abolition will not only benefit women. Instead, gender abolition will improve the condition of all human beings.

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