

**Back To Basics: Elements and Dynamics of Gender-Related
Policy-Making**
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Abstract. *The aim of this paper is to understand the major elements that affect gender-related policies and highlight the elements' interrelationships in an attempt to comprehend the current dynamics of policy-making in the work force. To do so, the author of this paper presents a model based on Joya Misra's article, "Mothers or Workers?" with the ultimate goal of understanding the origins of bias and consequently the betterment of future policies. The first part discusses the need for developing frameworks, followed by a description of the model. The paper concludes with an application to the French society, specifically examining the effects of low-birth rates on the gender-related policies in France.*

1. Motivations: The Need for a New System of Analysis

The French Revolution at the end of the 18th century established France as a nation guided by the principles of “Égalité, Liberté, and Fraternité.” In fact, these principles continue to serve as indisputable references for morality at each of the individual, the institutional, and the international level; this is particularly true at a time when globalization demands the universality of laws and the influence of religion as an ideology for governances is significantly diminishing. The use of these principles as references for morality culminated in the articles forming the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. One of the fundamental implications of the Declaration is the fact that it transformed many issues concerning class, race, and gender from being merely moral issues to being formal issues of human *right*. However, research continues to strongly indicate that the application of the Declaration’s articles to a particular society is a complex and challenging endeavor. The universality and vagueness contained in the 30 articles of the Declaration limited its applications and necessitated the emergence of policies that are particular to and are shaped by the society’s history, culture, women’s movements, politics, and economy. Even in a given society, the complexities that arise within the context of the population’s race, gender, and class, have led researchers such as Patricia Collins to question the very manner in which the current method of analysis is conducted, reflecting our probably self-imposed naivety when dealing with these eminent yet sensitive issues.

Collins' article "Toward a New Vision: Race, Class, and Gender as Categories of Analysis and Connection, [1]" asserts that the current method of analyzing race-, class-, gender-related issues within a given society relies primarily on the notion of **oppression** and its absolute as well as relative quantification. This method of analysis portrays race, class, and gender as often conflicting forces struggling against one another to capture the largest piece of the 'rights' pie. This fact is clearly revealed in Tom Morrison's article, "Race-ing Justice, Engineering Power [2]," in which he analyzes the Anita Hill versus Clarence Thomas case. The author highlights the animosity between blacks fighting for equality and feminist movements, primarily because of the perception that: 1. white women and blacks compete for jobs that might otherwise go to blacks, and that, because of racism, the women are more likely to get those jobs; 2. that the complaints of white feminists are less compelling than those of racial minorities (taking us back to the heart of Collin's article); 3. Feminism has caused friction between black-men and black-women which weakens the struggle against racism.

From a policy-making point of view, Collins therefore correctly condemns this simple approach to analyzing such a complex problem that inherently involves an unusually high level of subjectivity. From our natural inclination towards either/or, dichotomous thinking, to the inevitable effects of our personal experiences and background on the analysis, to our awareness of our own victimization, she states that a new system of analysis is required.

In a problem so intertwined with our natural impulses, how does one therefore form an objective system of analysis? How can policy-makers (their experiences and background included) who are concretely part of the problem, take a step backwards and observe it objectively? Where is the root of the problem? Is it at the individual, the symbolic, or at the institutional level (categories she discusses in the text)? Who exactly is the oppressor, is it an individual, a couple of individuals, the media? Should policy-makers stress universal policies, thus maintaining the principle of equality, or is it sometimes necessary to target the underrepresented in society to ensure the future sustenance of the principle of equality?

These are all are all *fundamental* questions which have to be confronted head-on by policy-makers and indeed by society as a whole. Unfortunately, given the fact that each society is unique in its culture and tradition, religion, history, and ideology, a comprehensive universal framework that represents the utopian policy-making procedure proves to be impractical and probably impossible. However, understanding the current dynamics of a society's policy-making process is essential to both facilitating the passing of viable future policies and understanding the obstacles and shortcomings of the current process.

A society's workplace (and its accompanied policies) often reflects the bias and prejudices that exist in it. It therefore serves as a reliable starting-point to understanding the race-, class-, and, gender-related issues that challenge society. For example, in the US more women and fewer men are participating in

the labor force [3]. If this trend continues, the percentage of women in the labor force will be larger than the percentage of men. Despite this fact, and the fact that women are earning less than men, they continue to be responsible for childcare. One out of six women are single mothers in the US [3]. Two-thirds of poor adults are women [3]. These are startling statistics that emphasize the importance of understanding the policy-making process across societies.

The aim of this paper is to understand the major elements that affect gender-related policies and highlight the elements' interrelationships in an attempt to comprehend the current dynamics of policy-making in the work force. To do so, the author of this paper presents a model based on Joya Misra's article, "Mothers or Workers? [4]" with the ultimate goal of understanding the origins of bias and consequently the betterment of future policies.

2. The Framework

Based on Misra's article, a model was developed and will be used as the basis of analysis for the rest of the paper. Figure 1 below illustrates the dynamics and relationships between the various aspects involved in policy-making according to Misra's thesis statement, "I build on the work of ... to suggest that explaining the effects of women's movements on welfare policy lies in the gender ideology of a nation-state with respect to women's roles as mothers and workers. In particular, I focus on the value placed on women's work, both paid and unpaid, to make sense of the policies that have emerged [4]." Three main components are considered within this framework, and are necessary for the formation of *fair* policy: 1. the country's women's movements and their demands, 2. the nation's

gender ideologies, and 3. the resulting policy in the both the paid and the unpaid labor.

2.1 Women's movement

Historically, the society's women movements have been critical to the formation of policies that take into consideration the unpaid labor of women mostly as domicile work. A given society's women's movement is constrained primarily by two components considered in the framework: 1. the society's needs at a given point in time, which are primarily shaped by certain external historical events and 2. the society's perceived gender ideologies, which have been shaped through traditions, history and culture. As one can imagine these ideologies prove to be very difficult to overcome in spite of the detrimental effects it can have in the workplace. In addition, a third component that affects the women's movement is the race and class of the women involved in the movement. For example, in the US, the class and racial belongings of the participating women determined what kinds of policies were formed, and which racial group, even among the women themselves were targeted. The US's initial women's movement aimed at fostering the interests of white, middle-class women. The resulting policies "promoted motherhood for certain women and discouraged it for others [4]."

2.2 Historical Context

This component was vaguely defined previously in the paper intentionally because it has been used to signify several meanings depending on the context. In effect, there are two aspects that it represents: 1. specific historical events that

trigger the *need for change* in a given society's workforce (which often serves as leverage for the women's movement argumentation), and 2. historical events that trigger the need for change in a given society's gender ideologies. As we will see in the case of France, these two aspects are often connected, and the need for gender representation change in the workforce necessarily forces the nation to question its current gender ideologies. The historical context thus affects both the women's movements and their goals, and the nation's gender ideologies directly. In short, changing the nation's ideologies can be a very delicate matter; however, historical happenings often serve as a foundation to challenge these ideologies. Sometimes, the nation's gender ideologies are so well ingrained in the society that the women's movement utilizes certain historical events as a strategy for partial change by appealing to the perceived ideologies. For example, in the US "Lewis and Pederson show that strong feminist movements did not necessarily lead to policy that was more supportive to women [4]." However, in the strong-male-breadwinner British state, Rathbone changed her strategy to focus her attention on children in poverty, and was able to constitute the Family Endowment Society [4].

2.3 Nation's Gender Ideologies

The important thing to mention here is that it is not enough to have a dual or a moderate male breadwinner ideology, the women's roles as mothers and workers must be respected as well to form a gender-fair policy. Gender ideologies often constrain the women movements' goals, and in their turn,

depending on certain historical happenings, women movements can challenge these ideologies.

Misra put it best when contrasting the ideologies formed in the UK and France. “Feminists in Britain were aware of the limitations of family allowances; culture did not provide the tools necessary to support their movement. However, in France, culture helped provide feminists with effective “strategies of action [4].”

Figure 1 summarizes the model and the relative interactions of the various elements involved. A solid arrow represents direct influence, and a dotted arrow represents weak or indirect influence.

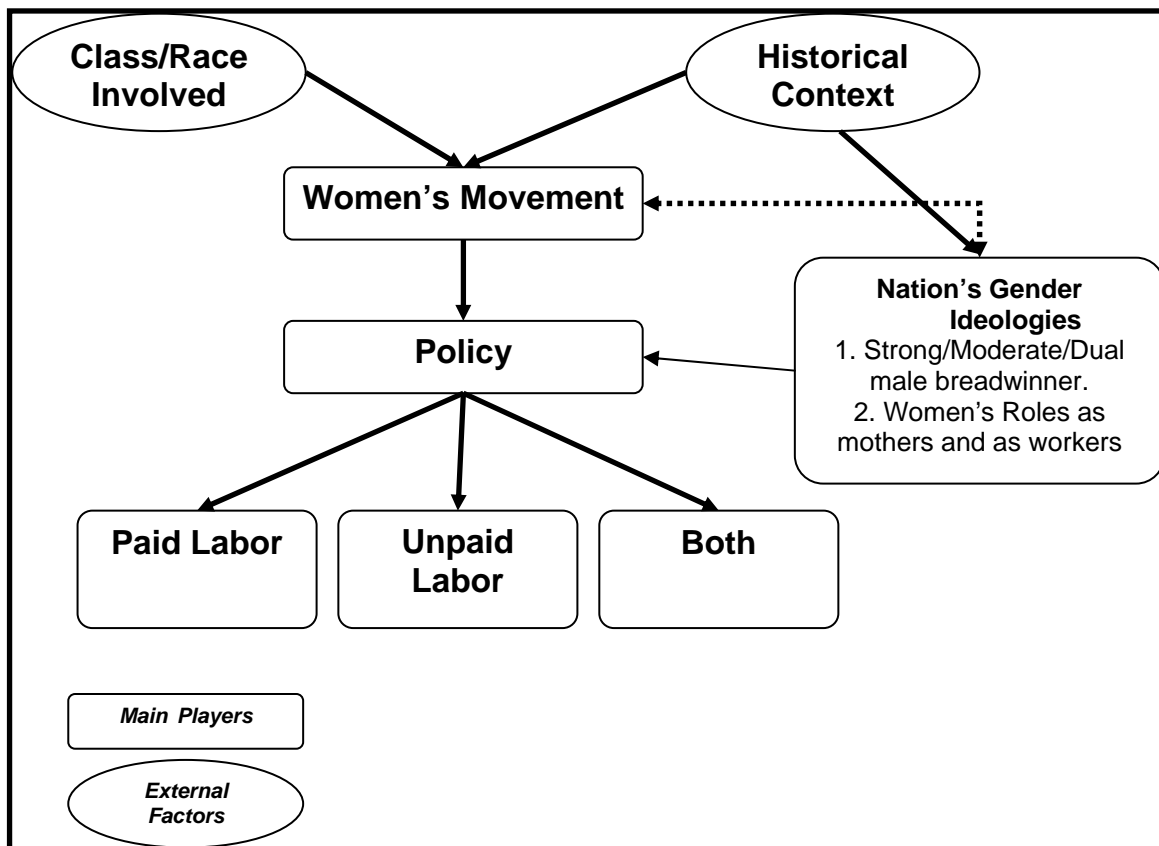


Figure 1: Components and Dynamics for current Policy-Making

3. Application Example: France

3.1 French Historical Aura

In essence, France's history can be divided into 2 major periods separated by the French Revolution. The oppression in the days of pre-Revolutionary aristocratic France led to major transformations that are still in effect today. The separation of Church and State and the principles of Equality, Fraternity, and Liberty still guide the French society and politics in a fundamental way. In the context of policy, the principle of Equality is generally perceived in its strictest sense leading to a culture that leans towards forming universal laws rather than ones targeted to certain groups in society. Most importantly, the revolution created France as being "La Patrie," (the fatherland), in whose name most of the policies are formed [5].

In contrast to the US, in France, the family plays a rather important role in governmental policies. This is done with the view that family and childrearing are essential for the development of "La Patrie;" a philosophy reflecting the paternal role of the State. For example, all pregnant women get generous allocations from the state on the condition that they go through all the free medical tests administered by the state. This perception of the State as a father figure is often misinterpreted as being due to the socialist nature of France; however, it originated from an ultra-conservative regime, that of Marechal Petain (1940-1944), during WWII at a time when the French family's status was being gravely jeopardized [5].

Having said this though, there is no doubt that remnants of the pre-revolution still exist in French society today. In addition, with the formation of the Legion d'Honneur by Napoleon, which is aimed at honoring distinguished members of "La Patrie" remains heavily in effect in French society today.

3.1 Women in France

3.1.1 Women's Movement

The French Revolution and the civil code of 1804 regarded women as juristically inferior to man (until 1884, a woman who commits adultery was put in prison while a man who did so was punished only in the case where he brings his mistress home. The law banned women in helping in political reunions, etc [5]. However, Feminism has had a long history in France. In 1791, two years after the Declaration of Human Rights, Olympe de Gouges published (*Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne*). In the 19th Century there were prominent feminists such as Flora Tristan, George Sand, Pauline Roland, Jeanne Deroin, Marie Deraisme; however, their influence was minimal and their works ignored for a long time before taking effect. In the 20th Century, the women's movement manifested itself through the writings of middle-class women most notably the works of Simone de Beauvoir [6]. In my opinion, this reluctance to change was due to the remnants of pre-revolutionary France [6].

It wasn't until the third republic (1880-1940) that things began to change. In 1880, women were allowed to attend secondary public schools, and in 1885, women were allowed to divorce. However, those changes were still very slow, and it wasn't until 1945 that women were allowed to vote.

As for women in the workplace, in 1972, a law was passed that ensures equal payment for the same job for both men and women. In 1975, an anti-discrimination law was passed prohibiting all discrimination by gender in the workplace. In 1981, the “Ministere des Droits de la Femme” was established to ensure equal rights. It has to be mentioned that it ensures equal rights, and not rights that are reserved for women which men will not have access to. This is an interesting fact since it shows an obviously targeted initiative, but in the context of universality (the fact that they will not have rights not accessed by other citizens in society) [6].

3.2.2 Women in today’s Workplace

Given the recent economic demands, there has been a high women’s participation in the labor force in France. However, the traditional views of women’s role as nurturers are still prevalent. Women are still responsible for the family care, domestic and community work; 62% of caregivers to the elderly are women, and daughters represent 63% of parent helpers (Gregory and Windebank 2000/Mindy Fried). In addition, the unemployment rate among women persisted to be substantially high for women: 14.7% in contrast to other EU nations: 12.4 % (Gregory and Windebank 2000/Mindy Fried). This is reminiscent to the problems outlined by Tilly in the US.

In comparison to males non-manual women workers earned 68.4% of men’s pay while manual women workers earned 80.8% (Gregory and Windebank, 2000).

3.2 French Ideologies

3.2.1 On Work

There are two traditions that are important and have affected the French views on work. The first one comes from the medieval aristocratic ideology, which degrades the value of work. Living without work was perceived as more prestigious, especially if the work involved manual labor. It is a tradition of classes, but still has its remnants in modern French society. The French are generally proud of their free time and their vacations in contrast to the Americans who often claim with pride that they are hard-workers and take very few vacations.

The second tradition that affected French views vis-à-vis work comes from the post-revolution bourgeois and protestant attitudes developed in the 18th and 19th Century. Work is viewed as something positive, through which the individual ameliorates his condition and that of society as a whole. Working is beautiful and honorable, and laziness is viewed as something negative. This tradition is highly visible in the US today, but in the French society, there still exists a disparity shaped by these two almost contradictory traditions.

3.2.2 Gender Ideologies

According to Misra, the traditional “Catholic ideology, commonly seen as limiting to women has provided a sometimes friendlier environment for women as both workers and mothers in France [4].” This is not so surprising given the fact that in the aristocratic pre-revolutionary France, it was considered good etiquette to give value to women and femininity (though superficially) [5]¹. Having said

¹ A famous French story, I thought would be interesting in this regard: “The 13th of April 1794, the count Arthur Dillon was about to be executed by the guillotine when a woman who was also about

this, while French policy may value femininity and their perceived roles as nurturers, questioning their roles as being so was widely unacceptable.

3.3 Historical Perspective: Low Birth-Rates

As an example to show the mechanism of the model, the concern over low-birth rates is considered. There is much controversy behind the decline of birth rates in France by the end of the 18th century [5]. However, this decline had a big impact on the French. Many French analysts blame the decline in French status in Europe and in the world in the 19th and beginning 20th century on its declining population! By the 20th century, the situation was nearing catastrophe, following the enormous losses that France suffered in WWI (1.5 million deaths [5]), the French birth rate was lower than its death rate. France thus opened its borders to foreign immigrants to fill in the deficit. This would be another important aspect to discuss but is beyond the scope of this paper.

to be executed before him asked him if he could go before her. He gives her a kind hand gesture and said, "I will never refuse anything from a woman" and was executed before her. (Memoires de La Marquise de La Tour du Pin. Paris: Mercure de France, 1979).

Source: Les Francais page 114)

Year	Birth Rate (# of births per 1000)
1800	32
1850	27
1900	22
1935	15
1946	21
1955	19
1968	17
1985	14
1998	12.6

The government thus (especially following WWII) felt obliged to adopt a pro-natal philosophy to encourage the French to give birth. This obviously had a great impact on gender-related policies. All political parties agreed with this philosophy, consequently today's France has policies that benefit families with children like no other country or society [5]. For example:

- Compensations, mounting to \$180 per month for 8 months to all pregnant women who undergo free medical tests administered by the health services.
- Obligatory paid mother-leave of 16 weeks to all salaried women who give birth to a child.

- \$870 is allocated to every mother who has a child.
- \$125 per month for families with 2 children, \$285 per months for those with 3 children, \$445 per month for those with 4, and \$605 per month for those with 5 children, until the children reach the age of 18.
- \$556 per month for every parent who stops work to take care of at least 2 children in which one of them is less than 3 yrs old.
- \$585 to any woman who is single and pregnant.
- 2 employed parents that are on minimum wage salaries and have 5 or 6 children can receive from the State a monthly salary equaling their current salary.

These are just a few of the laws that have been put in effect as a reaction to the decreasing birth rates.

4. Conclusion/End Remarks

The model presented in this paper highlighted the major factors that have shaped our policies today, and their interdependence. Of course there are many other important factors, such as politics and the political system that have been disregarded from the model. I argue that these can fall under the Nation's Ideologies section of the paper. The application example of France has shown us that it often takes major happenings to highlight issues of women in the workplace. However, since there isn't any formal utopian policy-making process, the best that one can do is approach the problem by highlighting the major factors that affect policy and their interrelationships. In a world challenged by globalization, more of these models that can be somehow systematically

pursued need to be developed in order to isolate the bias and prejudice that continue to appear in many societies around the world.

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