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## **Toward Gender Justice: Confronting Stratification and Unequal Power**

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### **Abstract**

This paper advances a theory of gender justice, defined as equality of outcomes in three domains: *capabilities*, *livelihoods*, and *empowerment/agency*. A pivotal requirement is that women and men must be equally distributed along axes of well-being, with their respective distributions possessing equal means and dispersions. An understanding of gender stratification lies behind this proposal, whereby males benefit materially from a system of gender-divided work and responsibilities. This hierarchical system, buttressed by gender ideology, norms, and stereotypes, is disturbed as we approach gender equality in outcomes, especially of livelihoods. The latter induces greater female bargaining power, which, coupled with the effect of social role incongruity on norms and stereotypes, serves to leverage change. Macroeconomic policy can support the shift to greater economic power for women by creating the conditions for class equality that is compatible with sustained economic growth.

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# **Toward Gender Justice: Confronting Stratification and Unequal Power**

## **I. Introduction**

In his book *Cosmopolitanism*, Kwame Anthony Appiah presciently poses a question for our times: “What do we owe strangers by virtue of our shared humanity?” (2006: xxi) That query echoes two major themes of justice concerns in the new millennium. The first regards the social implications of globalization and the greater engagement with strangers—members of groups we distinguish as distinctively different from our own. The second concern is more deeply embedded in Appiah’s question—what is a just distribution of resources? Appiah asks us to consider the values and morals that govern relations, including the sharing of material resources, between “them” and “us.” More than ever, we need to come to grips with that question, as cultures interact, overlap, and sometimes collide.

What of gender as a demarcation between “them” and “us”? What is owed to the opposite gender by virtue of our shared humanity? That is a ponderous question, given that “we” and “they” live in such close proximity. Unlike nations, ethnic or religious groups that can maintain spatial dispersion, males and females by and large share the hearth, and by implication, the production and reproduction of children.

Analyses that began some 100 years ago, but have gained traction in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, underscore that despite the close proximity in which we live, a persistent and pervasive inequality exists and accordingly shapes life possibilities. Are gender inequalities unjust—and if so, which ones? What are the chief impediments to gender justice? And what kinds of actions and policies would be necessary for us to achieve gender justice? This paper makes an effort to outline the contours of a theory of gender justice, placing gender equality in material resources at center stage. It then assesses the constraints on gender justice, focusing on systemic gender stratification that results in males’ disproportionate control over material resources. The role of gender and stereotypes in buttressing a gender ideology that justifies inequality is evaluated. Finally, policies that address these constraints are discussed.

## II. Gender Justice as Equality of Outcomes

Concurrent with the emergent self-rule of former colonies, democratization and human rights discourse began to influence our evaluation of fairness and justice in the mid-1940s. A growing global consensus, reflected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, signed in 1948, is based on the moral argument that human rights belong equally to all people by virtue of our humanity. The Declaration extends the notion of justice from formal rights related to freedom of person to economic rights. Formal rights, it has been noted, have no meaning if people do not possess the material basis to access those rights. As a result, the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the extension of rights discourse to include a universal right to an education, a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of self and of family, and economic security.

The fundamental contribution of the Declaration to the rights discourse is that it has undermined appeals to biological determinism as a justification for social and economic exclusion, and discrimination. But still the parameters of justice remain vague. Although the document implicitly sets a minimum threshold of material well-being, it does not delineate a framework for determining justice in distribution.

A more recent foundation for a theory of gender justice emerged in the form of the capabilities approach. Sen (1999) argues that the goal of governments should be to expand the real (that is materially feasible) freedom to choose the kind of life one has reason to value. Capabilities are the means required to achieve this freedom. The emphasis on *real* freedoms underscores the resource and material costs of the achievement of a fully developed set of capabilities, as compared to a mere legalistic approach, which instead accentuates procedural freedoms (such as, for example, the right to vote or the right to property).

There are clear, persistent, though varying gender differences in capabilities globally. Robeyns (2007) insightfully notes that the system of gender inequality acts as a “conversion factor,” discounting the extent to which women can convert income and other resources into capabilities. That system is undergirded by a gender ideology that justifies the unequal state of gender relations, socially and materially. It is supported, monitored, and enforced in large part by gender stereotypes and norms, embedded in a variety of institutions, including marriage laws, property laws, labor markets, and

religious and cultural institutions. The material and cultural spheres operate in tandem, each influencing the other to produce and reproduce systemic gender inequality. The hitch is that this system thus inhibits the possibilities for females to enjoy the same capabilities as males.

Gender justice, it might be argued, requires that adequate resources flow to both genders<sup>1</sup> in such measure as to ensure that each has the means to acquire the necessary capabilities. It requires not only explicit decisions about how to distribute resources, but also attention to the social/psychological realm which shapes people's opportunity sets, both internally and externally.

An important question any theory of gender justice must answer is: Which capabilities matter for gender justice? And second, are we interested in meeting a minimum set of capabilities as a condition of gender justice, or, does gender justice require equality of capabilities? As to the first question, there is no single agreed upon answer. Although Amartya Sen has eschewed delineation of a specific set of capabilities, Nussbaum (2003) and Robeyns (2003) have offered some guidance on what might be included. The list goes beyond income to include education, but also good health and long life, leisure, mobility, respect, and bodily integrity.

With regard to the second question, the capabilities approach in practice simply defines the space in which to evaluate differences in well-being, but does not outline the parameters within which gender differences can still be considered equitable or fair. That requires a further elaboration of a theory of gender justice.

Robeyns (2007) offers a judiciously parsimonious theory of gender justice. Justice would require equality of relevant capability sets, equality in constraints on choice, and finally, equality of pay-offs to capability sets. "Men and women should have the same opportunities to valuable doings and beings," according to Robeyns (2007: 65), but she exhorts that justice shouldn't require that genders equally populate the same avenues to achieve those goals. Men and women have the right to be different, as gender groups, in

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<sup>1</sup> The parlance of "two genders" is being eroded, given the acknowledgement that there are multiple gender identities. In that sense, such a reference in this paper is inaccurate. Lacking, however, as I do, the language to elaborate a broader set of genders than simply male and female, and given that social structures are largely based on the existence of only two, I leave that linguistic issue for resolution in the future.

other words. Whatever work is undertaken, however, pay-offs or rewards should not be influenced by gender.

I call this the *opportunity equality approach*. A prominent place is awarded to ensuring equality in the preconditions for provisioning, which might include education and health. To this list, we could add access to key resources in livelihood generation (e.g., access to credit, land, jobs), and fairness in economic rewards (e.g., equal pay for equal work) premised on procedural equality. The *opportunity equality* framework does not, however, require equality of income or material rewards generated from one's livelihood. This would appear to stem from Robeyns' desire to elucidate a theory of justice whereby the genders may indeed differ in their predilection to engage in different—and perhaps gender-specific—types of work; as a result, control over resources may differ, and this is acceptable so long as, for the same tasks, women's economic rewards equal those of men, and their access to necessary resources to generate an livelihood (e.g., the right to own land) are similar.

This meritocratic approach, founded on the fairness in rewards to intelligence and effort, could be justified if three conditions hold. The first is that biogenetically, intelligence is equally distributed between the genders; second, we assume that there no plausible basis to believe that on average women and men exert differential amounts of effort over the life cycle; and third, we would need to further argue that women and men as genders on average might prefer different activities. This framework for gender justice is exemplified in the World Bank's (2001) policy report *Engendering Development* where the emphasis is on equality of opportunities, but not outcomes.

I would like to argue for a different theory of gender justice, one I term the *livelihoods equality approach*. This approach has a macrostructural frame, based on the argument that livelihood inequality buttresses other forms of gender inequality—such as education, health, life, bodily integrity, and dignity. For this reason, livelihood equality is a pivotal change target in order to transform a comprehensive stratified gender system into one that is gender equitable. In short, equity—equality of opportunities—thus requires material equality.

The *livelihood equality* approach emerges from research that has developed organically in a variety of empirical assessments of trends in gendered well-being, based

on a desire to delineate a comprehensive set of measures in addition to capabilities.<sup>2</sup> Key components of well-being required to ensure that women's equal probability of leading a life they would choose to value can be grouped into three domains: *capabilities*, *livelihoods* (a shortened phrase for access to and control over resources and opportunities), and *empowerment/agency*.<sup>3</sup>

Before elaborating the motivation for arguing that gender equality in outcomes, i.e., livelihoods, is a necessary component of a theory of gender justice, let's give some descriptive substance to each of these domains. The *capabilities* domain encompasses fundamental human abilities or functionings necessary to lead a good life.<sup>4</sup> These include education and measures of health, including life, and are pre-conditions for self-expression and self-realization.<sup>5</sup> The second domain, *livelihoods* or, access to and control over resources and opportunities, refers to the ability to use capabilities to generate a livelihood to support oneself and one's family. The relevant indicators of gender equality in this domain will differ by the structure of production in economies. For example, in where there are well-developed labor markets, three representative measures are: wage rates, employment, and annual income. Livelihood equality in agricultural economies with widespread subsistence production may be better reflected by measures of land ownership, access to credit, time spent in labor activities, and caloric intake.<sup>6</sup> Wealth and assets would be a useful measure that cuts across economies at different stages of development.

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<sup>2</sup> For examples of applications of this approach, see Dijkstra (2002), Grown, Gupta, and Khan (2003), and Seguino (2002, 2007c).

<sup>3</sup> This framework has been influenced by the work of the Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality (UN Millennium Project 2005), with lead authors Caren Grown, Geeta Rao Gupta, and Aslihan Kes. An earlier and slightly different version of this framework owes to the work of Grown, Gupta and Khan (2003).

<sup>4</sup> For accuracy, it should be noted that according to Robeyns (2003, 2007), functionings line up with what the empiricists identify as "capabilities" while the *access to resources and opportunities* domain bears some resemblance to Robeyns' description of capabilities.

<sup>5</sup> The UN Millennium Task Force (2005) identified *security* as a separate domain, with the argument that that is bodily integrity and freedom from violence are a prerequisite for women and men to use their accumulated capabilities to live the life they would have reason to value. Various indicators, such as the prevalence of intimate partner violence, rape, female trafficking, or sexual harassment, can measure security. While there may be some value in placing security in a separate domain, it is conceptually linked to *capabilities* and therefore I fold it into the first domain in the framework developed in this paper.

<sup>6</sup> Government spending social safety nets in the form of transfer payments and on infrastructure that influence the time that women and men have to spend in income generating activities may be relevant proxy measures, though these have not been used in empirical studies due to data deficiencies.

Third, the *empowerment/agency* domain measures gender differences in “voice,” the ability of each group to shape decision-making in the productive sphere (e.g., the workplace) and in the political process.<sup>7</sup> The concept of empowerment, while intuitively appealing, is still operationally underdeveloped. It can be understood, however, as the ability of both individuals and groups to which they belong to shape their environment. Thus gender equality in this domain would imply that women are equally *agentic* as men. The term *agentic* comes from social cognition theory and implies that individuals and groups are both producers and well as products of their social systems—that agents both react to social norms but can in turn shape norms, and the gender system. Women’s share of professional and managerial positions, and of leadership positions in cooperatives, businesses, and governing bodies are indicators in this domain.

The empirical impetus to measure trends in well-being has shaped researchers’ approach to defining gender equality. As a result, the three domains that measure gender equality are both narrower and broader than Sen’s and Nussbaum’s capabilities approach—narrower, in the sense that the list of capabilities is shorter and tends to be more easily quantifiable than in the original capabilities approach, and broader in that gender equality is seen as necessary in a greater set of arenas. The emphasis has been on defining a critical but limited set of well-being measures in each domain, with the understanding that these may serve as proxies for less quantifiable measures.

Gender justice, using the *livelihoods approach*, would require that societies create the conditions under which women’s well-being in each of these domains is equal to that of men. Empirically, that implies a goal of equal distributions of the measures of well-being, with similar variance, median and means.<sup>8</sup> Figure 1 provides an example of distributions of say, the monetary value of owned assets, for women and men that are

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<sup>7</sup> For an extensive evaluation of statistics and methods to evaluate gender equality in each of these domains, see Grown (2007).

<sup>8</sup> A well-developed theory of gender justice (and justice of any kind) would usefully also make the case for some thresholds for the median, mean, and variance of these distributions. I do not attempt that here, as such criteria should be based on empirical and dynamic analyses of the effects of minima of well-being indicators and dispersions on within group and intergroup measures of well-being. Does, for example, an income or wealth dispersion that is too wide promote status differences that lead to intergroup conflict, a struggle over resources and hierarchy? Can inequality—both within and between groups—in other words, lead to declines in well-being for one or another group? If so, sustainable gender justice world require not only equality in all three domains but also some minimum level of mean and median well-being for both genders and some minimum dispersion of well-being.

similar in dispersion but unequal in medians and means. The goal of gender justice would be to ensure that the two distributions are superimposed, the one on the other. Such a result would imply that the probability that a female's asset ownership value falls into the lower half of the distribution would be equal to a male's. Equal probabilities in all identified domains of well-being thus would be defined as gender justice.

Figure 1 about here.

It should be clear that this approach emphasizes the goal intergroup equality, and not necessarily individual equality.<sup>9</sup> By inference, if there is within-group inequality, it should be no greater in the subordinate group (women, in this case) than in the dominant group. More precisely, the dispersion of the subordinate group's distribution of well-being measures should be no greater than the dominant group's. Figure 2 summarizes the livelihoods equality approach to gender justice, and contrasts it to the opportunity equality approach..

Figure 2 about here.

That gender justice requires equality in the first domain, *capabilities*, is no longer controversial. Capabilities are seen to be a pre-condition for living a good life. There appears to be a broad consensus that all have an equal right to these, and that a basic premise of fairness is that we start from a place of equal initial conditions. Any systematic intergroup difference in outcomes alerts us to inequality of initial conditions (Roemer 1998; Phillips 2004). Requiring equality in the last two domains, however, demands some justification.

Intergroup inequality in the *livelihoods* domain would imply that a subordinate group has a lower probability of generating an adequate livelihood than the dominant group. Critics of the goal of equality of outcomes in *livelihoods* have appealed to biological determinism, or more recently, to a claim of cultural deficits (or simply differences), as a justification for intergroup inequality in material outcomes. The former—biological determinism—has been assiduously eroded in recent decades as a plausible justification for systematic and intergenerational inequality.

The second, culture, still has currency in debates over the source of intergroup inequality. It is, as William Darity, Jr (2005) notes, a more polite trope for justifying

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<sup>9</sup> The latter would be a special case of the former.

inequality of outcomes. Politeness aside, that cultural differences could justifiably lead to intergroup inequality implies that one group—the subaltern group—collectively and systematically makes choices that leave it worse off materially than the dominant group. If each group had the same choice set—that is, if the choice sets available to men and women were not appreciably different—there might be some currency in this argument. But choice sets do differ as a result of constraints imposed by capabilities and resource inequality. They also vary due to gendered norms and stereotypes that shape individual behavior and treatment of dominant and subordinate group members.

Precisely because gendered social roles are embedded, cultivated, and reproduced from an early age, it would be difficult to argue that women and men make livelihood decisions from a similar choice set. Further, even if it could be shown that women and men freely and systemically make different choices in the area of livelihoods, why should this lead to inequality of outcomes in the form of income, wealth, and property? It would be difficult to argue convincingly that on average one group—women—consciously and freely chooses less remunerative livelihoods, especially given women’s responsibility for the care of children. Further, why should women’s economic activities on average attract a lower valuation in the market than men’s, for example, if their capabilities are equal?

I argue therefore that a prerequisite for gender justice is equality in livelihoods, defined as all of those areas that equalize women’s and men’s access to and control over material resources, to include not only jobs but access to credit and land ownership. Whatever path women on average choose to provision for themselves and their families, gender justice requires that that effort yield the same outcome in terms of access to and control over material resources as the average male effort.

The claim that gender equality is a proper measure of gender justice in the empowerment/agency domain should be less problematic. As Phillips (2004) notes, that notion of justice is already embedded in our view of fair political representation with a variety of countries establishing quotas for female representation on voting lists and in government, including Uganda, India (in local bodies), and Italy. In France, too, *parité* legislation requires voting lists to include equal numbers of women and men. Member countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) very recently signed a protocol that, among other goals, calls for at least 50% representation of women in

political and decision-making bodies in SADC countries by 2015.<sup>10</sup> The enactment of quotas is a reflection that policymakers have put the barrier of structural constraints to equitable gender representation on equal footing with overtly discriminatory practices (Phillips 2004). The recognition then that structural constraints impede equality in empowerment and agency should alert us to the role they also play in other domains.

This leads to two important questions. What is the nature of those structural constraints? Are they related to the degree of inequality in the *livelihoods* domain, and if so, does inequality here in fact influence the degree of inequality in the *capabilities* and *empowerment/agency* domains? The response to the first question is complex, and is rooted in the view of gender inequalities in all domains as embedded in a system of stratification. The following two sections explore in greater detail the nature of that system. In anticipation of a fuller discussion of stratification in the next section, we can acclaim here that the latter question's response is, yes, livelihood inequality in fact does influence the degree of inequality in other domains, and is the motivation for arguing for equality of outcomes in livelihoods, not just opportunity.

This link is supported by empirical research exploring the determinants of distribution of resources and labor within households. Power matters. In particular, relative power, as measured by outside options—income, wealth, and property such as dowry—influence intrahousehold negotiations over the distribution of income and other resources that influence children's well-being. Women's better livelihood options affords them more choice in leaving damaging relationships; in negotiating a more fair distribution of unpaid labor within the household, in caring for children; and in controlling their fertility. Equality in livelihoods also contributes to gender equality in empowerment and agency (Iversen and Rosenbluth 2008).

The next section moves beyond the household to an exploration of intergroup inequality dynamics as influenced by a system of gender stratification. Gender hierarchies and differential control over material resources, it is argued, provide the motivation for the dominant group to reproduce conditions of inequality in the *capabilities* and *empowerment/agency* domains.

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<sup>10</sup> SADC members are comprised of: Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

### III. Gender Stratification

What is the nature of the structural constraints on gender equality? Gender inequality can be traced to social stratification—that is, hierarchical social and economic relations—based on accentuated differences between women and men that in turn shape a gender division of labor. The gender division of labor favors men’s access to and control over resources, allowing them to control wives’ labor at the household level. Women, burdened with non-remunerative reproductive labor, are constrained from engaging in resource-generating activities outside the household. Status and power hierarchies derive from males’ superior control over material resources. That control and the resulting power differential provide the motivation for males to continue this hierarchal system based on gender differentiation.

At the macro-level, male power permits elites to shape ideology, norms, and stereotypes as well as formal social institutions, in such a way that defines male activities and traits as superior and more valuable than women’s. Chafetz (1989: 139) argues that “to the extent that women choose to comply with gender norms, accept gender ideologies and stereotypes, and acquiesces to male definition of situations, men need not employ their power – micro or macro—to maintain the status quo.” In sum, gender stratification is comprised of intentional processes (though perhaps deeply embedded in institutions so as to appear “natural”) that ensure male dominance in all aspects of social life—in cultural, legal, political, religious, and economic institutions.

The degree of gender stratification varies inversely with the extent to which the labor is gender segregated, and as a result, with the level of women’s economic power and the control over the material resources this stratification generates (Blumberg 1984; Chafetz 1989). Huber (1990) succinctly summarizes this principle: producers in the family economy have more power than consumers. Greater economic power—that is, control over production—in turn, allows women to control their sexuality and fertility and affords increased power at the macro-level in key institutions.

These precepts, derived from sociological and anthropological search, presciently anticipate the more recent intrahousehold bargaining literature in economics. The earlier work differs, however, in emphasizing features of stratification that also operate outside the household, based on a framework that links the micro- and macro-levels. Blumberg

(1984) advances the hypothesis that the more power women have at macro-levels of social organization (in the workplace, in the larger economy, and in political spheres), the greater their ability to control a proportionate share of their output at the household level. Their bargaining power at the household level, then is “discounted” in proportion to women’s relative status at the macro level (1984: 49). The greater the degree of gender inequality at the macro level (e.g., the greater women’s concentration in low-wage insecure jobs or lack of jobs as compared to men), the less bargaining power *all* women have within the household, though to differing degrees.

This is equivalent to saying that the state of the macroeconomy influences women’s bargaining power at the household level, since it affects women’s outside options. For example, the overall demand for labor coupled with the types of jobs women can get or the goods they produce (associated with the degree to which work is gender differentiated) have a positive effect on women’s status within households.

These observations suggest the foundations of a theory of change in gender stratification. Improvements in women’s relative well-being require a diminution of the gender division of labor, permitting women greater access to and control over material resources. Sustained shifts in this direction can contribute to shifts in gender ideology, norms, and stereotypes, which will change to conform to new gender economic roles. Social theorists also link trends in the degree of gender stratification to ecology and technology, which combine to shape the structure of production [hunting/gathering, herding, plow agriculture, and industrialization] (Boserup 1970; Friedl 1975; Huber and Spitze 1988; Iversen and Rosenbluth 2005). In the framework developed by Iversen and Rosenbluth (2005), the more mobile are male economic assets (physical strength) relative to female economic assets (caring labor), the greater male power in intra-family bargaining, with a consequent effect on norms. Because male brawn is more portable in agricultural societies as compared to hunting/gathering or industrial societies and women’s skills are more “firm” or to be precise, “family specific,” females are in a weaker bargaining position.

Blumberg (1984) notes, however, that the critical factor is not only the stage of development, but also the degree to which women are engaged in productive activities as compared to men. She gives the example of Southeast Asian rice societies as gender

egalitarian, where everybody works. This stands in contrast to other agrarian societies where women are more disadvantaged in access to and control over resources (Blumberg 2004). Nor is women's mere participation in production sufficient. They must be as likely to be employed in high wage, high status jobs as men, or, in the words of Blumberg, women's work must be of "strategic indispensability"(1984: 52).<sup>11</sup>

The system of gender stratification is overdetermined—there are multiple causal relationships at play, any combination of which may be enough to generate inequality. Further, these causal effects operate in multiple directions, mutually reinforcing each other, and thus making it difficult to identify the initial cause and therefore policy target. Most stratification theorists, however, identify female relative economic power as the pivotal change target that will trigger change in other realms of inequality, including the in cultural realm, of patriarchal gender ideology, norms, and stereotypes and, as a result, formal institutions such as property and laws.<sup>12</sup>

To summarize, gender inequality in all domains, and most pertinently in the *livelihood* domain, flows from a system of gender stratification, with members of the hegemonic (male) group<sup>13</sup> intentionally acting to develop and sustain processes that generate social hierarchy, status differences, and by consequence, inequality in income and wealth. The dark horse then that lurks in the background of discussions of gender justice is the exercise of male power over rewards and punishments, in an effort to maintain control of a disproportionate share of material resources.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Blumberg (1984) offers a description of the meaning of "strategically indispensable," one that varies by structure of production. In wage-labor economies, higher wage jobs with a small gender earnings gap would be considered more strategically indispensable than say, women's temporary employment in a low wage service sector job .

<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that trends are not necessarily linear or smooth. During times of transition, repression against females is likely to emerge in proportion to the extent males perceive the shift as a zero-sum game (Blumberg 1984; Chaetz 1989). That said, change is possible. Seguino (2007b), using data from the World Values Survey that reflects global trends in norms and stereotypes finds evidence to support this hypothesis. That research shows that increases in female share of paid employment is linked to declines in gender unequal norms and stereotypes.

<sup>13</sup> Hegemony in this sense refers to power derived from the intersection of class, ethnicity, and gender of the socially and economically dominant group.

<sup>14</sup> A disproportionate share of output means a share that is greater than the corresponding effort that was required for production, with the implication that women's share of output is significantly less than would be warranted by their contribution.

Power inequalities imply that men as a group are able to extract compliance from subordinates. The tools of extraction include the material dependence of the subordinate group on the dominant group, a set of gender definitions (ideology, norms and stereotypes) to regulate everyday behavior, thus reducing monitoring and enforcement costs, and overt forms of power, including violence and assault of female bodily integrity for infractions that threaten the status quo (Chafetz 1989). Increases in women's ability to participate in economic production and to control the distribution of their production then can enhance their status and reduce physical, political, and ideological oppression.

It is useful to note the similarity between gender and racial stratification theories. Oliver Cox's (1948) *Caste, Class, and Race* provides an illuminating account of rigidly structured societal inequality along the lines of caste, which map onto class, status, and power divisions. Hierarchy is embedded in the structure of class relations, buttressed by accompanying social norms that provide the rules of social behavior, serving to reduce enforcement costs. As in the gender system, William Darity, Jr (2005) argues that there are thus material benefits from racial inequality that redound to the dominant groups, who therefore have an incentive to reproduce conditions of inequality. Inequality is likely to persist, according to Darity, if the privileged group also dominates the political system. "Tastes for discrimination" then are materially motivated. There is as yet little research that explores the intersection and relationship between gender and racial stratification within the same societies; this remains a fertile area for inquiry (Seguino 2006).

That intergroup inequality could be intentionally structured to extract rents is alien to much of the economics literature. The next section explores this topic, identifying some recent feminist research that provides the foundations for a more fully developed theory of economic stratification.

#### **IV. Economists on Stratification: Rent-Seeking and Collective Action, Efficiency, or Just a Mistake?**

Economists, with few exceptions, have yet to adopt the language of stratification, or explored its relationship to ideology, norms, stereotypes, and status differences in relation

to intergroup inequality.<sup>15</sup> Economists' consideration of role of hierarchy has been limited in scope and largely focuses on institutional behavior rather than ascriptively different groups. In the influential work of Coase (1937) and Becker (1981), hierarchy is seen as an efficient and thus socially beneficial form of organization, serving to fix the coordination problem inherent in complex organizations and social structures. There is little reference to status implications.

Neoclassical institutionalists have challenged the claim that institutions are always beneficial, arguing that rent-seeking behavior can contribute to inefficiencies. Individuals and groups expend resources to maintain advantage, regardless of costs to wider society, in order to extract unearned compensation. Neoclassical accounts, however, fail to embody the sense in which “economic actors exercise power or collective action to create and maintain social norms and rules that are personally advantageous but socially costly (Braunstein 2008:3).”

More recently, feminist economists have attributed the perpetuation of gender inequality and patriarchy to the rents it generates for men who have an incentive to maintain structures underpinning their privileged economic position (Purkayasta 1999; Braunstein 2008). Patriarchal dominance is a collective action problem, according to Braunstein (2008), with men as a group exercising power to maintain their superior positions and control over resources. As in other cases, collective action necessitates mechanisms to maintain group cohesion. Braunstein links the solution to this free-rider problem to the formation of gender identity, built and internalized through repeated social interactions. Internalized norms of masculinity and social sanctions raise the costs of defection. The construction of gender identities in turn produces a set of institutions that support the interests of the hegemonic male group – males of the dominant ethnic group in the capitalist class (Braunstein 2008).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> An important exception, referenced in the previous section, is Darity (2005), who calls on economists to contribute to a new subfield of stratification economics, to explore intergroup inequality based on economic motivations for constructing and reproducing hierarchy between ascriptively different groups.

<sup>16</sup> Patriarchal systems, Braunstein (2008) notes, are not permanent, and instead change to accommodate the newer material requirements of the hegemonic group. As capitalism changes, for example, we can expect some loosening of gender norms and stereotypes to accommodate the system's demand for new forms of labor, such as in the case of “Rosie the Riveter” during World War II.

More than male compliance is needed, though. Females also need to be convinced to submit to this unequal system in order to lower monitoring and extraction costs. Economists' analysis of the patriarchal system could usefully extend to the realm of gender social definitions and formal institutions that "normalize" unequal allocations of resources and labor. These, I would argue, are the mechanisms by which gender identities are formed and maintained. They thus merit closer attention in order to understand how the role of the gender distribution of resources can affect them and are discussed in greater detail in the next section.

But first, it is useful to consider whether in fact rent-seeking by patriarchs is as economically costly as it is assumed to be in other domains of the economy. Economists have the possibility of making an important contribution to this aspect of gender stratification theory: a analysis of the relationship between gender inequality and the performance of the macroeconomy. Braunstein (2008) argues that gender inequality is socially costly in the long run. It dampens women's bargaining power in the household, with consequent negative effects on care and resource investments in children, and ultimately, long-run productivity growth (Folbre 1994). A number of empirical studies, largely neoclassical in theoretical underpinnings, provide evidence that gender inequality in education in fact has a negative impact on long-run growth (Hill and King 1995; Klasen 2002; Knowles, Lorgelly, and Owen 2002).

We must, however, question whether in fact gender inequality is dysfunctional in every context—that is, inimical to growth. Structuralist macroeconomic models find that gender wage inequality can be a stimulus to short- and medium-run growth under some conditions (Seguino 2000; Blecker and Seguino 2002). Higher female wages that narrow the gender gap can reduce aggregate demand via a negative effect on profits investment, and exports. Male employment and output can fall as a consequence, suggesting a motivation for males to resist gender-equitable policies in the short-run, even if they are costly to men, too, in the longer-run.

A further problem is that short-run disturbances in demand make it difficult to achieve long-run potential. Aggregate demand shocks can knock a county off its "normal" long-run growth path, belying the view from traditional growth theorists that

output is “trend stationary” in the face of demand-side shocks (Dutt and Ros 2007).<sup>17</sup> Thus, even if in the long-run, gender equality could produce positive supply-side effects on the quality of the labor force, in the short-run this might induce shocks that drive economies off their long run paths. In economies of different structures, however, it is possible that both the short- and long-run effects of gender inequality are negative.<sup>18</sup>

It is an empirical questions as to whether the short-run costs of gender inequality dominate long-run costs. If the long-run costs dominate, we are left with the question as to why men support a patriarchal system that is socially inefficient and holds potentially negative ramifications for men themselves. A plausible answer response is that dominant groups are inclined to exercise power for short-run gain, discounting heavily longer run effects of inequality, especially if redistribution would impose short-run costs on the dominant group.

### **V. Gender and Social Psychology: Ideology, Norms, and Stereotypes**

Common to both racial and gender systems are a set of social definitions (ideology/cultural beliefs, norms, and stereotypes) that justify a given distribution of resources and social hierarchy, thus serving to organize and coordinate social interactions. Gender ideology refers to people’s ideal concept of how to live in the world, and reflects a set of hegemonic cultural beliefs about gender (Ridgeway and Correll (2004). As such, it is normative, justifying the existing social order and the differential roles and rights for women and men.

Hegemonic males, through their control of elite positions in important institutions, shape gender ideology, sanctionin the unequal distribution of resources and the resulting social hierarchy. That rationalization may be based on religion, biology/psychology, or cultural explanations. But gender ideology is not without competition. It exists side by side with other meta-belief systems, including those regarding human rights, democracy, and class equality. What then explains the persistence of gender ideology in the face of conflicting belief sets?

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<sup>17</sup> Hysterisis effects in labor markets, increasing returns, and balance of payments constraints explain the failure to return to trend growth after a demand-side shock.

<sup>18</sup> There is some reason to believe, for example, that in agricultural economies, gender inequality inhibits growth even in the short-run (Seguino 2007).

Ridgeway and Correll (2004) maintain that hegemonic cultural beliefs about gender are the background of everyday social interactions. We engage in these interactions, believing that others hold these views as well. The frequency of social interactions is an important mechanism by which gender inequality is reproduced. As a result, gender beliefs and hierarchy are resilient and reproduced even in new formations—e.g., new industries, occupations—because these have not yet established institutional rules and organizational procedures.

Social norms and stereotypes provide the means of embedding gender ideology in social interactions and individual behavior, serving as a vehicle for the exercise of power. Gender stereotypes describe the manner in which men and women presumably differ, usually in ways that justify the gender division of labor. Norms provide a check on behaviors, congruent with stereotypes. Gender norms are the rules and expectations that contribute to gender differentiated behavior. Those who transgress norms face punishment—stigmatization, shunning, and other responses to social deviance. The intensity of the response raises the cost of deviating from gendered behavioral norms.

Gender social definitions in turn shape the formation of formal institutions that provide the visible formal “rules of the game.” Family institutions, property rights, and organized religion all are examples of formal institutions in which are embedded gender social definitions. Together, these influence the formation of gender identity. This psychological/social sphere exists alongside the material structure of gender relations, embedded in the macroeconomy, and influenced by the gender division of labor, the structure of production, external relations and the macro policy environment. Combining the social/psychological domain (or cultural sphere, for short) with the economic, we obtain a schema of the system that supports and reproduces gender relations (Figure 3).

Figure 3 about here.

At the level of the household, the gender division of labor influences women’s access to and control over resources. Men’s superior control over resources gives them greater bargaining power to control women’s labor, and reproductive functions. The macroeconomy shapes the opportunities for women to engage in remunerative work, and the greater the demand for female labor, the more likely women’s status and well-being is to improve absolutely and relative to men. Thus, the functioning of the macroeconomy,

and the policies that shape the growth process, with concomitant effects on the structure of production, macroeconomic stability, and the demand for labor can be construed an important change target to promote gender equality. Traditional gender roles—with men the breadwinners and women the caretakers—ensure the persistence of gender inequality over time as these roles solidify into norms and stereotypes, buttressed by a gender ideology. Those in turn shape the formation of institutions that embed gender hierarchy. Note the two-way causal links between the economy (micro and macro) and the cultural sphere.

Here, we have provided a more detailed schema for understanding micro-level relations and entry points for change in those relations. Gender social definitions and their impact on formal institutions, which together shape gender identity, suggest it is not necessary to resort to a notion of collective action to understand how males maintain social and economic dominance. Men and women can appear to act consensually to maintain and reproduce a system of hierarchy. Agents thus appear to coordinate their actions in a way that respects a social hierarchy with status and resources differences.

Economists have tended to spend less time thinking about norms and stereotypes, as well as overarching ideologies. There are exceptions, Marx being an important one. Institutional economics partially fills this lacuna, linking sociology and economics, although its incorporation of social psychology is limited. In that literature, formal institutions are a key level of analysis, with ideology, norms, and stereotypes—considered to be more intransigent to change and beyond the scope of analysis. Indeed, cultural beliefs, norms, and stereotypes are described as informal constraints embedded in social interactions, but deemed inertial (taking from 100 to 1000 years to shift, Williamson [2005], estimates). Formal institutions, by contrast, are described as those in which redress is possible for violation of the rules, publicly enforced by legitimated powers. For this reason, they are seen as more amenable to change and are therefore target variables for inducing shifts towards gender equality.

Some economists have challenged this view, identifying the ability of norms (dubbed “informal institutions”) to thwart efforts at gender equitable change and development (Morrisson and Jütting 2005; de Soysa and Jutting 2007; Sen 2007). Morrisson and Jutting (2005) have constructed a new data set that measures social

institutions related to gender. It should be noted that their framework differs from that advanced here; it blends formal institutions and social norms.<sup>19</sup> They find evidence that these institutions constrain women's access to *capabilities* (education), *livelihoods* and *empowerment/agency* (female share of employment and of technical and professional positions). This important research underscores the important independent effect of social institutions on our efforts to achieve genders justice in the *capability* and *livelihood* domains. In this work, too, a pessimistic sense emerges that social institutions are slow-moving variables, though not immovable. Jütting and Morrisson (2005) argue that in governments can induce change, but that it might require compensating men in order to reduce their resistance, implicitly acknowledging men's material benefits flowing from a system of gender hierarchy.

Are there other methods for altering gender inequitable norms and stereotypes and leveraging change in all three domains of gender well-being? In an effort to answer that question, the next section explores the sociological and psychology literature on the changeability of norms and stereotypes.

## **VI. A Framework for Promoting Gender Justice: Changing Gender Social Definitions, Institutions, and Identity**

Even if we remove the external limitations on gender equality in formal institutions—by enacting anti-discrimination legislation, for example, equalizing investments in health and education, outlawing sex selective abortion or polygamy, for example—internalized ideology, gender inequitable norms and stereotype produce internal and external conflict. Achievement of gender equality and thus gender justice requires that we address the constraint posed by gender social definitions.

Take, for instance, the resistance women face as they move into typically male occupations from the male workers in those jobs effort (Bergmann (1996). Men appear to fear that as an occupation becomes feminized, its wages and status will decline, and not irrationally so. But women too resist change. Gender role differentiation is embedded in norms and stereotypes that produce real social costs, if violated. Badgett and Folbre

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<sup>19</sup> Social institution variables include the right to inherit, freedom of movement and dressing, right to ownership and access to property, genital mutilation, polygamy, and authority over children.

(1999) report on the results of an experiment to test respondents' reactions to men and women in gender atypical occupations. Responses to women (and men) received lower ratings of attractiveness than those perceived to be employed in gender typical occupations. This suggests that marriage markets may influence job choices of women as well as men in the labor market. We can find many other cases in which women adhere to and enforce gender inequitable norms and institutions, for fear of the costs of violating these strictures on behavior.

Although equalization of economic power between women and men is a precondition for equality and thus gender justice, how this is done matters. Because gender equality also requires change in gender social definitions, well-designed strategies and conditions are required to produce change in the social/psychological realm.

Recent sociological research on stereotypes provides some insight on what might be required in order to shift ideology, norms, and stereotypes in a gender-equitable direction. Influenced by Gordon Allport's (1954) seminal work, *On the Nature of Prejudice*, sociologists view stereotypes as a normal human propensity to categorize and summarize information. Categories guide our daily activities and judgments. Allport notes that stereotypes do not need to be accurate to be widely held; indeed, the mind has a facile way of responding to information that does fit into previously constructed categories—e.g., a woman truck driver, a black supervisor. The mind reports this an exception, rather than incorporating this and reformulating categories. Humans tend to hold preconceptions and do not adjust them in the face of conflicting evidence.

Allport was particularly concerned with stereotyping that resulted in *prejudice*—or negative stereotypical beliefs—a condition he described as “an antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization”(1954: 9). The burden of prejudice rests on the fact that it results in a disadvantage not merited by the individual in question. Allport was especially concerned with the problem of negative racial/ethnic stereotypes. He proposed as a solution, the creation of conditions for structured contact on equal footing, sanctioned and supported by some institutional authority. An example might be a project to increase women's access to jobs from which they had previously been excluded, supported by anti-discrimination legislation and leadership in the hiring institution, with women working in the same job classification in equal proportion to men

Allport's important work, though influential, faced some major challenges. One is the argument that prejudice is a *group*, not individual process. Blumer (1958), for example, contended that race prejudice is a sense of group position, resulting in the development of a group identity expressed through the individual. "Feelings," according to Blumer, develop as part of a collective process, where groups of "we" and "they" are delineated. Blumer identifies four types of feelings in the dominant racial group: 1) a feeling of superiority and corresponding prejudices about the qualities inherent in the subordinate group; 2) a feeling that the subordinate group is intrinsically different, e.g., biologically, culturally; 3) a feeling of proprietary claim to privileges and advantages in certain areas; and 4) fear and suspicion that the subordinate group harbors claims to the privileges of the dominant group. Blumer's framework is not entirely consistent with that laid out in Figure 3, insofar as it does not differentiate between ideology, norms, and negative stereotypes. Nevertheless, it is a useful summary of the context in which racial hierarchies are formed, and is analogous to gender hierarchical prejudices.

Eagly and Diekmann (2005) identify a major difference with regard to gender and racial stereotypes. Antipathy is not necessarily a component of prejudice to attitudes towards females. Indeed, women, though a subordinate group, are often viewed more favorably than men. More importantly, Eagly and Diekmann (2005) argue that the faulty generalizations that become aggregated into negative stereotypes are not as inflexible as often assumed. A great deal of research supports the view that ideology/culture and norms are also malleable (Diekmann, Goodfriend, and Goodwin 2004; Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Diekmann, Eagly, Mladinic, and Ferreira 2005; Kroska and Elman 2006).

Eagly and Diekmann (2005) link changes in stereotypes to shifts in social roles both within the family and in the workplace. They use social role theory to explain the shifts in gender stereotypes in recent years, noting that:

"the role behavior of group members shapes their stereotype because perceivers assume correspondence between people's behavior in their everyday social roles and their inner dispositions....Applied to men and women, this theory posits that perceivers should think that sex differences are eroding because of increasing similarity in the social roles of women and men. Moreover, the stereotypes for women should be more dynamic than that of men, because much greater change has taken place in the roles of women than in those of men"(2005: 104-05).

Humans suffer internal conflict, “cognitive dissonance,” when the beliefs they hold differ from their material conditions.

Policy prescriptions that take this into consideration could act as a fulcrum to induce change in stereotypes, and eventually norms and ideology. There is some evidence of such effects. Structural economic change and economic crisis lead to changes in work opportunities for women and men. Naila Kabeer (2000) provides analysis of such a shift in her research on women garment workers in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Long years of economic crisis and the shift to an export-oriented growth strategy that sought cheap female labor led to a rift between families’ economic needs and gender norms that constrained women’s mobility and contact with men. Norms and stereotypes were forced to give way to accommodate the changed macroeconomic shifts. Similarly, structural adjustment policies in Central America contributed to falling male wages in male-dominated sectors and an expansion of service sector jobs (e.g., tourism) that employed primarily females. This structural shift ran up against gender ideologies in the region.

In such circumstances, gender conflict can emerge (Chant 2000), but what are the prospects for adaptation? Addressing this question, Kroska and Elman (2006) investigate whether married women and men in the United States change their gender ideology (classified as traditional or egalitarian) to conform to work and family activities and gender divisions of labor. Using data from two waves of the National Survey of Families and Households, 1988-89 and 1992-93, they find that individuals whose background, work, and family life are inconsistent with their gender ideology shift their gender ideology in a direction that is more compatible with their background, work, and family life. Egalitarians with traditional life patterns at wave 1 were found to be more traditional in their gender ideology at wave 2, and traditionalists with egalitarian life patterns at wave 1 were more egalitarian at wave 2. This suggests that sustained social role change is likely to dynamically shift gender stereotypes.

Research on political representation has generated results consistent with social role theory. Using data from Indian villages with quotas for female village leaders, Beaman, Chattopadhyay, Duflo, Pande, and Topalova (2008) evaluate the effect of exposure to female leaders on gender stereotypes. They find that exposure weakens stereotypes about gender roles in public and family life. Relevant to social role theory,

villagers rate their women leaders as less effective when exposed to them for their first term in office, but the gender gap in evaluation disappears the second time women hold office.

## **VII. Implications for Public and Macroeconomic Policy**

Feminist economists have made a major contribution to understanding how gender relations influence and are influenced by macroeconomic outcomes. Efforts to develop policies that will reduce and eventually eliminate gender inequalities in *capabilities*, *livelihoods*, and *empowerment/agency* require a further expansion of our sights to the realm of gender ideology, norms and stereotypes, and institutions.

Getting governments and individuals to agree to gender equality in capabilities appears to be an easier sell in a world of human rights discourse. We can agree to some extent on *minima* of investments that create equality of opportunity. But if gender justice also requires equality in livelihoods, as I argue it does, how do we shift the distribution of control over material resources, in the face of resistance by the dominant group?

At least two possibilities have been identified. We can compensate the dominant group for their loss of patriarchal rents, though it is not clear how this is done without reaffirming the justness of gender hierarchies (Jütting and Morrisson 2007; Braunstein 2008). A second strategy is to build and expand an alternative cultural belief system that is incongruous with male dominance through the promotion of a collective norm of justice (Braunstein 2008). Expansion of a collective justice ideology that includes a commitment to gender justice, defined as equality in *capabilities*, *livelihoods*, and *empowerment/agency*, may produce cognitive dissonance, especially for the short-run beneficiaries of gender inequality.

A third strategy is to develop a macroeconomic program to promote gender equality in all domains. Such a program, cognizant of the constraints and possibilities imposed by norms and stereotypes, would expand women's access to jobs, and create the conditions for women to occupy technologically sophisticated positions. To do this in a way that lessens resistance would require that policies be implemented in the context of an expanding economic pie, so that women gain absolutely and relatively, while men at least are absolutely not worse off. This approach is not new, and characterizes the very

successful New Economic Policy (NEP) adopted in Malaysia in the 1960s to improve the status of native Malays in a society in which Chinese Malaysians dominated elite positions. The success of the NEP was due in significant measure to the rapid expansion of the Malaysian economy during this period of transition, lessening the cost to elites whose material well-being grew in absolute terms.

These concerns make apparent the important role of macroeconomic policy in promoting gender equality. What would a gender-equitable macroeconomic policy framework look like? First, macroeconomic policies would need to ensure full employment.<sup>20</sup> This would require a different type of central bank—one concerned with employment as a primary goal that worked with the government to address supply-side inflation drivers. Agricultural and industrial policies would be required to facilitate structural change, moving the economy to the production of higher-value added goods and services. This would support the transformation of the economy from one that is hierarchical with a wide wage and thus status gap between low-paid and high-paid jobs to a more egalitarian wage, income, and wealth structure. Public policies that socialize the care burden, reducing conflict between men and women over labor allocation, help.

Macroeconomic policies that make class equity compatible with growth feasible and that limit macroeconomic instability would play a central role. The more equal the economy-wide distribution of resources and incomes, the lower the cost of gender equality. These policies would address constraints of the “sand” of ideology, norms and stereotypes in the wheels of gender-equitable change. They provide an environment to put women into well-paid work without, however, forcing men down the job ladder. Norms and stereotypes don’t change overnight. Sustained macroeconomic growth and stability is required to give these changes time to take root.

A cautionary note is offered, by way of the example of South Korea. That country embarked on a path of rapid growth and structural change in the 1960s. Now a major producer and exporter of high-tech goods, South Korea’s per capita GDP has risen to a level that makes it the envy of developing countries. Women’s paid labor was at the

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<sup>20</sup> Inflation concerns have dominated in central banks in the last two decades, constraining the ability of governments to promote employment growth. Some countries have been more successful than others at achieving close to full employment with low inflation, and in the case of Sweden, an important institutions mechanism in achieving this goal is tripartite bargaining over wages between business, government, and workers. Worker owned enterprise structures might also facilitate this goal.

center of this growth strategy. In large numbers, young women were segregated into labor-intensive export sector jobs due to the stimulus their lower wages provided to export demand. But 40 years later, despite a dramatic increase in women's educational attainment<sup>21</sup> and sustained strong demand for their labor, the ratio of female to male wages has risen only marginally from 48% to 55%.<sup>22</sup> More worrying is that the ratio of females to males in the population, a marker of women's status, has declined in recent years. As Figure 4 shows, clearly, employing women is not enough. Ensuring conditions for women to access high status jobs in equal proportion to men is a requirement for progress. This did not occur in South Korea, and with globalization, continued job segregation and constraints on countries to use industrial policies move up the industrial ladder, the goal of gender justice is challenging.

Figure 4 about here.

### **VIII. Conclusion**

Gender justice requires not only equality of opportunity. It requires equality of outcomes, and especially, gender equality of livelihoods in the sense of access to and control over material resources. Women's relative economic power is the most important predictor of their overall relative inequality in a wide variety of "life options," according to Blumberg (1984: 74). Economic equality can give women more bargaining power to negotiate for role and resource shifts at the level of the household, triggering change in gender unequal ideology, norms and stereotypes towards beliefs that are more egalitarian.

What types of policies will promote greater economic power for women? Affirmative action policies can make it possible for women to enter traditional male occupations, and social welfare policies that allow men to take up the care burden are necessary to induce greater shifts in social roles. To lessen the cost in the form of patriarchal rents, these changes are likely to be more successful in the context of an economy in which employment is expanding, and in which the state is willing to adopt

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<sup>21</sup> The ratio of female to male educational attainment rose from 52% to 85% from 1960 to 2000 (Barro and Lee 2000).

<sup>22</sup> These data are for the manufacturing sector, representative of wages ratios in other sections, and are from the International Labour Organisation's LABORSTA, [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org), accessed August 31, 2008.

policies to smooth aggregate demand to prevent macroeconomic instability, and economic insecurity. Macroeconomic policy can thus play a facilitating role, stimulating sustained demand for labor, and creating the conditions whereby equality and growth are not at odds.

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Figure 1. Female and Male Well-Being Distributions

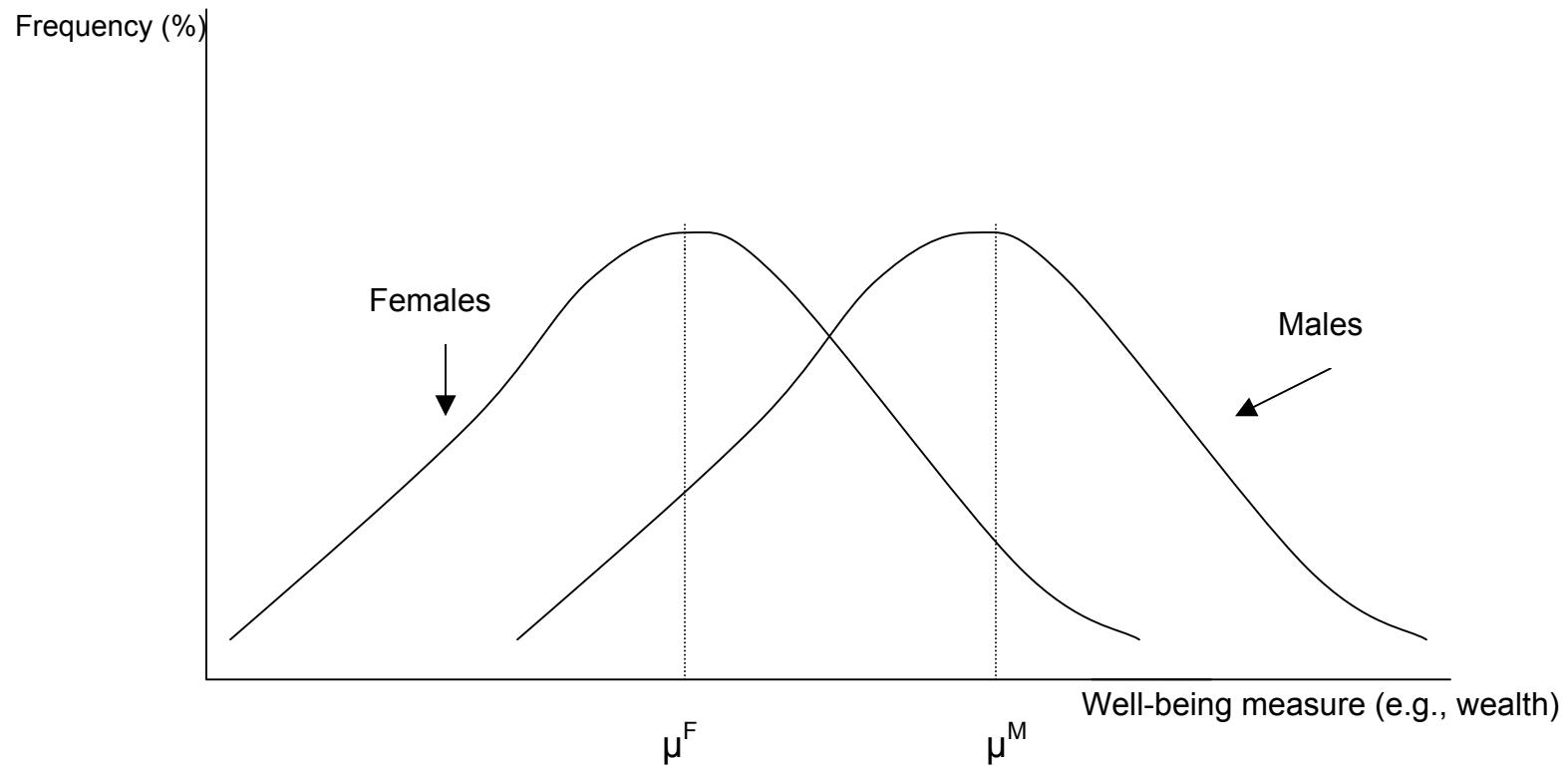


Figure 2. Two frameworks for assessing gender justice

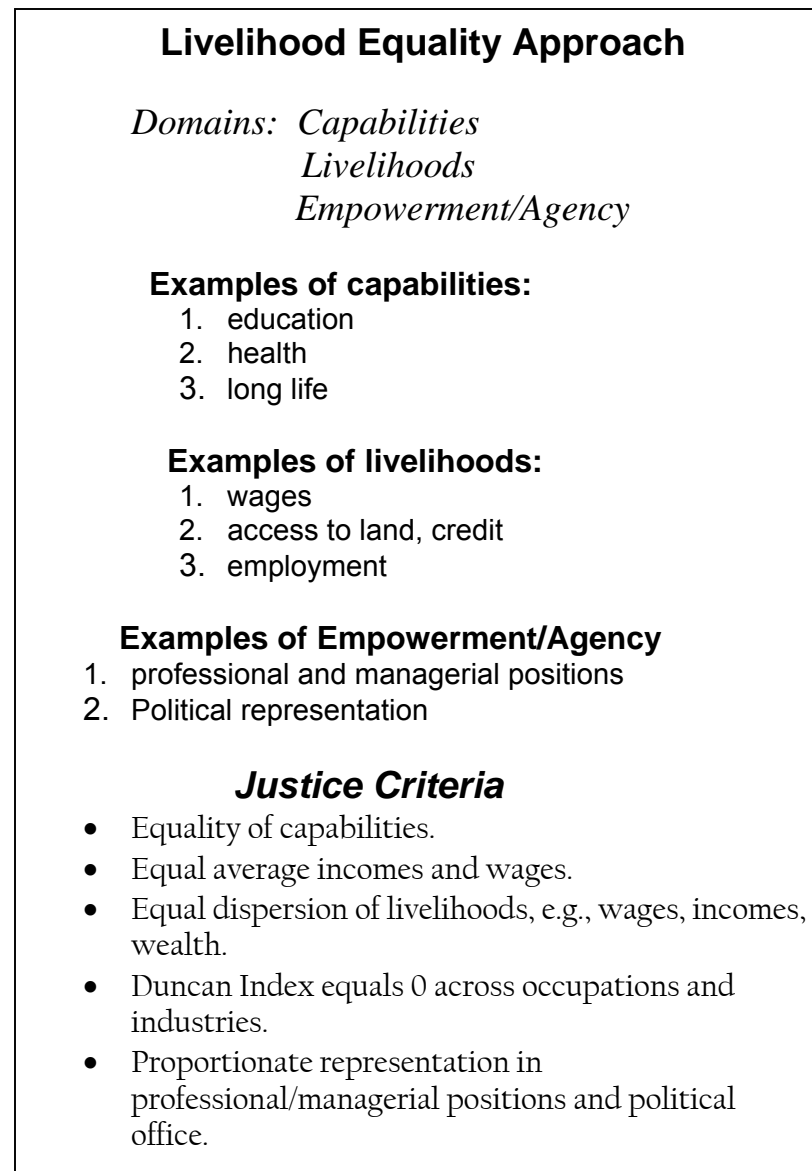
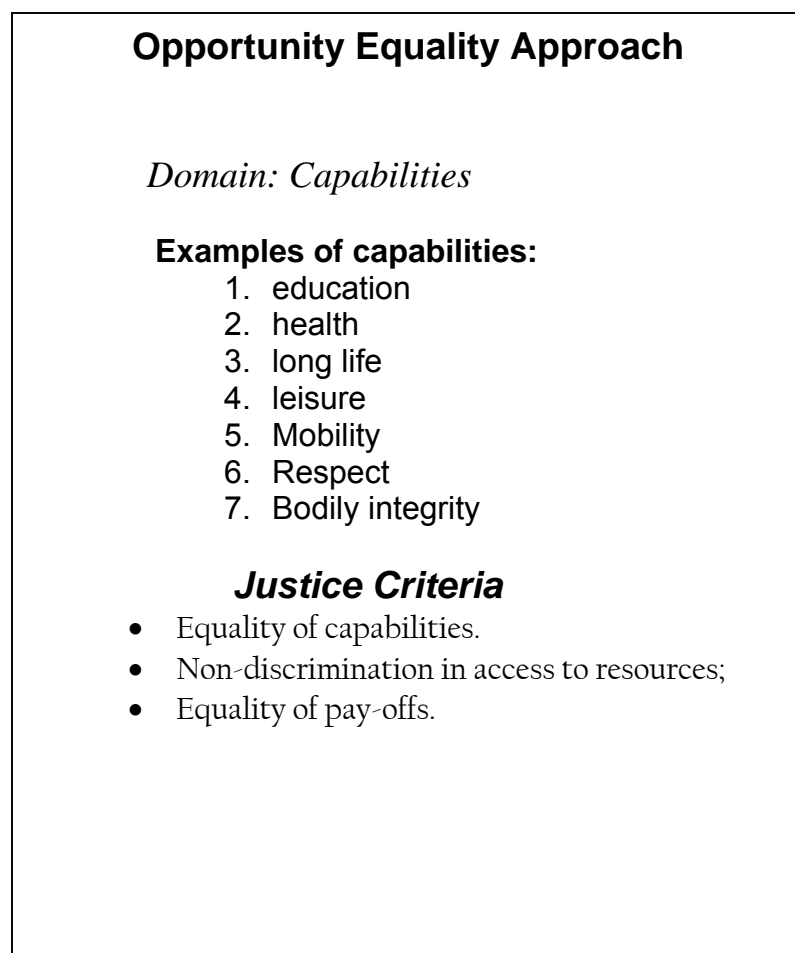


Figure 3. Gender Stratification in the Economic and Cultural Spheres

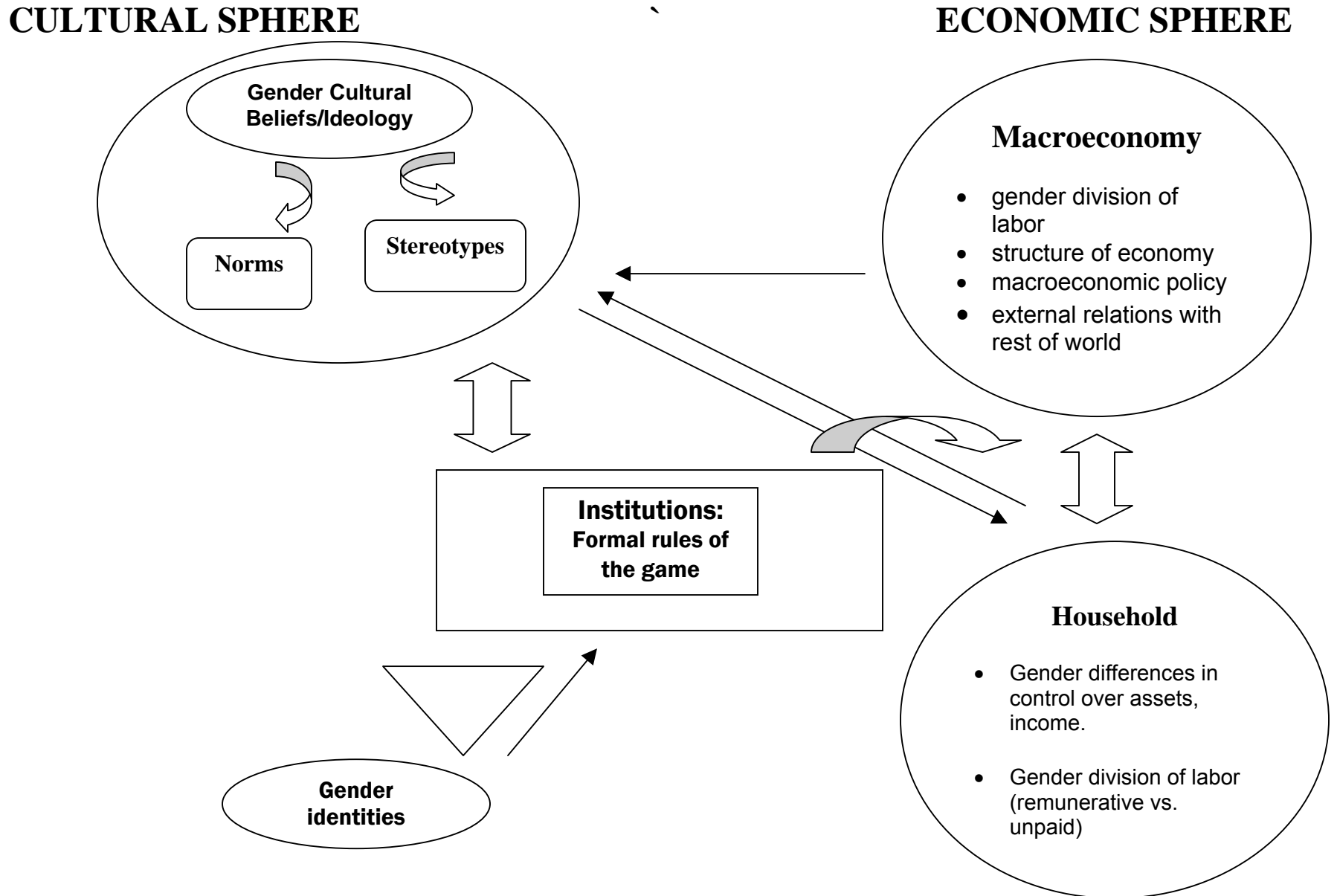


Figure 4. South Korea: Female Share of Total Employment and F/M Population Ratio, 1975-2004

