



New Thinking:

The Domination/Partnership Social Systems

Analysis of society through the lenses of the domination system and the partnership system reveals connections that are invisible through the lenses of the common right vs. left categories. These new categories show that how a society constructs childhood and gender relations — the relations that children first experience and observe — is integral to what people consider normal, possible, and moral in all relations, from intimate to international.

Be they secular like Nazi Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union or religious like Eastern and Western fundamentalist, regressive societies — characterized by political and economic domination, injustice and violence — advance their political agenda on the foundation of domination, injustice, and even violence in gender and parent/child relations. They recognize that the four cornerstones for either

partnership or domination systems are 1) family/childhood relations, 2) gender relations, 3) economics, and 4) language/narratives about human nature and human possibilities.

For most progressives however, parent-child and gender relations are peripheral. While progressives understand the importance of economics, they do not recognize the importance of the distribution of resources within families or how undervaluing caring work undermines progressive principles. All too often they buy into the old stories about a flawed human nature where rankings of domination are “just the way things are.”

Our job is to make progressives aware that regressive politics and economics are only the top of a domination pyramid, and that unless we leave behind traditions of domination in the gender and parent-child relations that are cornerstones of the pyramid, domination, political and economics will keep rebuilding themselves on these foundations in different forms.

The Unified Regressive Agenda vs. the Fragmented Progressive Agenda

Regimes like the Nazis or religious fundamentalists like ISIS have a unified social/political agenda that promotes “strongman” rule in both the family and the state. For them, subordinating women and anything considered “feminine”, such as caregiving or nonviolence, is naturally or divinely ordained. They promote controlling children through corporal punishment, so that children learn, before their brains are fully formed, that disobeying orders, no matter how unjust, is very painful.

By contrast, progressive have had a fragmented agenda, lacking understanding of the foundational importance of gender and childrearing. So embedded is this blindness that progressives ignore not only the historical and cross-cultural evidence, but they also even ignore the statistical evidence.

For example, the Center for Partnership Studies' pioneering statistical research report, *Women, Men, and the Global Quality of Life*, shows that the status of women is a powerful predictor of a nation's general quality of life. Subsequent *Gender Gap Reports* by the World Economic Forum show that nations like Sweden, Norway, and Finland, which have the lowest gender gaps — and invest heavily in good early childhood and parenting education — are highly economically competitive as well as equitable nations.

In sum, because progressives have lacked an integrated social/political agenda, they have not focused on building a solid foundation for a partnership system. Instead, they have left the foundation for domination systems in place, and it is on this foundation that domination economics and politics keep rebuilding themselves.

First Steps toward an Integrated progressive agenda

Making the Invisible Visible

The first step toward an integrated progressive agenda is making visible the obstacles that make it so hard to see how injustice, repression, and violence in gender and parent-child relations are connected to injustice, repression, and violence in politics and economics.

Investigating why so many people were susceptible to Hitler's messages of hate, scapegoating, and oppression, studies have shown that growing up in authoritarian families where the normative ideal was male dominance and children were harshly punished, is typical of highly prejudiced people who admire "strong leaders."

Other studies have shown that people growing up in authoritarian, male-dominated, punitive families tend to vote for "hard" punitive policies, such as funding for weapons and building prisons, while voting against "soft" or caring policies, which they associate with the feminine.

These kinds of findings indicate that families that are highly punitive and male-dominated tend to make people vulnerable to denial, which extends to other areas, such as denial of climate change and human rights violations in families and countries. This denial also leads to deflection of fear and pain into scapegoating and the election of strongman demagogues. The domination system keeps women "in their place" and distorts political choices by privileging "hard" or "masculine" policies over "soft" or "feminine" ones. Moreover, the ranking of male over female is a template children internalize for other in-group vs. out-group thinking — be it of different races, religions, or sexual orientations.

Gender and Values

Another important connection we must make visible is that a rise in the status of women is accompanied by a rise in the value of traits and activities generally

associated with women. We see this in more partnership-oriented U.S. subcultures, where fathers are today doing the “women’s work” of feeding and diapering babies. And we see it in nations such as Sweden, Norway, and Finland, where half of national legislators are women and caring for people is a priority.

These more partnership-oriented nations have: 1) more egalitarianism in both family and state; 2) more gender equity; 3) less abuse and violence.

Societies oriented to the domination side of the social scale have: 1) strongman rule in both family and state; 2) ranking of men and “masculinity” over women and “femininity”; 3) abuse and violence to maintain rankings of domination – man over man, man over woman, or man over nature.

Economic Policies

As detailed in the book *The Real Wealth of Nations*, neither capitalism nor socialism can meet our unprecedented economic, social, and environmental challenges. This is not only because both came from early industrial times and we are now in the post-industrial era; it is also because both came from times when the West was still more heavily weighted to the domination side of the social scale.

Neither Adam Smith (*The Wealth of Nations*) nor Karl Marx considered the indispensable work of caring for people and caring for our environment “productive work.” This has had terrible consequences for women, who still do most of the care work for free in households and for low pay in the market – a major factor in the disproportionate poverty of women, (and their families), worldwide. It has also had terrible consequences for us all since devaluing the work of caring has led to economic policies guided by the uncaring, “hard” values that are our legacy from more rigid domination times when caring for people, starting in early childhood, and for nature, was deemed only “reproductive” work – a label still perpetuated in economic schools today.

Today, when automation, robotics, and artificial intelligence has already replaced millions of jobs, and it is predicted that job loss will escalate exponentially, and when caring for nature is a matter of species survival, we must redefine what is, and is not, productive work. This is our crisis and our opportunity.