

Chapter 7 Seeing Gender Harriett Martineau and Charlotte Perkins Gilman



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As we've seen, the social project of modernity is based on the idea, value, and belief in equality, and this belief comes from a more fundamental assumption about human beings: Every individual is capable of discerning truth, is born with the capacity to reason, and is not only able but required to

make decisions that guide his or her life and contribute to the welfare of society at large. However, you also know that the social project fell well short of the mark—the belief in equality was in truth founded upon practices of inequality. Western capitalism, for example, was built on black slave labor as well as upon the free labor that women provided and continue to provide. Women were also excluded from owning property in Western societies until the middle of the nineteenth century, and they didn't have the right to vote in democratic elections until well into the twentieth century. Gender continues to be the basis for the unequal distribution of income: In 2008, the median income for women in the United States with a college degree was 26 percent less than for men (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). Gender is also a factor in violence. In 2008, about 552,000 women above the age of 12 were victims of intimate violence compared to 101,000 men (Bureau of Justice Statistics Selected Findings, 2009). In addition, it's estimated that 91 percent of rape victims are female versus 9 percent that are male (UC Santa Cruz Student Health Center, n.d.). In short, gender matters in terms of these issues of democracy: social justice, equality, and happiness.

Generally speaking, the social disciplines distinguish between sex (the biological assignment of male and female) and gender (the social constructions of meaning, norms, values, and so on that are built upon the biological categories). When compared to other systems of inequality, gender has unique characteristics. It is the oldest system of economic and political discrimination, and gender is ubiquitous: It's found in virtually every situation and thus crosscuts every other system of stratification. But gender is deeper still: It involves every facet of the body—from health to image to sex and sexuality. Gender is perceived to impact the way we think and feel and relate to our self, and gender is the foundation of marriage and family and thus an intrinsic part of how we become human through socialization. Further, gender is structured in such a way as to keep group members from connecting, sharing grief, and building solidarity—there is no neighborhood or ghetto for gender. Moreover, gender is required of every single person; thus, children are intentionally and thoroughly trained in gender, sometimes even before birth. Finally, gender is the social category that is most powerfully linked by most people to biological, genetic, and religious causes and legitimations.

Waves of Feminism

In Western European societies, these inequalities of gender have been addressed in three distinct waves of feminism. Ideas about the equal rights of women first began to emerge during the Enlightenment. The first significant expression of these issues was Mary Wollstonecraft's book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792/1993). In it, she clearly linked gender to the discourse of human nature found in the Enlightenment and thus "brought the issue of women's rights for a short moment in the 1790s into the general debate about civil rights" (Todd, 1993, p. xv). Wollstonecraft acknowledged the physical strength differences between men and women but argued that the differences in personality, mind, and action were due to education—education in the thorough socializing sense. Women, she argued, are socialized to be alluring, simply objects of beauty fit only for the pedestal. Women's "strength and usefulness are sacrificed for beauty" in that "they are treated as a kind of subordinate being, and not as a part of the human species" (Wollstonecraft, 1792/1993, p. 71).

The first wave of feminism became organized as the result of the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, which called for equal rights for women to vote and own property, to full access to educational opportunities, and equal compensation. The Convention adopted a statement written by Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1848/2007) that was patterned after the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (p. 58). After a 72-year fight, women finally gained the right to vote in the United States in 1920; Great Britain followed in 1928.

The second wave of feminism grew out of the civil rights movements of the 1960s. Important for the second wave of feminists were the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949/1989) and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Beauvoir affirmed that gender distinctions involve issues pertaining to human nature, but she used an existentialist philosophy as her base rather than the Enlightenment—in many ways, what

she said is more profound.

Beauvoir (1949/1989) pointed out that part of what makes us human is our consciousness (see [Chapter 3](#) of this volume); and intrinsic to our consciousness—one of the ways it is built—is the category of the Other. Otherness is built into most world religions, and it is a fundamental aspect of *self*-consciousness: *Self*-consciousness can only exist if there is an Other (otherwise, everything and everyone is the same, which is what some religions tell us). For men, the Other category is woman, and it's men who have defined it as such. The profound problem with this is that the Other doesn't have its own independent existence: "Thus *humanity is male* and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him" (Beauvoir, 1949/1989, p. xxii, emphasis added). In their Otherness, women "do not authentically assume a subjective attitude. . . . [T]hey have taken nothing, they have only received" (p. xxv).

Friedan (1963) pointed to the same problem but came at it from a different perspective. The "feminine mystique" was the picture of a suburban housewife. Beginning in the latter part of the 1940s and coming into its own in the 1950s, being a "housewife" took on increased cultural value. Books were written, classes were organized, and degrees were offered in home economics to enable the American women to be the best she could be, which, of course, meant being a housewife caring for her children and husband. This was the mystique of feminine fulfillment.

The problem was that women weren't happy, but the *real* problem was that women couldn't name the problem. The mystique had so engulfed the hearts of Americans that it was unthinkable that being a housewife could be a source of unhappiness. Friedan (1963) argued that two things needed to happen. One, housework had to be seen for what it is and not as a career in itself. Friedan urged women to say no to the voices of marketers and advertisers who tell them they require a specific product brand to be the perfect, happy housewife. Two, like men, women will only find happiness in creative work of their own. She thus advocated a national education system for women that would be supported well enough that the demands of children and husbands wouldn't require the unpaid work of a woman.

Central to the organization of the second wave was the founding in 1966 of

the National Organization for Women. Important issues for these feminists were pay equity; equal access to jobs and higher education; and the control over women's bodies, including but not limited to sexuality and reproduction, and the reduction of violence and rape.

The third wave of feminism is much harder to define, both in terms of its characteristics and its history. Rory Dicker (2008) argues that an important historical moment was the Clarence Thomas Supreme Court confirmation hearings (p. 103). Thomas, an African American, was appointed to replace Thurgood Marshall, the first black Supreme Court justice. During the hearings, African American lawyer Anita Hill accused Thomas of sexual harassment. It came down to he said/she said, and Thomas was confirmed in spite of the accusations, but it set off a firestorm of controversy.

Writing in response to the hearings and cultural upheaval, Rebecca Walker (1992/2007)—an African American woman (and the daughter of author Alice Walker)—said that the hearings were about “checking and redefining the extent of women's credibility and power” (p. 398). The hearings were also about one woman's *experience* in the face of a *structure* of prejudice. The night after the hearings, Rebecca Walker tells us, she was talking with a black man who saw the confirmation as a step backward for racial equality. She was outraged because this man didn't see the issue of gender at all, just race. A week later, she was on a train and overheard two men talking about sex and women: “‘Man, I fucked that bitch all night and then I never called her again’” (p. 399). The man then hit on Walker, she told him in no uncertain terms what she thought, and then she moved to another part of the train. As Walker says of the incident, “I am livid, unrelenting in my anger at those who invade my space . . . who refuse to hear my voice” (p. 400). To her readers, she writes, “Let Thomas' confirmation serve to remind you . . . the fight is far from over. Let this *dismissal of a woman's experience* move you to anger” (p. 400, emphasis added). Walker tells us that being third wave means demanding the validity of a woman's experience. It is in many ways a counter to the effects of being Other.

Yet third-wave feminism isn't just one thing. In her chapter on the third wave, Dicker (2008) touches on a number of manifestations, such as womanism, ecofeminism, queer theory, power feminism, and the grassroots

cultural work of the radical feminist group Riot Grrrls. Kathleen Hanna (1992/2007), of the punk band Bikini Kill, writes in the “Riot Grrrl Manifesto,”

WHY RIOT? BECAUSE us girls crave records and books and fanzines that speak to US that WE feel included in and can understand in our own ways . . . BECAUSE we must take over the means of production in order to create our own meanings. BECAUSE viewing our work as being connected to our girlfriends-politics-real-lives is essential if we are gonna figure out how [what] we are doing impacts, reflects, perpetuates, or DISRUPTS the status quo. (p. 395)

The time period of the two women I’ve chosen for this chapter coincides with the first wave of feminism, Martineau toward the beginning and Gilman toward the end. Charlotte Perkins Gilman was politically active and wrote theory as well as several works of fiction. Harriet Martineau, on the other hand, isn’t someone we can classify as being directly involved in the feminist movement. Martineau was clearly concerned with gender and saw the condition of women to be the chief measurement of any society’s democracy. For Martineau, the quality of a good society is measured by the happiness of its disenfranchised. But Martineau was a generalist in a way that Gilman was not, and her primary focus was on democracy.

Harriet Martineau—Gender and Democracy

Harriet Martineau was born in Norwich, England, on June 12, 1802, the sixth of eight children. Martineau was a sickly child, and by the age of 12, she had lost most of her hearing. Many of the adult pictures of Martineau show her with her hearing trumpet (an early hearing aid), which she acquired when she was 18. Martineau grew up in a Unitarian household and was generally educated at home (most women at this time were barred from the university). Unitarians believe in one God, in contrast to the doctrine of the trinity, and are committed to the use of reason in religion, universal brotherhood, and a creedless church. Unitarians were part of the religious dissenters' movement in England, which fought against the dominance of the Anglican Church. Though she eventually became agnostic, Martineau's religious background clearly informs her thinking, as we will see when we get to her typology of religion. Her father was a modest capitalist, whose business eventually collapsed due to competition from larger, more industrialized companies. This business failure forced Harriet to seek gainful employment, which she found, writing for the *Monthly Repository*, a Unitarian journal. Martineau began by writing a series of short stories with ethical and political points. She saw writing as a way of teaching and illustrating the ideas of political economy for the general public. Her talent for writing soon became obvious: In only her second year of full-time writing, she published a novel, a book on religious history, a variety of essays, and 52 articles for the *Monthly Repository*.

Among her best-known works are *How to Observe Morals and Manners* (a book of sociological methods), *Society in America* (a three-volume sociological study of America), *Deerbrook* (a novel about English domestic life), and the translation of Comte's *Positive Philosophy* into English. She wrote *Morals and Manners* on the ship traveling to America and spent 2 years in the United States gathering data for *Society in America*. Martineau was a prolific writer, traveled extensively, and was well respected by the intellectuals of her day. Martineau's first serialized piece, for example,

outsold Charles Dickens, who was a contemporary of hers. By the time of her death, Martineau had published over 70 books and around 1,500 newspaper articles. Harriet Martineau died of natural causes at 74 years of age. She passed away at The Knoll, a home she designed and had built in the Ambleside Lake District in England, and she left her own obituary.

Theorist's Digest

Central Sociological Questions

Martineau is what we would call today a general theorist. She's obviously concerned with gender, but sees it as part of the bigger project of modernity and nation building. Thus, Martineau's work is focused on understanding how democracy is progressing. She answers this question by first explaining how certain institutions and issues ought to be in a modern democracy. Notice that for Martineau, and most early social thinkers, democracy could not be understood apart from ethics and morals: Democracy is built upon a specific ethical, moral base. After laying out what democracy should be, Martineau empirically compares those standards against how the United States was doing at the time.

Simply Stated

Martineau's theoretical work isn't concerned with explaining how something works or came into existence; she is focused, rather, on being a critical observer of the progress of democracy. Martineau's methodology goes something like this: In preparing to observe society, there are three issues a person must first resolve. She or he must have a clear notion of what defines human nature, the categories of distinction upon which observation will be made must be clear, and the observer must divest her- or himself of all ethnocentrism. In her work, Martineau considered many social institutions as measures of democracy; among them are gender and family, religion, and education.

Key Ideas

Natural law and happiness, morals and manners, preparing the observer, observational safeguards, things, gender, marriage, religion, education.

Concepts and Theory: Observing Society

Harriet Martineau is one of the earliest sociologists. She is best known for her translation of Auguste Comte's *Positive Philosophy*, one of the major foundation stones of sociology. In praise of Martineau, Comte wrote,

And looking at it from the point of view of future generations, I feel sure that your name will be linked to mine, for you have executed the only one of those works that will survive amongst all those which my fundamental treatise has called forth. (as cited in Harrison, 1913, p. xviii)

Like Comte, Martineau felt that the social sciences could be used to improve the human condition. Martineau took Comte's positivism as a tool to measure how well the societies born out of the Enlightenment were faring. She looked specifically at the United States, as the nation most likely to embody the hopes of enlightened thinkers. In the words of Seymour Martin Lipset (1962), "Americans today have forgotten, if they ever knew, the meaning the United States once held for the world." To the poor, it was a country where "they might live as free and equal men." To the intellectuals, political activists, and rulers "America was both a reality and a symbol" (p. 5).

The standard against which she evaluated the United States is one that was deeply embedded in the Enlightenment as well as the Declaration of Independence. It was the Declaration's line concerning the pursuit of happiness that Martineau (1838/2003) saw as the core of this democratic experiment: "every element of social life derives its importance from this great consideration—the relative amount of human happiness" (p. 25). Her method and purpose was "to compare the existing state of society in America with the principles on which it is professedly founded; thus testing Institutions, Morals, and Manners by an indisputable, instead of an arbitrary standard" (Martineau, 1837/1966, p. viii). Martineau's statements on methods are important because they constitute one of the first accounts of social methodology, which predates both Weber's and Durkheim's books. More

important, however, is the reason why Martineau wrote her book on methodology: *She felt that every responsible citizen ought to make informed, scientific observations of society.*

Morals and Manners

Martineau's approach to observing society is to make a distinction between morals (stated beliefs) on the one hand and manners (observable practices) on the other. In her comparison of morals and manners, Martineau prefigures the contemporary work of Robert Wuthnow (1987). Wuthnow argues that the moral foundation of any society is its cultural code. The content *per se* isn't really a concern for Wuthnow; rather, he is interested in the distinctions between the code and the way people relate to the code. He sees a dynamic aspect to the distance between morals and manners. Individuals must maintain a close but distant relationship between the ideal and the real. If the distance gets too close, people will tend to become either discouraged, because no one can uphold the ideal, or self-righteous and judgmental in their supposed adherence. On the other hand, if the boundary between the two is blurred and the individual ceases to be able to distinguish between the ideal and the real, then either cynicism or loss of justification for action will result. Though Martineau doesn't include the social psychological effects, the use of comparison is the same: How do our actions measure up to the unseen beliefs we hold?

Martineau (1838/2003) advocates the observation of what she terms Things: "The great secret of wise inquiry into Morals and Manners is to begin with the study of things, using the discourse of persons as a commentary upon them" (p. 73). Like Durkheim, she sees that morals are part of the "common mind" of a people and that this public consciousness can be understood through social facts. However, Martineau's approach is much broader than Durkheim's. I've listed the social facts that Martineau uses to measure morals and manners in her work in America in [Table 7.1](#). I'm not going to be describing each element of her methodology because they are of varying degrees of theoretical importance. I do, however, want to point out the variety and objectivity of the things she has on her list. In order to understand human practices, Martineau uses such things as typologies, buildings, the physical environment, social practices such as suicide, cultural artifacts such as

cemeteries, social networks such as attachment to birthplace and family, land ownership, health, marriage, education, police, urbanization, newspapers, songs, literature, and so on. One is almost overwhelmed at the breadth by simply reading the list. The really interesting point is that almost all of these items are actual things and facts that can be observed. One more issue I'd like to point out is that this list, along with her follow-up interviews with people, represents a very sophisticated and contemporary triangulation of methodologies. She used observational techniques, interviews, archival, and content analysis methods.

Table 7.1 Martineau's Measurements of Morals

<i>Structure</i>	<i>Observance</i>
Religion	General type: licentious, ascetic, or moderate Physical places of worship Condition of the clergy Superstitions Suicide
General Moral Notions	Cemetery (age, and cause of death; visions of future) Degree of attachment to birthplace and family Representative characters—two kinds: dead (deepest beliefs) and living (currents of belief) National celebrations Treatment of guilty Songs Literature
Domestic State	Physical environment Distribution of resources Method and ownership of land Extent of commerce Physical health Condition of marriage
Idea of Liberty	Amount of feudal arrangements still present Kind of police (military, private, public) Urbanization Conditions of servants Freedom of press Education Persecution of opinion

Preparing the Observer

Further, Martineau sets out requirements for observation, the first of which concern the observer. Martineau is making an important point in social research: Sometimes the observer is the instrument of measurement. To demonstrate the importance of preparation, Martineau points out that if

someone asked you or me to explain the physics of the universe, or the biology of the human body, or the geographic strata of the Grand Canyon, we would respond by saying the request is silly, unless we had some basis to claim expertise. Yet the average person does not hesitate for a moment to “imagine that he can understand men at a glance” (Martineau, 1838/2003, p. 14). I wonder what Martineau would think about the prevalence today of people expressing their opinion about social issues on radio, television, and blogs—mostly without an ounce of preparation whatsoever. Martineau thought having an opinion about social things without training was just as ludicrous as my having an opinion about Einstein’s theory of special relativity. This was why Martineau wrote her book on methods of observation.

For Martineau, there are two main areas of preparation: philosophical and moral. The first thing to notice about her preparations is that they pertain to the inner person. Martineau points out that the instrument of observation is the human mind. Here we can really see the difference between old-school positivism and neo-positivism (see [Chapter 1](#)). Of course, neo-positivism requires training, but the real instrument of measure is the survey or statistical analysis. For the old school, it’s the inner person that must be prepared.

Philosophical preparation.

The first philosophical preparation you have to make is to know what it is you want to know. For Martineau, what she wants to know is the condition of the society with regard to happiness. I’d like you to see a couple of things here. First, Martineau didn’t get the idea of happiness off the top of her head; she drew it from the intellectual discourse of her time. Darrin McMahon (2006) tells us that prior to the Enlightenment, happiness was viewed as a reward for exceptional behavior or having arrived at perfection. For thinkers of the Enlightenment, happiness was “a *natural human endowment* attainable in theory by every man, woman, and child” (p.13, emphasis added). In fact, as Martineau points out, if people aren’t happy, then something was wrong “with their beliefs, with their form of government, with their living conditions, with their customs” (p. 13). The second thing I’d like you to see is in the italicized portion of the preceding quote. We again see the importance of the ideas and assumptions about human nature for studying society.

Another element of philosophical preparation involves understanding that human beings *create* social institutions and their beliefs and practices. Martineau lived at the beginning of the age of modernity, the period of time when the world began to shrink. Communication and transportation technology had shown the civilized nations that there are many truths and many ways of organizing human behavior. Martineau observes that this information should give the researcher the ability to step out of her or his own culture. Martineau sees two important results from this open point of view. The prepared observer of human morals will “escape the affliction of seeing sin wherever he sees difference” and will be freed from emotional responses that can cloud observation (Martineau, 1838/2003, p. 34). Rather than experiencing shock and alarm, the observer is able to perceive and understand the morals and manners of a people as they exist for that society.

Moral preparation.

In addition to philosophic preparation, the observer of the human condition must make moral readiness. In this, Martineau pulls no punches, for she tells us that to make accurate observations the observer “should be himself perfect.” Here we can see the depth of relationship between the observer and the observed. Martineau truly believes that the inner condition of the researcher is the prime concern regarding preparation for making social observations. Martineau also recognizes that no one is perfect, and if we should wait for perfection, no observations would be made at all. Thus, we are to take stock and understand the issues that would most easily beset our observations and make us prejudiced. Knowing what can pervert our vision, we can “carry with us restoratives of temper and spirits which may be of essential service to us in our task” (Martineau, 1838/2003, p. 52). In other words, we should know enough about the human spirit, and our own psychological and emotional development in particular, to be able to plan ahead to meet the issues that may cause us to be prejudiced.

Moreover, and more practically, the researcher must have unreserved sympathy. Martineau says that a geologist can have a heart of stone and a statistician can be as abstract as a column of numbers and still be successful. But the observer of society will be subject to deception at every turn if she cannot find her way into the hearts and minds of people. The observer of

humanity must herself be most human. She must be able to feel her way through the labyrinth of social institutions and interactions and find what is truly meaningful to the subjective actor. She must be able to empathetically understand what people do and why they do it, what people believe and why they believe it, and what people feel and why they feel it.

Notice first that Martineau's emphasis echoes Weber's concern with subjectivity and *verstehen*, except Martineau predated Weber by about 80 years. I also want to point out that this priority of the person that Martineau gives us is a central feature in modern feminist epistemology. According to Patricia Hill Collins (2000), a black feminist epistemology entails the ethics of caring, which implies "that personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy are central to the knowledge validation process" (p. 263). Dorothy E. Smith (1987) tells us, "a sociology for women preserves the presence of subjects as knowers and as actors. It does not transform subjects into the objects of study" (p. 105).

Safeguarding Observations

Martineau adds safeguards to the philosophic and moralistic preparation of the investigator. She advises that no preemptory decision be made, not only in public when she returns to her home culture but also in the private, daily journal she keeps. The researcher, in other words, must *deny her- or himself the luxury of coming to any conclusions until massive amounts of data are gathered*. This advice stands in stark contrast to the American system of academia that honors the number of publications over the profoundness and depth of thought and insight. Further, the observer must guard against making generalizations too quickly. The connections we see between different situations and beliefs may in fact be only on the surface. The data we gather must, then, be complex and nuanced (Martineau again predating Weber). Only by knowingly guarding ourselves against premature generalization can we hope to do justice to the variety of subjective worlds that we observe. Obviously, Martineau isn't telling us not to make generalizations. Rather, she is telling us to make them slowly and only after compiling enough detail to respect the social worlds of others. Of course, one way to check our observations of others is to actually ask them, a practice Martineau recommends.

The final safeguard that the traveler must keep is hope. The path that Martineau advises is long and arduous. The researcher must make philosophical and moral preparations. Her heart and mind must be ready to observe human behavior. The observations must be made in great detail and breadth. She must keep a journal of her observations and considerations, being careful to not generalize or draw conclusions too quickly. This kind of research takes time, patience, and part of our soul. With such costs, it's easy to become discouraged, particularly when we have to be so careful and take so much time. But Martineau (1838/2003) tells us to keep hope:

Every observer and recorder is fulfilling a function; and no one observer or recorder ought to feel discouragement, as long as he desires to be useful rather than shining; to be the servant rather than the lord of science; and a friend to the home-stayers rather than their dictator. (pp. 20–21)

Concepts and Theory: Gender and Democracy

Martineau investigated many institutions in her quest to understand the progress of democracy in America. We'll consider three of them; each is important for different reasons. First, gender and family are of specific concern because home is the place of primary socialization, where morals and manners are thus bestowed and can best be observed. In addition, the elite of any society will be happy (happiness is a key point in modernity), but the true test of democracy is the happiness of those that society excludes—in this case, women. Second, religion is one of the most powerful institutions deciding the success or failure of democracy. According to Martineau, modernity and democracy can only prosper under one type of religion: moderate religion that has few rituals and is concerned primarily with education and self-actualization. Third, the single most important institution in a modern democracy is education. Every level of education must be freely available, and a university education must be based upon critical thinking.

Gender and Family

The home is important for several reasons in Martineau's scheme. It is the primary part of what she calls the domestic state. As you can see in [Table 7.1](#), the domestic sphere of society includes economic and distributive structures (manufacturing, markets, roadways, and so forth), commerce in general (Martineau includes dealings between individuals or groups in society, and interchanges of ideas and opinions, or sentiments), the general level of health, as well as marriage. Among all these domestic institutions, family (marriage in particular) stands out. It's the place where the primary socialization of children takes place, and a place where the morals and manners of a people can best be observed. Further, the treatment of women in marriage is one of the most important keys for understanding how a society measures up to the universal law of happiness. Keep in mind that happiness is the basic human right and that marriage is the fundamental social institution. Thus, unhappy marriages are a strong indicator of the moral state of an entire society. Martineau also says that the treatment of blacks is a measuring rod for happiness. It's the position of the oppressed that is particularly important for

critiquing a society's overall standing with regard to happiness. The elite in any society are going to be happy; but whether or not human happiness is generally valued can only be gauged by how universal it is in a collective, and that is determined by the experience of society's minority. The reason for this goes back to the issue of natural rights. If human beings have natural rights, then the groups it excludes from those rights and the degree of that exclusion judge the success of government.

The Cultural Logic of Gender

Cultural logic is an idea that expresses the fact that culture has implications, often unanticipated or unintended. The idea is particularly insightful regarding gender. One example of cultural logic is eating disorders. Cultures that put a high premium on women being thin tend to have higher incidences of eating disorders among women. It's no surprise, then (there's a logic to it), that the United States has the highest incidence of eating disorders in the world. The only nation that is even close is Japan. It's also no surprise that eating disorders were almost unknown in Japan prior to the 1960s, when Western culture began to make inroads; actual cases in Japan doubled between 1976 and 1981, and quadrupled between 1988 and 1992. Martineau uses the idea of cultural logic to talk about gender relations, and in this she was (again) ahead of her time.

Martineau argues that the state of marriage in particular provides insight into the moral fabric and practices of a people. She asserts there is a link between marriage and the practice of gender. While the institution of marriage and the structure of gender are two distinct things, they also have reciprocal effects on one another. Thus, the unhappiness in marriage that is prompted by gender inequality is given strength by our cultural concepts of gender. Specifically, Martineau finds clear links between the condition of marriage and the beliefs that men should have courage and women should be chaste. The connection between gender on the one hand (masculinity = courage; femininity = chastity) and marital unhappiness on the other is a cultural link.

What's wrong with men being identified with bravery? Martineau argues that as long as the chief defining feature of masculinity is courage, then men's primary obligation is to society. Bravery is a social virtue. It is played out on

the stage of society for the benefit of society: Men are brave so that society can exist. They demonstrate their courage most clearly on the battlefield and are given medals, parades, and sacred burials in return. Being brave in war is the pinnacle toward which all other forms of masculine bravery is oriented, whether it is bravery in the face of pain in sports or emotional strength in the face of sad stories. Little boys must be brave and not give in to pain or emotion because someday they may be called to battle.

The cultural logic of this gets played out in gender in a couple of ways. First, and probably most insidiously, the principal male quality is expressed in obligation to society, not to the home or to individual people—most specifically, to wives. There is, then, a clear separation between public and private spheres in this culture of courage and chastity. The logic of the culture dictates that men are responsible for public society and social power, and women are responsible for the private fields of home and sexual purity.

The other significant result of this cultural logic is that women are subject to the whims of men. Martineau tells us that honor associated with courage is shallow because it comes to be “viewed as regarding only equals,” which in this case would only be other men. This kind of honor is not a personal virtue. It is associated with courage, which we have seen is a public sentiment, and is therefore a public issue. A public authenticity is at stake in this kind of honor, not personal authenticity. Moreover, its honorability is dependent upon its base. What I mean is that this kind of honor is defined by courage. Therefore,

The requisitions of honour come to be viewed as regarding only equals, or those who are hedged about with honour, and they are neglected with regard to the helpless. Men of honour use treachery with women; with those to whom they promise marriage, and with those to whom, in marrying, they promised fidelity, love, and care; and yet their honour is, in the eyes of society, unstained.
(Martineau, 1838/2003, pp. 173–174)

Let me reemphasize that Martineau does not see these as *intrinsic* features of gender. Men are not naturally aggressive, and women are not naturally moral.

The sentiments and values associated with gender are found in specific kinds of societies—structure and culture go together in Martineau’s scheme.

Workforce Participation

Martineau also argues that the level and kind of workforce participation women have influences the moral codes of a society. In this, of course, she foreshadows a great deal of feminist theory, as well as the work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman. There is a relationship between the way we think of marriage and the workforce participation of women. Martineau gives us two ways that domestic morals are influenced. First, to the degree that women are left out of the workforce, they will be seen as “helpless.” This helplessness, Martineau tells us, provides the basis for men’s aggressive domination of women, oftentimes to the point of physical violence. There is a relationship between personal power or efficacy and money. This relationship makes perfect sense, of course, in a society where one’s survival is linked to work and making money. In societies where a living wage is guaranteed to all, or women are given equal opportunity, this association would be very weak. Women would not be dependent upon men for their survival, and the power between the genders would be equal. In societies “where the objects of life are as various and as freely open to women as to men,” there will be found “the greatest amount of domestic purity and peace” (Martineau, 1838/2003, p. 182).

The second result of unequal workforce participation is that the institution of marriage is “debased.” The contemporary ideal of marriage in our culture is that it is a union freely entered into by two people in love. In a society where marriage is the chief way that women get ahead or survive, it can never be the case that marriage is secure “against the influence of some of these motives even in the simplest and purest cases of attachment” (Martineau, 1838/2003, p. 183). Martineau actually frames this issue more pointedly. She talks about it in terms of marriage being the principal or only aim of women in society. When the main goal of women is to marry and have children, then the values associated with that goal are inculcated in the very young. Young girls are socialized to value being attractive to men (yet chaste), dating, marriage, and having children. The toys, games, and images provided for girls generally have these themes. Thus, when grown, women sense that they are unfulfilled

and incomplete unless they are married and have children. One's femininity becomes synonymous with marriage and childbearing. In such a society, according to Martineau, "the taint is in the mind before the [marital] attachment begins, before the objects meet; and the evil effects upon the marriage state are incalculable" (p. 183).

Martineau (1838/2003) makes an interesting observation about the condition of women and the legitimacy of the state. She says that every civilized nation claims legitimacy by its treatment of women. In modern society, the rights of women were probably an issue before racial inequality. No matter what race or society or culture in which you find yourself, there are men and women and gender relations. As I've mentioned, one of the earmarks of modernity is the idea of the natural equality of all men. Before modern democracy, people were judged to be different by birth. For example, in a monarchy, the royal family is believed to be naturally superior. At the core of the modern state is the belief that all men are *created* equal. Of course, this idea was initially understood in a limited manner, and women were thus seen as naturally different from men. Once planted, however, this idea took root and grew to eventually include women.

Because of the link between state legitimacy and equality, nation-states claiming to be modern point to their treatment of women as proof of modernity. However, as Martineau notes, different proofs may be used and in the end only serve to legitimate the exclusion of women. One society of people may claim that women are honored in their country because women are "cherished domestic companions" and afforded high respect. This respect might be shown by allowing women to go first through a door, by standing when they enter or leave a room, or by covering them from head to toe in a veil of sacredness. Another society will claim honor because religion safeguards women by not requiring them to deal with the harsh aspects of life; another will declare the honor of women because all of society knows that behind every great man is a great woman. The list of legitimations goes on, but Martineau claims that only in societies where women are guaranteed equal workforce participation is there true honoring of women and true equality.

Concepts and Theory: Religion, Education, and Democracy

Religion is another important social structure for measuring society's morals and manners. As we've seen, religion is consistently theorized as an important social institution. For example, Durkheim argued that religion forms the foundation of society. Out of it sprang the primary categories of thought and the moral basis of society. Durkheim noted that the two functions of religion eventually split, with science taking over speculation about the origins and workings of the universe and religion the issues of faith. Religion, in Durkheim's way of thinking, will evolve to a very general form that embraces all humankind under universal values.

Religious Forms

Martineau isn't concerned with the origins of religion, as Durkheim is, but she does seem to say that religion evolves toward more inclusive, less judgmental forms. The *forms* of religion are of chief interest for Martineau. She gives us three types of religion: licentious, ascetic, and moderate. *Licentious religions* are those where the gods are seen as part of nature and having human passions, as in the early Greek pantheons. During the early stages of this type of religion, licentious or immoral conduct is encouraged. This form changes when people are seen as less than the gods, and the power for doing good or harm is attributed to the gods. When this happens, the idea of propitiation (an act or gift given to appease the wrath of a god) enters and ritual worship begins. Even in its advanced form, this kind of religion is still preoccupied with licentious behavior, albeit in a negative way: The rituals performed for an almighty god counter the ill done by sin.

Ascetic religions are highly ritualized as well. Emphasis here is on rituals that provide proofs of holiness. Martineau argues that spiritual vices rather than immoral acts of the flesh are the center of this type of religion. The spiritual vices of "pride, vanity, and hypocrisy,—are as fatal to high morals under this state of religious sentiment as sensual indulgence under the other" (Martineau, 1838/2003, p. 79). Martineau sees religious ritual as misplaced

emphasis. In this way of thinking, rituals are an empty form that takes our attention away from “self-perfection, sought through the free but disciplined exercise of their whole nature” (p. 80). *Moderate religions* are the least ritualized of the three, and these focus on self-actualization through broad education that involves the entire being.

Martineau doesn't argue that the different forms are replaced as religion evolves. On the contrary, each of these forms existed in her day and is still with us today. For example, traditional Christianity is based on propitiation and the sins of the flesh. The older forms of Christianity, like Catholicism, still emphasize ritual as the vehicle through which come propitiation and forgiveness. The big question for the social researcher is which form dominates. The importance of the different religious forms is that religion plays a key role in forming the morals of any society. If licentious religious forms dominate, then the political and domestic morals will be very low or contain mostly ritual. Where asceticism governs, the natural behaviors and emotions of humanity are judged to be sin. Martineau (1838/2003) prefigures symbolic interaction and labeling theory by arguing that once a behavior or emotion is called licentiousness, “it soon becomes licentiousness in fact, according to the general rule that a bad name changes that to which it is affixed into a bad quality” (p. 81). Moderate religion encourages a culture of freedom and acceptance. It's a “temper” rather than a pursuit, a settled state of mind focused on inner peace and strength rather than behaviors.

Religious Forms and Democracy

Martineau's understanding of religion is evolutionary and intrinsically linked to modernity and democracy. She doesn't explain how religion changed, but she provides a typology of religion whereby observers can ascertain democratic progress by the type of religion most prominent. The first historical type is ascetic religions, which use abstinence for proof of holiness; a society wherein this type of religion dominates will be characterized by an ever-expanding inventory of sin and an emphasis on outward restraint rather than inward ethics. The second type, licentious religions, are so called because in their beginning phases, they lack moral constraints—gods and humans alike participate in lewd behavior. In the latter phases, this kind of religion still focuses on immoral behaviors, but on their exclusion: More and

more actions are defined as sin and are easily atoned for through ritual. In society, licentious religions produce a condition with little concern for humanistic morals and strong emphasis on ritualized behaviors. The third, modern, type is that of moderate religions, which emphasize the overall well-being of humanity through self-actualization and education. A society that has a high level of this type of religion will have a culture that stresses freedom and true equality and broad-mindedness.

Conditions of Religion

The things of religion that Martineau advises us to look at include the places of worship, the condition of the clergy, generally held superstitions, holy days, and suicide. In talking about the places of worship, Martineau is giving us a *sociology of space*. Sociology of space looks at how the design and placement of buildings influences human sentiments and behaviors. Martineau tells us to look at where the religious buildings are located, how they are built, their number, their diversity, and whether or not the physical structure is conducive to ritual or spiritual service.

Martineau's sociology of space takes in much more than architecture. The first thing she recommends in studying domestic institutions is to look at a geological map. Martineau recognizes that how a society is situated geographically, that is, its physical environment, is important for how social structures develop. For example, nations whose territory is isolated but filled with natural resources will have a different set of structural arrangements than a society that has boundaries on all sides and is dependent upon other nations for raw materials. The natural environment also strongly influences a society's division of labor and the psychological makeup of the workers. Farming needs large expanses of fertile soil, and mining requires deposits of valued ore—farmers and miners are different kinds of people because of the different work they perform. Areas that are conducive to city dwelling and trade will contain artisans and craftspeople, who are both different from miners and farmers. Martineau tells us that the psychological dispositions of a society are significantly dependent upon these jobs and political realities, all of which are influenced by the environment.

In addition to architecture and building placement, the clergy are important

for the study of religion because they are the first learned people in a society. Education begins with them, so it is important to ask, what kind of knowledge do they espouse and how are they esteemed in society? Are they respected because of their perceived holiness or their great learning? Suicide, of course, gives us some idea of religious sentiment as well: Why do people commit suicide? Is it from shame, from devotion, or to shrink from suffering? What kind of religious sanctions or motivations are there regarding suicide?

Martineau places her thinking about religion under a research agenda she calls the “idea of liberty.” The way a society is structured around the idea of liberty is extremely important to Martineau. It is clearly related to the idea of happiness. The way in which the structures of a society are related to happiness is gauged by the level and kind of oppression. As we’ve seen, her key cases are those of race and gender. The opposite of oppression is liberty. Thus, liberty can be seen as the positive counterpart to oppression in measuring the structured potential of happiness in any society. Martineau mentions several factors that provide measures of liberty: the level of class divisions in society (the greater the bifurcation, the more likely the use of ideology and suppression); the kind of police force (national and military versus local and custodial); the level of urbanization and the influence city culture has on the nation (urbanized culture will tend to be more diverse and accepting of difference); the level of democratic governance; the level of direct or indirect governmental control of the press; and the degree of persecution of opinion. However, Martineau argues that in many ways the most important indicator of the idea of liberty is the condition of the education system in society.

Education and Freedom

The extent of popular education is a fact of the deepest significance. Under despotisms there will be the smallest amount of it; and in proportion to the national idea of the dignity and importance of man,—idea of liberty in short,—will be its extent, both in regard to the number it comprehends, and to the enlargement of their studies. (Martineau, 1838/2003, pp. 202–203)

As a modernist thinker, Martineau believes in the progress of humanity. According to Martineau, there are two great powers—force and knowledge—and the story of humanity is the movement away from one and toward the other. Social relations began through physical force and domination and the idea that “might makes right.” In such societies, “the past is everything.” The kind of knowledge that is of most value, then, is traditional knowledge. The tastes, ideas, sentiments, and ambitions in such a society are those that come from antiquity. This kind of knowledge is nonreflexive and maintains the status quo; it “falls back upon precedent, and reposes there” (Martineau, 1838/2003, p. 45).

Martineau (1838/2003) argues that society moves away from force and toward knowledge as the basis for moral power in response to increases in commerce, professionalization, communication, and urbanization (p. 46). Under these conditions, knowledge cannot stay fixed in the past. It is opened up to new horizons through increases in communication and commerce with other societies. Urbanization and commerce tend to expand the limits of knowledge as well as push for constant change. City living also brings people more in contact with diversity, which in turn opens up the boundaries of knowledge. Professionalization creates expert knowledge systems and, as more and more jobs and trades become professions, people in general begin to value expert knowledge over traditional information.

Concerning the education system itself, Martineau gives us both interesting (like the use of uniforms, which she says is “always suspicious”) and obvious measures (such as the distribution of social types—gender, race, religion, class—and the general level of educational attainment). However, two of the most important indicators of education and its connection to the idea of freedom are its financial base and the position of the university. The influence of education’s financial base should be apparent, but it bears mentioning. The first issue is *the extent of free education*. The level to which a society supports public education is an unmistakable measure of the support of the ideas of freedom and democracy. In civilized countries, education is the way to socially advance; it’s the legitimate way to get ahead. A high level of support for free, public education indicates a high level of support for equal opportunity. The level of supported equality is linked to the kinds of jobs or careers one can get with a given level of education. In other words, all

we have to do to understand the level of equality that society wants to support is look at the kinds of job opportunities free and public education provides. For example, if a society supports public education only through high school, it indicates that the level of equality that the state is interested in providing is equal to the jobs that require a high school education.

The second indicator of the place of education in society is *the status of the university*. Martineau (1838/2003) claims that “in countries where there is any popular Idea of Liberty, the universities are considered its stronghold” (p. 203). The reason for this link between liberty and universities might surprise you. Weber tells us that in societies where bureaucracy is the principal form of social organization, education will serve to credential a workforce. Martineau’s function for the university is different from Weber’s. Of it she says, “It would be an interesting inquiry how many revolutions warlike and bloodless, have issued from seats of learning” (p. 203). According to Martineau, the function of the university in its relationship to liberty is to inspire critical thinking. A university education should make you question authority and society. Freedom must be won anew by every generation. Almost by definition, democracy is alive and expansive. A university that doesn’t challenge its students with new ideas and doesn’t provide an atmosphere wherein new principles can be founded, is “sure to retain the antique notions in accordance with which they were instituted, and to fall into the rear of society in morals and manners” (p. 203).

Not only are the purpose, content, and environment of the university important, but so are its students, in particular their motivation for study. To the degree that students are motivated to obtain a university education for a job, education for freedom is dead in a society. Martineau (1838/2003) makes a comparison between students in Germany and those in America (recall that she is British and thus has no vested interest). German students are noted as having a thirst for knowledge: The student may “remain within the walls of his college till time silvers his hairs.” The young American student, on the other hand, “satisfied at the end of three years that he knows as much as his neighbours . . . plunges into what alone he considers the business of life” (p. 205). These words were of course written almost 170 years ago. However, Martineau had great hope for the American system of education: “a literature will grow up within her, and study will assume its place among the chief

objects of life” (p. 206). I will let the reader judge the fulfillment of her hope.

Summary

- Martineau's perspective is based on positivism and the Enlightenment. She believes that all humans have an inalienable right to happiness. This notion is the touchstone for all empirical and theoretical work. Because happiness is a natural right for humans, governments must be measured in terms of their facilitation or denial of this right. In particular, Martineau uses the way society treats gender and race as key indicators of happiness. Empirically, societies are measured by comparing their stated morals and practiced manners.
- Martineau feels that every citizen should be part of the enlightened observation of society. Society is generally moving forward, but its true progress toward providing for the natural rights of human beings must be measured, and societies must be held accountable to these measures. However, because the human mind is the principal tool of observation, quite a bit of preparation must take place: Observers must not judge the behavior of others simply because it is different from their own; the researcher must also be able to empathize with others.
- Martineau argues that there is a link between the culture and practice of marriage, and gender. Courage as a particularly masculine trait will obligate men to society, rather than to family or relationships; thus, it follows that men will give honor to heroic people (men), rather than to women and children. The feminine culture of chastity also has practical effects. Equating chastity with femininity makes women responsible for intimate relations. Together, these cultural equations help to create separate spheres of influence and concerns for men and women.
- Marriage and gender are also negatively affected as women are denied workforce participation. Not only are women seen as helpless and men enabled to be vicious, but marriage is always to some degree motivated by economic concerns rather than more enlightened incentives, when women are given limited workforce opportunities. Children are socialized into this gendered culture and economy. Thus, when grown, people feel that their gender is essentially tied to expressions of courage and work, chastity and relationships.
- In order for societies to progress toward providing happiness for their citizenry, education must be freely provided. The level of equal

opportunity in a society is measured by the level of free education. Education must also be sought for its own sake, and not simply economic gain. In addition, the universities in a society must provide a critical, reflexive education. The kind of religion most prevalent in a society will also influence how far a society goes in providing for and safeguarding happiness. Overly ritualized religions, or religions that focus on holiness or redemption, will stand in the way of the self-actualization of the people. Moderate religions provide a mind-set that is focused on inner peace, strength, and authenticity. Societies will tend to move toward greater levels of free and open education and moderate religious forms due to the influences of commerce, professionalization, communication, and urbanization. However, the true level is always determined through empirical research.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman—The Evolution of Gender

Charlotte Stetson Perkins Gilman was born Charlotte Perkins on July 3, 1860, in Hartford, Connecticut. Her father was related to the Beecher family, one of the most important American families of the nineteenth century. Gilman's great-uncle was Henry Ward Beecher, a powerful abolitionist and clergyman, and her great-aunt was Harriet Beecher Stowe, who wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which focused the nation's attention on slavery. Gilman's parents divorced early, leaving Charlotte and her mother to live as poor relations to the Beecher family, moving from house to house. Gilman grew up poor and was poorly schooled.

Gilman's adult life was marked by tumultuous personal relationships. Gilman's first marriage in 1884, to Charles Stetson, ended in divorce, but it also provided the impetus for her novella, *The Yellow Wallpaper*. The autobiographical book tells the story of a depressed new mother who is told by both her doctor and husband to abandon her intellectual life and avoid any writing or stimulating conversation. The woman sinks deeper into depression and madness as she is left alone in the yellow-wallpapered nursery. Gilman's feeling of hopelessness against the tyranny of male-dominated institutions is heard in the repeated refrain of "but what is one to do?" Between her first and second marriages, a period of about 12 years, Gilman had a number of passionate affairs with women. However, her second marriage—to George Gilman, a cousin—proved to be at least a somewhat successful and important relationship for Charlotte: Some of her best work was done during the courtship and marriage.

In her lifetime, Gilman wrote over 2,000 works, including short stories, poems, novels, political pieces, and major sociological writings. She also founded *The Forerunner*, a monthly journal on women's rights and related issues. Among her best-known works are *Concerning Children*, *The Home*, *The Man-Made World*, and *Herland* (a feminist utopian novel). However, Gilman's most important theoretical work is *Women and Economy*. In Gilman's lifetime, the book went through nine editions and was translated

into seven different languages.

Gilman was also politically active. She often spoke at political rallies and was a firm supporter of the Women's Club Movement, which was an important part of the progress toward women's rights in the United States. It initially began as a place for women to share culture and friendship. Before the development of these clubs, most women's associations were either auxiliaries of men's groups or allied with a church. In contrast, many of the clubs of the Women's Club Movement became politically involved, but others were simply public and educational service organizations. One such club became the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). On August 17, 1935, sick with cancer, Charlotte Gilman died by her own hand in Pasadena, California.

Theorist's Digest

Central Sociological Questions

Gilman was specifically concerned with gender in a way that Martineau was not. Gilman was also an evolutionist, much like Herbert Spencer. But where Spencer was concerned with the evolution of society, Gilman was focused on the evolution of gender inequality. Gilman is also different from Spencer in another important way: She was interested in how the evolution of gender inequality has affected and in turn is structured by the female body.

Simply Stated

In order for humans to evolve a productive economy and complex social relations, patriarchy and monogamy were naturally selected. As a result, women's bodies changed and developed exaggerated secondary sex characteristics in order to attract a mate. However, human beings have now dominated the natural environment utterly and have created complex social relations extending far past kinship. Thus, these early adaptive changes of patriarchy, monogamy, and exaggerated sexual dimorphism are now dysfunctional for human society.

Key Ideas

Gynaecocentric theory, self- and race preservation, sexuo-economic relations, morbid excess in sex distinctions.

Concepts and Theory: Critical Evolution Theory

We've seen that Harriet Martineau's perspective is somewhat informed by the idea of evolution. She sees society moving from organization by physical force to order through the moral force of education. Gilman, on the other hand, bases her entire perspective on a fully developed theory of evolution that in many ways is like that of Herbert Spencer ([Chapter 2](#)). Gilman generally understands the history of human society as moving from simple to complex systems, with various elements being chosen through the mechanism of survival of the fittest. Gilman doesn't simply use the evolutionary perspective to explain societies up to this point. As we will see, she uses evolution to explain what is going on currently in society and where we are headed.

Functional Evolution

Gilman begins with functionalism, but she does a couple of interesting things. First, she takes seriously the idea of environment. With Spencer and Durkheim, the environment is assumed, but it doesn't become a major player in the theories. Gilman makes the environment a major factor in social evolution. However, she does it with a twist. Anticipating the work of people like Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966), whom I've mentioned a couple of times in this book, Gilman argues that there came a point in our species' history where the sociocultural environment took precedence over the natural environment. The second thing she does with functionalism is imply that there are unintended dysfunctions. This insight didn't enter into mainstream sociology until the work of Robert K. Merton (1949). The third unique contribution is that Gilman adds a critical Marxian bent to functional theory.

Like Spencer, Gilman argues that humans began as brute animals pursuing individual gain. Survival of the fittest at that point was based on individual strength and competition. Men would hunt for food and fight one another for sexual rights to women. It was a day-by-day existence with no surplus or communal cooperation. Wealth was, of course, unknown, as it requires surplus and social organization. Competition among men was individual and

often resulted in death. Females, as is the case with many other species, would choose the best fit of the males for mating. There was no family unit beyond the provision of basic necessities for the young, mostly provided by women. Life was short and brutal.

As competition between species within a natural environment continued, human ancestors gradually developed a social organization beyond their natural base. Very much like an organism, society began to form out of small cells of social organization that joined with other small cells. Gilman (1899/1975) says that “society is the fourth power of the cell” (p. 101). By that she means something similar to Spencer’s notion of compounding: Once societies started to grow and structurally differentiate, the process continued in a multiplicative manner. The reason for this is simple: Complex societies, because of the level of social cooperation and division of labor, have a greater chance of survival than do individuals or simple societies. As societies became more complex, and thus more social, structures and individuals had to rely on each other for survival. Just like the way different organs in your body must depend upon other organs and processes, so must every social unit (individuals and structures) depend upon the others.

An interesting thing happened for humans at this point. All animals are influenced by their environment. If the environment turns cold, then the organism will either develop a way of regulating body temperature (polar bears are well-suited for the Arctic), move to a different environment, or die out. The environment equally affected humans at one time. But after we organized socially, our organization and culture developed, allowing us to live in a controlled manner with regard to the environment: Humans can now exist in almost any environment, on or off the planet. We thus distanced ourselves from the natural environment, but at the same time we created a new environment in which to live. Gilman argues that *human beings have become more influenced by the social environment of culture, structure, and relations than by the natural setting*—we have a new evolutionary environment.

This evolutionary approach with its organismic analogy has intuitive appeal. It certainly makes sense that differentiated structures and people with a high division of labor would be functionally dependent. Spencer named this as one

of the main reasons that societies tend to integrate. However, Gilman has something specific that she wants us to see. To make it clear, let me state the principles of social evolution as a maxim: To say “society” is to say cooperation and dependency. The bottom line of this postulate is that, while at the beginning of our evolutionary path it was functional for individuals to struggle and compete for their own gain, it is no longer functional for them to do so now. As Gilman (1899/1975) says, “It is no longer of advantage to the individual to struggle for his own gain at the expense of others: his gain now requires the co-ordinate efforts of these others; yet he continues so to struggle” (p. 104). Gilman’s point is in that last bit of the quote: We continue to struggle for individual gain even though it is no longer functionally advantageous. From an evolutionary standpoint, Gilman argues, there is something wrong. It is here that Gilman’s critical viewpoint is most noticeable.

Adding Marx

Gilman’s critical perspective has clear Marxian overtones. Like Marx, she argues that the economy is the most important social institution. All species are defined by their relationship to the natural environment. Stated in functionalist terms, structures in an organism are formed as the organism finds specific ways to survive (structure follows function), and the same is true in society. The economy is the structure that is formed in response to our particular way of surviving, and it is thus our most defining feature. We are therefore most human in our economic relations. Marx argued that we are alienated from our nature as we are removed from direct participation in the economy, as with capitalism. Gilman also argues that alienation occurs, but the source of that alienation is different. Where Marx saw class, Gilman sees gender. Gilman, in fact, is quite in favor of capitalism—in no other system has our ability to survive been so clearly manifest. Even so, there are alienating influences that originate in our gendered relationship to the economy, most specifically the limitation of women’s workforce participation.

Gilman’s perspective is thus similar to but different from Martineau’s. Obviously, they are both concerned with gender, and we will see that more clearly as we go through Gilman’s theoretical ideas. And they both have a

sense of forward progress, from brute force to more peaceful, complex forms of society. Yet Gilman's evolutionary theory is far more developed than are Martineau's ideas, and that's true across the board. Gilman gives us a fully developed theory, whereas Martineau gives us more of a general perspective charged with pregnant ideas. Another way in which they are different is in their scope. In looking at society at one point in time, Martineau gives us a much fuller vision, but when it comes to long-term social factors, it's Gilman who excels. Martineau's point of view is more in keeping with the Enlightenment. She sees herself as a cultured citizen who believes in the philosophical progress of humanity. Happiness is the natural law, and education is our path to find it. Gilman, on the other hand, is a functional evolutionist who sees progress meted out over long periods of time by natural selection. Change for Gilman comes through massive movements of social structure over centuries.

Their most pronounced similarity is the idea of workforce participation for women. This is central to both women and is a key ingredient in contemporary feminist theory. Gilman, however, is much more detailed in her explication of this factor. Martineau argues that excluding women from the workforce reduces their social, political, and personal power, a concept that became a major tenet of contemporary gender theory. Martineau also gives us a subtler cultural take. She says that where livelihood is an issue in marriage (where women must marry to survive), marriage can never be free from the taint of the economy. Thus, marriage is debased from the ideal of two people in love to an economic relationship. Gilman focuses on this latter idea and details it in all its ramifications.

Gynaecocentric Theory

As we will see in the following pages, Gilman understands the exclusion of women from the economy in evolutionary terms. This perspective yields amazing results. We will see in the [next section](#) about *self- and race preservation* that removing women from economic participation threw off the balance between the individual and society. This disequilibrium from a functionalist's view means that the evolutionary path of humanity is not functional. Gilman explores the main point of this dysfunction in her use of gynaecocentric theory. *Gynaecocentric theory* posits that the female is the

basic social model rather than the male (which had been assumed for most of our scientific and philosophic history). Gilman argues that men and women have natural, intrinsic energies that are different from one another. Based on this postulate of different energies, Gilman contends that excluding women from the workforce actually ended up producing evolutionary advantages, which we'll cover in a moment. Thus, in the long run, it turned out to be functional to remove women from the workforce. However, it is certainly not the case that Gilman thinks everything is right and wonderful for women. In the section on *sexuo-economic effects*, we'll see that denying women access to the natural economic environment has had horrible consequences.

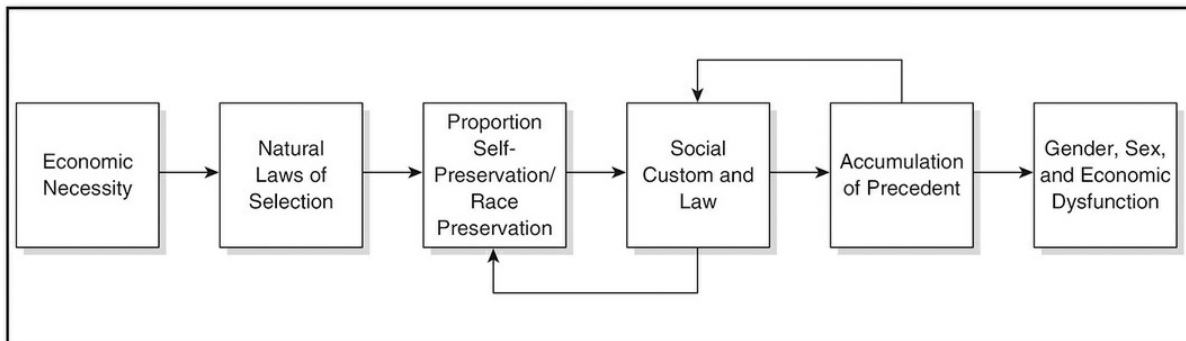


Gynaecocentric theory originated with Lester F. Ward and is used by Gilman to explain gender inequality. Gynaecocentric theory argues that women, not men, are the general species type for humans: It is through women that the race is born and the first social connections created. In gynaecocentric theory, men and women have essential sex-specific energies.

Concepts and Theory: Dynamics of Social Evolution

I've diagrammed Gilman's basic model of social evolution in [Figure 7.1](#). As you can see, she, like Marx, argues that the basic driving force in humanity is economic production: Creative production is the way that we as a species survive. In all species, economic needs push the natural laws of selection that result in a functional balance between self-preservation and race preservation. Natural selection in self-preservation develops those characteristics in the individual that are needed to succeed in the struggle for self-survival. In the evolutionary model, individuals within a species fight for food, sex, and so on. Natural selection equips the individual for that fight. Race preservation, on the other hand, develops those characteristics that enable the species as a whole to succeed in the struggle for existence. Gilman is using the term *race* in the same way I'm using *species*; she isn't using it to make racial distinctions among ourselves. The most important point here is that the relationship between self- and race preservation is balanced: Individuals are selfish enough to fight for their own survival and selfless enough to fight for the good of the whole species.

Figure 7.1 Gilman's Basic Model of Social Evolution



The ideas of *race preservation* and *self-preservation* are part of Gilman's evolutionary theory of gender relations. Race preservation stimulates the natural selection for skills that promote the general welfare of the collective, and self-preservation motivates the natural selection for skills that protect the individual.

Self-preservation and race-preservation skills ought to balance one another. However, because women have been removed from the natural environment by male-dominated society, the self-preservation skills are overemphasized and the evolutionary system is dysfunctional.

Gilman's point here is interesting because most evolutionists assume that these two factors are one and the same. In other words, self-preservation is structured in such a way as to function as species preservation. This assumption is what allows social philosophers like Adam Smith to take for granted that severe individualism in systems like capitalism is good. Gilman insightfully perceives that these two functions can be at odds with one another. She thus creates an empirical research question where many people don't see any problem or they make a value judgment, such as the inherent goodness of capitalistic free markets.

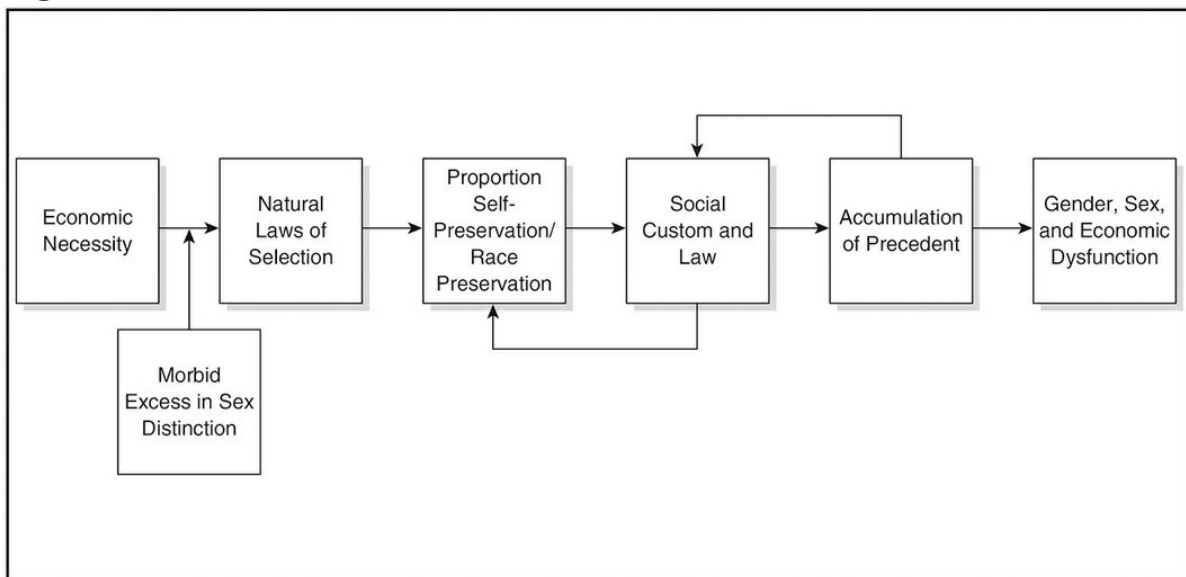
The third box of [Figure 7.1](#) is where human evolution becomes specific. Because of our overwhelming dependency on social organization for survival, we develop laws and customs that in turn support the equilibrium between self-preservation and race preservation, as noted by the feedback arrow. With the idea of "accumulation of precedent," Gilman has in mind art, religion, habit, and institutions other than the economy that tend to reinforce and legitimate our laws and customs. As you can see, there is a self-reinforcing cycle that encompasses the race/self-preservation proportion; social laws and customs; and the institutions, culture, and habits of a society. This social loop becomes humankind's environment. Of course, we still relate to and are affected by the natural world, but the social environment becomes much more important for the human evolutionary progress. This entire process works together to increase the likelihood of the survival of the human race.

That's the model of how things are supposed to work. [Figure 7.2](#) depicts how things actually work under gender inequality. As you can see, the model is basically the same. The same central dynamics are present: Economic necessity pushes the laws of selection that in turn produce the proportion of self- to race-preservation characteristics, which then create laws and customs that reinforce those characteristics and produce social behaviors, culture, and institutions that strengthen and justify the laws and customs. This time, however, the social loop doesn't result in greater species survivability, but

rather, in gender, sex, and economic dysfunctions.

We will talk about those dysfunctions, but first we need to look at how Gilman sees the overall movement of evolution. Her conclusions are extremely interesting and perhaps startling, but in the overall way in which she makes her argument, she is years ahead of the functional arguments of her time. In fact, we can safely say that the kind of argument that she presents wasn't generally found in sociology until after Robert K. Merton's work around 1949. In general, Gilman argues that dysfunctions in some subsystems can have functional consequences for the whole.

Figure 7.2 Gilman's Model of Sexuo-Economic Evolution



Morbid Excess in Sex Distinction

The dynamic difference between [Figure 7.1](#) and [Figure 7.2](#) is found in what Gilman calls “morbid excess in sex distinction.” Much like Spencer, Gilman argues that human sexuality and the kinship structure were evolutionarily selected. In the predawn history of humankind, it became advantageous for us to have two sexes that joined together in monogamy. From an evolutionary perspective, the methods of reproducing the species are endless. They run from the extremes of hermaphroditism (both sexes contained in a single organism) to multiple-partnered egg hatcheries. Because human beings need high levels of culture and social organization to survive, the two-sex model

was naturally selected along with monogamy. Thus, having two sexes that are distinct from one another is natural for us. In this model, the physical distinctions between the sexes produce attraction and competition for mates, just as in other species. Eventually, however, because of the need for social organization among humans, the brutal competition for mates was mitigated and the social bond extended past mother–child through monogamy.

Patriarchy, however, tainted this process. Gilman presents a unique and fascinating argument as to why patriarchy came about. According to Gilman (1911/2001), there are distinct, natural male and female energies. The basic masculine characteristics are “desire, combat, self-expression; all legitimate and right in proper use” (p. 41). Female energy, on the other hand, is more conservative and is characterized by maternal instincts—the love and care of little ones. In this, Gilman sees us as no different than most other species—these energies are true of many male and female creatures. Yet the natural level of these energies posed a problem for human evolution. To survive as humans, we required a higher degree of social organization than simple male and female energy could provide. The male energy in particular was at odds with this need. As long as “the male savage was still a mere hunter and fighter, expressing masculine energy . . . along its essential line, expanding, scattering” (Gilman, 1899/1975, p. 126), social organization of any complexity was impossible. Men were aggressive and individualistic and thus had to be “maternalized” for social organization to grow.

In this argument, Gilman is using and expanding on Lester F. Ward’s gynaeocentric theory: The female is the general race type, while male is a sex type. In fact, Gilman dedicated her book *The Man-Made World* (1911/2001) to “Lester F. Ward, Sociologist and Humanitarian, one of the world’s great men . . . and to whom all women are especially bound in honor and gratitude for his Gynaecocentric Theory of Life.” The word *gynaecocentric* means woman-centered. Though Herbert Spencer didn’t phrase it in quite this way, the theory is very similar to his argument concerning monogamy. Family is the basis of social organization. All species, including humans, are related to one another biologically through descent. In our case, we used those biological relations to build social connections. The basic kin relationship is found between mother and child. This is the one relationship that has always been clear: It’s obvious from

whom the child comes. In order to build social relations on that basic tie, fathers had to be included through some mechanism. Of all the possible forms of marriage, monogamy provides the clearest connection between father and child, and thus the strongest, most basic social relationship.



Morbid excess in sex distinction is a theoretical concept in Gilman's evolutionary theory of gender. Sex distinctions are those physical and visual cues that make sexes different from one another. Gilman argues that the sex distinctions in humans have been carried to a harmful extreme due to women no longer living in the natural environment of economic pursuit, but, rather, living in the artificial environment of the home that has been established by men. Women have thus been physically and sexually changed by evolution so that they can better survive under patriarchy.

What Ward and Gilman add is the idea of intrinsic male and female energy. Male energy is at odds with family and social ties. The “giant force of masculine energy” had to be modified in order to add and extend the social tie between father and child. This was accomplished through the subjugation of women. (I told you it was interesting.) When men created patriarchy and dominated women, they also made women and children dependent upon men. In natural arrangements, both men and women produce economically; but as men dominated women, they also removed them from the world of economic production. Women could no longer provide for themselves, let alone their children. Men, then, had to take on this responsibility, and as they did, they took on “the instincts and habits of the female, to his immense improvement” (Gilman, 1899/1975, p. 128). Therefore, men became more social as a result of patriarchy.

This functional need was a two-way affair. Not only did men need to take on some of the women's traits, but also the natural environment could be more thoroughly tamed by men rather than women. By taking women out of the productive sphere, and thereby forcing men to be more productive themselves, “male energy . . . brought our industries to their present development” (Gilman, 1899/1975, pp. 132–133). Both men and human survival in general thus benefited from patriarchal arrangements.

Gilman draws two conclusions from gynaecocentric theory. First, women should not resent the past domination of men. Great harm to individuals and society has come through this system, but at the same time, necessary and great good has come as well,

[I]n the extension of female function through the male; in the blending of facilities which have resulted in the possibility of our civilization; in the superior fighting power developed in the male, and its effects in race-conquest, military and commercial; in the increased productivity developed by his assumption of maternal function; and by the sex-relation becoming mainly proportioned to his power to pay for it. (Gilman, 1899/1975, pp. 136–137)

The second thing Gilman draws from this theory is that the women's movements, and all the changes that they bring, are part of the evolutionary path for humanity. While women's economic dependence upon men was functional for a time, its usefulness is over. In fact, Gilman tells us, the women's and labor movements are misnamed; they ought more accurately to be called human movements. The reason that we've become aware of the atrocities associated with male dominance at this time in our history is that the dysfunctions are now greater than the functions. The behaviors and problems of patriarchy have always existed, but the benefits outweighed the costs and it therefore remained functional. Now, because of the level of social and economic progress, it is time to cast off this archaic form.

Sexuo-Economic Effects

However, it should be clear that Gilman's purpose is not to justify the subordination of women. Gynaecocentric theory gives her a way of understanding the effects, including the women's movements, in functional, evolutionary terms. It is, I think, to her credit that she maintains theoretical integrity in the face of the obvious suffering of women, and her own personal anguish as a woman. That said, a great deal of Gilman's work is occupied with exposing and explaining the current state of women.

Gilman characterizes the overall system and its effects as sexuo-economic. In *sexuo-economic relations*, two structures overlap, one personal and the other public. The social structure is the economy, and the private sphere is our sexual relationships. The basic issue here is that women are dependent upon men economically; as a result, two structures that ought to be somewhat separate intertwine. Historically, as women became more and more dependent upon men for their sustenance, they were removed further and further from economic participation. As we've noted, the economy is the most basic of all our institutions: It defines our humanness. A species is defined by its mode of survival; survival modes, then, determine the most basic features of a species. In our case, that basic feature is the economy. The economy is where we as a species compete for evolutionary survival. It is where we as a species come in contact with the environment and where the natural laws of selection are at work. Thus, when workforce participation is denied to women, they are denied interaction with the natural environment of the species. That natural environment, with all of its laws and effects, is replaced with another one. Man (meaning males) becomes woman's economic environment, and, just as any organism responds to its environment, woman changed, modified, and adapted to her new environment (form and function).



In Gilman's evolutionary theory of gender inequality, *sexuo-economic relations* occur when sex relations and economic relations overlap fundamentally. In a society where women's workforce participation is limited, the structures of economy and family are confounded, sex distinctions between men and women are accentuated and unbalanced, sex itself becomes pathologically important to people, women become consumers par excellence, and men are alienated from their work.

Gilman talks about several effects from living in this new environment, but the most important are those that contribute to morbid excess in sex distinction. As we've seen, all animals that have two sexes also have sex distinctions. These distinctions are called secondary sex characteristics: those traits in animals that are used to attract mates. In humans, according to Gilman, those distinctions have become accentuated so much that they are

morbid or gruesome. In societies where they are denied equal workforce participation, the primary drive in women is to attract men. Rather than improving her skills in economic pursuits, she must improve her skills at attracting a man. In fact, expertise in attraction skills *constitutes* her basic economic skills (which is how prostitution can exist). Thus, the secondary sex characteristics of women become exaggerated. She devotes herself to cosmetics, clothes, primping, subtle body-language techniques, and so on. Most of these are artificial, yet there are also natural, physical effects. Because women are pulled out from interacting with the natural environment, their bodies change: They become smaller, softer, more feeble, and clumsy.

The increase in sex distinctions leads to greater emphasis on sex for both men and women. The importance given to sex far exceeds the natural function of procreation and comes to represent a threat to both self- and race preservation. The natural ordering of the sexes becomes perverted as well. In most animals, it is the male that is flamboyant and attractive; this order is reversed in humans. To orient women toward this inversion, the sexual socialization of girls begins early. In our time, young girls are taught that women should be beautiful and sexy, and they are given toys that demonstrate the accentuated sex distinctions (like Barbie), toy versions of makeup kits used to create the illusion of flamboyancy in women, and games that emphasize the role of women in dating and marriage. Another result of this kind of gender structure and socialization is that women develop an overwhelming passion for attachment to men at any cost; Gilman points to women who stay in abusive relationships as evidence. In the end, because of the excess in sex distinction brought on by the economic dependence of women, marriage becomes mercenary.

Obviously, the economic dependency of women will have economic results as well. Women are affected most profoundly as they become “non-productive consumers” (Gilman, 1899/1975, p. 116). According to Gilman, in the natural order of things, productivity and consumption go hand in hand, and production comes first. Like Marx, Gilman sees economic production as the natural expression of human energy, “not sex-energy at all but race-energy” (p. 116). It’s part of what we do as a species, and there is a natural balance to it when everybody contributes and everybody consumes. The balance shifts, however, as women are denied workforce participation. The

consumption process is severed from the production process, and the whole system is therefore subject to unnatural kinds of pressures. Noneconomic women are focused on noneconomic needs. In the duties of her roles of wife, homemaker, and mother, the woman creates a market that focuses on “devotion to individuals and their personal needs” and “sensuous decoration and personal ornament” (Gilman, 1899/1975, pp. 119–120). The economy, of course, responds to this market demand. Contemporary examples of this kind of “feminized” market might include such things as fashion items (like jewelry, chic clothing, alluring scents, sophisticated makeup, and so forth); body image products (such as exercise tapes, health clubs, day spas, dietary products, and the like); fashionable baby care products (like heirloom baby carriages, designer nursery décor, and special infant fashions by The Gap, Gymboree, Baby B’Gosh, Tommy, Nike, Old Navy, ad infinitum); and decorative products for the home (such as specialized paints, wallpaper, trendy furnishings, and so on). Gilman argues that the creative efforts of men, which should be directed to durable commodities for the common good, are subject to the creation and maintenance of a “false market.” Women are thus alienated from the commodities they purchase because they don’t participate in the production process nor are their needs naturally produced; men are alienated because they are producing goods and services driven by a false market.

As [Figure 7.2](#) shows, the morbid excess in sex distinction disables the laws of natural selection and puts self- and race preservation out of balance; we’ve just explored some of these shifts. As a result, the customs and laws of society respond, as do the social institutions and practices (accumulation of precedent). Institutions and practices that properly belong to humankind become gendered. For example, the governing of society is a “race function,” but in societies that limit women’s workforce participation, it is seen as the duty and prerogative of men. Decorating is also distinctly human; it is a function of our species, but it is perceived as the domain of women. Religion, an obvious human function, is dominated by men and has been used to justify the unequal treatment of women, as have law, government, science, and so forth.

Yet Gilman does tell us that things are changing. She sees the women’s movements as part of our evolutionary path of progress. Implied in this

conclusion is the idea that equality is a luxury. Under primitive circumstances, only the strong survive. The weak, the feeble, and the old are left behind or killed. As social relationships come into existence, cooperation is possible, and as people cooperate, a surplus develops. Yes, for the most part, the powerful control the surplus and turn it into wealth. Yet, at the same time, it is then feasible to support some who had once been cut off. These people are integrated into society, and society continues to grow. It becomes more complex and technically better able to control the environment and produce surplus. In turn, other groups are brought into the fold, and increasing numbers of disenfranchised groups are able to live and prosper. It is Gilman's position that just as technical progress is our heritage, so is ever-expanding equality. Evolution of the species not only involves economic advancement, but increasing compassion as well; ethical and technical evolutions are inexorably linked.

At the present evolutionary moment, we are only hindered by our own blindness. We can afford the luxury of complete equality, but we fail to see the problem. Gilman says that this is due to a desire for consistency. We don't notice what we are used to. Even evil can become comfortable for us, and we will miss it when it's gone. This is one of the reasons why slavery wasn't seen as evil for so many years of our history. We also have a tendency to think in individual rather than general terms. It's easier for us to attribute reasons for what we see to individuals rather than broad social factors. This, of course, in C. Wright Mills' terms, is the problem of the sociological imagination. It is difficult to achieve.

Being used to them, we do not notice them, or, forced to notice them, we attribute the pain we feel to the evil behavior of some individual, and never think of it as being the result of a condition common to us all. (Gilman, 1899/1975, p. 84)

Summary

- Gilman is a critical evolutionist. All species fight for survival and create organic structures to help them survive in their environment. In this case, the function produces the structure. For humans, the primary evolutionary structure is the economy. It is through the economy that we as a species survive.
- When women were removed from the economy through male domination, several things happened. First, women were taken out of the natural environment of economic production and given a false environment—men, and indirectly the home and family, became women's environment. Gilman is a social evolutionist and argues that, as every species will, women changed in response to change in their environment. This change in environment made the distinctions between the sexes more pronounced. Rather than being equipped to economically produce, women became equipped to pursue a husband (in fact, their survival depended upon it). Their bodies became smaller and softer from disconnection with the natural world, and women augmented these changes through artificial means (such as makeup, clothing, etc.). Human beings now have a morbid excess in sex distinction, and as a result, the natural order has been reversed. In most animals, it is the male that is marked for attraction; in humans, it is the female. In order to produce this artificial order, girls have to be socialized from birth to want to be attractive and to value having a husband over all else. Further, in societies where women's workforce participation is limited, women become unnatural consumers. The natural relationship is production followed by consumption. Women are simply consumers without production. As such, their perceived needs are radically changed and they produce a market focused on beauty, decoration, and private relationships.
- This evolutionary path has also had functional consequences. The natural energy of men is aggressive, individualistic, and dominating. The male is, then, ill-suited for social life. However, in making women and children dependent upon him, he also obligated himself to provide for them (to be socially involved and committed). Thus, through gender oppression, the natural energy of men has been modified: They now

have maternal feelings and higher social abilities. Further, large societies require highly developed systems that can control the environment and extract resources. Gilman argues that men and women together could not have achieved the needed level of economic and technological development. In Gilman's evolutionary scheme men are naturally more aggressive and objectifying. Having men solely responsible for the economic sphere meant that society produced more and achieved higher levels of technological control. Thus, pulling women out of the workforce was functional so that the economy could develop fully.

- Humans have, however, reached the point where the suppression of women is more dysfunctional than functional. The women's movements are sure signs that evolution is pushing us toward higher levels of equality.

