

Male-Centric Metrics Fail to Measure Women's Progress: Analyzing Women
Through Economic, Political, Corporate, and Educational Metrics

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ABSTRACT

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My thesis is a questioning thesis that examines four metrics used to analyze women's progress in the world today: economic affluence, political influence, corporate influence, and education. I am looking at what these metrics tell us, how adequate these metrics are, and if these metrics provide any substantial information about women's progress at all. I am analyzing the current political, economic, and social structures in place and whether women can truly progress if these structures are not changing, as well. I am looking at whether researchers can learn anything about women's progress when they are looking at women through a male lens, using male-centric metrics that have been used to measure male progress.

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Introduction

The outsider will say, “in fact, as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country.

As a woman my country is the whole world.” Virginia Woolf

Do women have a nation in an agential way regardless of what culture they are from? By agential, I mean do women have agency in the world, the ability to think for themselves, make individualized choices, and choose their own trajectory and actions, regardless of their social structure or cultural setting. Should women buy into the political, economic, educational, and corporate institutional structures that they were brought into by men? What standing and degree of influence do women have in these structures given that women did not make these structures nor ask for them? These three questions are extremely difficult to answer if they are even answerable at all.

There are many metrics used today to describe a woman’s experience in the world, her quality of life, how successful she is, and her “progress” throughout history. Yet, how adequate are these metrics when the metrics, too, were established by men and used to measure these systems developed by men. These questions have been examined through economic, political, ideological, and social avenues, yet there are no concrete answers that persists. This begs the question: are people using adequate methods to answer these questions and what does the data reveal?

People attempt to determine the advancement of women by examining economic, political, corporate, and educational metrics. This thesis will examine the current metrics that aim to measure a woman’s agency, ownership, success, and autonomy in the world and the validity of these metrics. This thesis will analyze how these four metrics measure women’s “progress,” a word commonly used to determine the quality of women’s lives. However, it is

problematic given that “progress” is a completely masculine concept, predominantly used to measure success in the West. Does measuring the quality of a woman’s life by examining how much progress she has made reveal significant answers? It cannot, given that progress measures how far one has advanced down the male value chain. If we are looking at the progress of women, we are comparing women to the male standard of success. Progress today measures one’s advancement within male established institutions and structures. Is progress, then, an effective term to look at the quality of a woman’s life or does it reveal how well a woman has navigated and risen within a male value system?

I argue that “progress” is not an appropriate metric to analyze a women’s experience in the world today. Rather, to answer the question—do women have a nation? —we need to redesign all of that which speaks to the experience of women rather than to the experience of men. Instead of just relaying the current data, we must critically analyze what the data means, if it means anything at all. What does this data tell us? It is also important to ask how we are to interpret data like this when the whole framework is predetermined by men. We must examine whether these are good measures to use, or even appropriate measures to use if they all look at the world in the way that men made it.

One of the most influential writers beyond her time, Virginia Woolf, analyzed women’s experiences in the world through a different lens: Woolf critically analyzed whether women have a nation of their own or even a history of their own through her own set of metrics. Though she did not have all the answers in her writing, her works raised significant questions that needed to be asked. In Woolf’s 1938 essay, *Three Guineas*, Woolf responds to a solicitation letter from a prominent male asking for her contribution to an anti-war organization and in her opinion, “how are we to prevent war?” The premise of her essay rests on the simple fact: “I am a woman, why

are you asking me?” In response to his letter, Woolf analyzes a woman’s relationship to her nation. Woolf explains, when a man tries to arouse the patriotic nature of a woman by appealing to nationalistic sentiments regarding “our country,” Woolf says a woman must ask herself, “What does ‘our country’ mean to me an outsider?” In order to answer this question, Woolf states a woman must evaluate 1) “the position of her sex and her class in the past,” 2) “the amount of land, wealth and property in the possession of her own sex and class in the present,” 3) “the legal protection which the law has given her in the past and now gives her,” and 4) “the degree of physical protection that she now enjoys.” After examining these four areas of concern, Woolf asserts that as a woman, ““Our country throughout the greater part of its history has treated me as a slave; it has denied me education or any share in its possessions.... as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world.”” (Woolf 93-94). After Woolf analyzes her four necessary metrics to determine what “our country” means to a woman, she details that as a woman, she has no nation, she has never been allowed to contribute to or make her own nation. She questions how men could expect women to conform to the same sense of nationalism given that women have never experienced nor shared in the advantages, protections, or benefits of citizenship of any country.

Through this analysis, Woolf is highlighting the fact that women do not have a nation because they have been excluded, repressed, and discriminated against for so long. I think it is important to note that Woolf does not blindly analyze a woman’s relation to England in the present, but she acknowledges how history, the past, plays a crucial role to a woman’s experience and identity within her country today. Woolf’s four metrics analyze one’s historical place within society, one’s present ownership within her country, one’s historical and present legal protection, and one’s current physical protection. If Woolf’s metrics were used to analyze

whether women had a nation of their own across the globe, I believe few women, if any, would be able to proclaim, “under Woolf’s criteria, I feel my country is my own!” It is also essential to note that Woolf was raised in a prominent family of upper-middle class status. Woolf wrote this letter in 1938 after women had achieved suffrage in England and received greater rights than previous years. Nonetheless, Woolf’s conclusion holds that women do not have a country. Although women have achieved more rights, women did not make the rules nor establish the structures that govern them. Woolf explains this repression of women has resulted in women having a “freedom from unreal loyalties” to a nation state, to a religion, or to an institution given they have never reaped the benefits nor the protections from one group. This freedom could mean multiple things: freedom from male ideals, freedom from male metrics of success, or freedom from an allegiance to institutions women had no part in building or creating. I also think it is important to note that Woolf proclaims, “As a woman I want no country,” enforcing the idea that as a woman, she has an unreal loyalty to her country since she had no part in establishing the framework of her country. Given women experience this “freedom from unreal loyalties,” would normal, male-centric metrics be adequate to measure the quality of a women’s lives when men are bound by unreal loyalties?

I realize there are a lot of difficulties with this analysis. I do not know if I should be speaking for women of the world. I do not know if Woolf’s essay can reflect the experiences of women across the globe. However, as I am a woman in a culture that happens to be American, a country where women have been historically discriminated against, I do think I have standing to ask the question—do women have a nation...or do women have a world?—and to look at the metrics that attempt to answer this question. Though, undisputedly, women’s experiences vary greatly, I would argue that the main divisional categories separating women—nationality,

income level, race, gender, sexual orientation—are all unreal. They are unreal because these categories were historically defined by men as a way of classifying people and enforced by systems demarcated with inequity that we, women, did not establish. As women, we have “freedom from unreal loyalties” to political, economic, and institutional structures we did not create, and we share in this freedom. As women, we are historically all outsiders. Though I acknowledge women across the globe belong to very different cultures and experience very different realities than I do, I would argue that women are united through our “freedom from unreal loyalties.” In this freedom, I ask, do women have a world in an agential way, regardless of cultural backgrounds? And secondly, are the current male-centric metrics used to analyze women’s progress adequate metrics to determine whether women have a world in an agential way or to measure the quality and fulfillment of women’s lives?

Chapter I: Economic Measure of Women's Progress

Over the last 20 years, there has been a sharp rise in literature regarding the economic empowerment of women. Various organizations have championed the campaign to bring women closer to economic equality. Notably, in 2009, the World Economic Forum hosted a panel of speakers ranging from the Nike CEO, Mark Parker, to the Managing Director of the World Bank, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, to announce their newly established Adolescent Girls Initiative. The program sought to help girls in low-income countries develop skills that met market demand and support adolescent girls in obtaining employment. A high-level overview of this program was encompassed in a session titled “The Girl Effect on Development,” which argued, “‘investing in girls is smart economics’: ‘tapping’ the labour potential of girls not only stimulates economic growth, it also contributes to family health and slows the growth of the population” (Hickel, 2014). The World Economic Forum was not unique in its mission, but husband and wife, Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, both *New York Times* reporters, popularized this message in their best-selling 2009 book *Half the Sky*. Kristof and WuDunn have become global leaders in the gender development movement as *Half the Sky* focuses on the premise: “Throughout most of the world, the greatest unexploited resource is the female half of the population” (Kristof, 2009).

Although Kristof and WuDunn highlight the missed opportunities globally when countries fail to utilize their whole population economically, Kristof and WuDunn equate girls to an economic resource, human capital. This is an initial problem I noted when analyzing the effectiveness of economic metrics that attempt to measure women's progress. I do not know if equating girls to an “unexploited resource” materially improves girls' lives at all. No doubt, tapping into the untouched labor market will make countries more productive, but I do not see a direct correlation with countries allowing girls to enter the labor market and girls gaining greater

agency over their lives. Another disturbing factor is that countries must grant girls this opportunity to enter the labor market because girls did not create the structures that initially excluded them from economic participation in the first place. Across the globe, a goal should be that girls have total agency over their lives and decisions, whether that be to pursue or not to pursue an economic career path. Economic equality involves equal opportunities, but I am not sure equating girls to an unexploited resource would give girls the same equal economic opportunities as their male-counterparts.

The economic development of women has become a common metric to measure women's success and advancement. This message has been popularized by leading global institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the United Nations, to name a few. This metric tells us that for a woman to reach gender equality, she must first obtain economic autonomy, a historically male-valued ideology. It is necessary to analyze the current research regarding women's economic advancement to determine the tangible effects for women. Does allowing women to integrate into this male-developed system—infusing women into the economy—improve women's lives? Or, is this what men think women need to integrate into the system they established, while simultaneously bolstering the capitalistic system they operate in?

Human Resource Efficiency as an Economic Metric for Women's Advancement

Countless research promotes the economic advantages of integrating women into the economy. One way of measuring a women's economic progress is analyzing women as a human resource. This data looks at how efficiently countries use their human capital as a measure of how far women have progressed. Before we can analyze the effectiveness of this economic metric, we need to look at the economic literature that defines and examines this metric. Detailed

below is a high-level synopsis of the current data researchers are using to gauge the economic progress of women.

Across the globe, women account for 50 percent of the eligible, working-age population of nearly 5 billion people, but only 50 percent of these eligible women contribute to the labor force, compared with 80 percent of men (Dabla-Norris & Kochhar, 2019). Data consistently shows that countries suffer economically when women are sidelined: “If women—who account for half the world’s working-age population—don’t achieve their full economic potential—the global economy will suffer” (Jonathan Woetzel). Especially regarding developing countries, researchers argue their advancement is dependent on their empowerment of women. Melanne Verveer, executive director of the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security addresses this issue when she states, “No country can get ahead if it leaves half of its people behind” (Chermayeff, 2012).

The International Monetary Fund’s research illustrates there are large economic costs when women are repressed in society. The IMF attributes the female economic deficit to “disparities in access to education, health care, and finance and technology; legal rights; and social and cultural factors” (Dabla-Norris & Kochhar, 2019). The IMF explains these disparities result in a smaller pool of talent, lower productivity, and lower economic growth. Its research asserts that women are economically valuable. However, the research does not analyze how female economic advancement would change various areas of women’s lives.

In 2015, McKinsey’s Global Institute (MGI) projected the benefits to the global GDP if women were given equal access to work as men. The MGI found that in a “full potential” scenario, a “scenario in which women play an identical role in labor markets to that of men,” as much as \$28 trillion, or 26 percent, could be added to the global annual GDP by 2025 through

advancing women’s economic equality (Jonathan Woetzel). Whereas, a “best in region” scenario, a scenario “in which all countries match the rate of improvement of the fastest-improving country in their region,” could add as much as \$12 trillion, or 11 percent in annual GDP in 2025 (Jonathan Woetzel). MGI acknowledges in its report that this would require change in the public, private, and social sectors to decrease gender disparity. The chart below shows the incremental 2025 GDP increase that could occur for different regions if women were able to participate in labor markets in an equal manner to men:



(Jonathan Woetzel).

It is evident that regions from every part of the world have room to increase their GDP by tapping into the other half of their working-age population or allowing women to have the same right to earn their own living and contribute to the GDP on par with men. Not just nationally or regionally, but various industries have significant room for improvement through utilizing the human capital of women.

Specifically, in the agriculture sector, women have room to substantially increase production in this sector. In an analysis looking at agricultural labor performed by women, UN Women revealed,

On average, women make up about 43 percent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries. Evidence indicates that if these women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20 to 30 percent, raising total agricultural output in these countries by 2.5 to 4 percent. This would reduce the number of hungry people in the world by around 12 to 17 percent. (Facts and Figures, 2012)

Indisputably, allowing women to participate in labor markets in an equal manner to men would stimulate GDP growth and provide global benefits. The effects of disenfranchising women have hurt the global economy. However, nowhere in these analyses are researchers examining the psychological, qualitative, or tangible effects for women when women have greater economic access. This research analyzes women as a productive resource to be exploited rather than examining how economic access would change a woman's experience.

This economic metric to determine a women's progress is grounded on the idea that allowing women to contribute to the GDP improves not just a woman's economic autonomy, but a country's overall economy as well. Although this economic metric is used to gauge a women's experience in a given country, the data speaks to the benefits to a country rather than to the woman herself. I am aware that I selected the data cited above, but I do believe this data is a good representation of the bulk of research being produced in this area. Some might argue measuring women's ability to participate in the economy is a good metric to determine whether women have a nation. If we are looking at Woolf's criteria for determining what "my country" means to an individual, Woolf says a woman must analyze her ownership within the country: *"She will inform herself of the amount of land, wealth and property in the possession of her own sex and class in the present—how much of "England" in fact belongs to her"* (Woolf, 1938).

Through this economic analysis, one might argue that increasing women's economic participation would give women a greater stake, ownership, or participation in their countries. However, this economic metric fails to encompass the aspect that though women are entering the economy, they are still operating within a system that they have no allegiance to as it is an unreal loyalty. The economic system is not a system that women have a history in building, participating in, or reaping the benefits of, so does entering the system now really give a woman a greater agency over their lives or a nation of their own?

This economic metric fails to consider other factors that contribute to progress and a woman's quality of life. Though monitoring women's economic advancement provides some insight, the data is only somewhat valuable given that it involves further infiltrating women into a system developed by men. After analyzing the economic research provided above, all this research tells us is that allowing women to enter the economy in the same manner as men provides GDP benefits and allows women to participate a system created by men. There is no substantial, revealing information in this data. Rather than speaking to women's progress or advancement, it tells more about the mindset behind this research.

Is the China Economic Model Worth Emulating for Women's Advancement?

Another economic benchmark commonly cited for women's advancement involves the economic explosion that occurred in China when China began to utilize its untapped labor force of women. This case is interesting because various reports analyzing women's advancement cite China as an example or critique this model.

Researchers explain that China exemplifies the economic explosion that can occur when a country starts to utilize the other 50% of its human capital. As of 2016, women contributed about 41% to China's GDP, a higher percentage than most other regions, including North

America (McKinsey, 2018). However, historically, this was not the case for China. In 2018, the World Economic Forum released Peter Vanham's article titled, "Women in China contribute more to GDP than in the US. Viewing them as 'leftover' is problematic," that describes the transition of China from a country severely oppressing women to a country that realized the unlocked economic potential women have to offer. Vanham explains, "Women weren't always (allowed to be) the economic motors of China...Until 1906, most Chinese women had their feet bound. Until 1950, they were sold in marriage to the highest bidder" (Vanham 2018). Yet, Chinese women today have very different experiences. Vanham expounds that as recently as the 1960s and 1970s during Mao's Cultural Revolution, China's female employment rate became one of the highest in the world, "as women became 'sexless comrades,' laboring shoulder-to-shoulder with men" (Vanham 2018). Though the initial work experiences women achieved in China were not glamorous, it became the first step allowing women to become active contributors to China's economy. *Half the Sky* looks at how China started to optimize its resources, specifically in the form of utilizing its women, allowing China to experience an unprecedented economic boom:

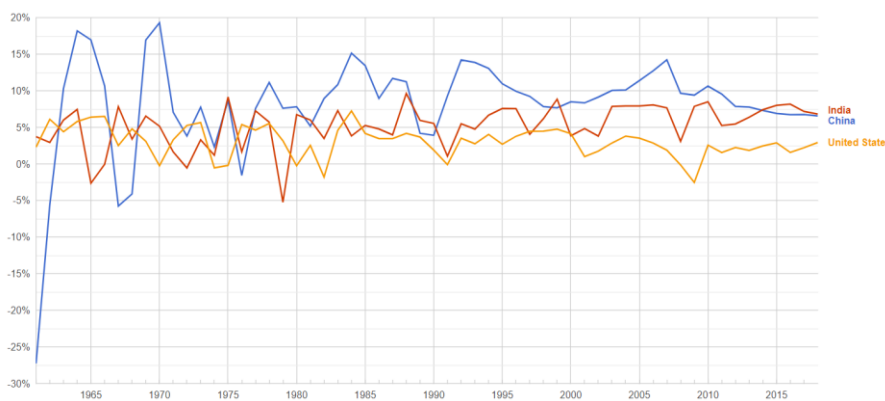
China is an important model because it was precisely its emancipation of girls that preceded and enabled its economic takeoff. The same is true of other rapidly growing Asian economies. As Homi Kharas, an economist who has worked on these issues for the World Bank and the Brookings Institution, advised us: Engineering an economic takeoff is really about using a nation's resources most efficiently. Many East Asian economies enjoyed a sustained boom by moving young peasant women from farms to factories, after giving them a basic education for free...It's no accident that the countries that have

enjoyed an economic takeoff have been those that educated girls and then gave them the autonomy to move to the cities to find work. (Kristof, 2009)

Although there is an apparent correlation between women entering the workforce and China's GDP beginning to increase, *Half the Sky* fails to acknowledge the other factors, such as China's low base and Western imperialism, that also contributed to this economic surge. Vanham explains that "the female 'dividend' now pays out in the economy" as young, urban, well-educated and single Chinese women were among the greatest contributors to China's growth (Vanham, 2018). Allowing women to enter the workforce simultaneously boosted both the production and consumption side of economics in China: "On the production side, they [women] represent the best of China's brain power and are propelling their country to new growth. On the consumption side, they buy millions of articles on Taobao and turned Alibaba's Singles' Day into the world's most valuable day for retailers" (Vanham, 2018).

The rapid increase in China's GDP over the second half of the twentieth century and the corresponding dates of China allowing women to enter the labor force can be seen in the chart below:

China, U.S., and India GDP Growth Rate



(GDP Growth Rate).

China experienced an unprecedented rise in its GDP growth rate in the early 1960s which some researchers correlate with China allowing women to enter its labor market. Researchers argue that the economic success experienced in China and other parts of East Asia is an example of what could be experienced all over the world if countries look to women to stimulate their GDP.

However, it is important to look at the data in depth to determine what occurred for women in East Asia and analyze whether this economic example is one worthy of emulating or an adequate measure of women's progress. Though women began to enter the economy in East Asia, women were mainly allowed to work in factories, the lowest quality of employment. Women now lead the production statistics in East Asia, but women also make up a majority of the marginalized employment positions: "Eighty percent of the employees on the assembly lines in coastal China are female, and the proportion across the manufacturing belt of East Asia is at least 70 percent" (Kristof, 2009). One factory manager explained that the business's success is attributed to young women employees: "They have smaller fingers, so they're better at stitching," while another factory owner explained, "They're obedient and work harder than men...And we can pay them less" (Kristof, 2009). Evidently, the factories' success was achieved by paying women lower wages. East Asia's economy boomed because women who previously could not contribute to the gross national product were now working and contributing to the labor force while simultaneously stimulating the economy, but was this growth at their own expense?

Kristof and WuDunn explain in layman's terms the equation of East Asia's success: "the basic formula was to ease repression, educate girls as well as boys, give the girls the freedom to move to the cities and take factory jobs, and then benefit from a demographic dividend as they delayed marriage and reduced childbearing" (Kristof, 2009). Kristof and WuDunn argue that

when women work, it benefits the whole society and empowers girls to excel in educational endeavors. Vanham explains, “The result is that, as in many countries around the world, girls started outperforming boys in school: today, almost 53% of the top-scoring students across China’s 31 provincial-level regions are female... Chinese women have been the dominant gender in colleges for several years” (Vanham, 2018). With women owning their own financial means, the women in East Asia were able to pay to educate their younger relatives while simultaneously saving and boosting the national savings rate (Kristof, 2009). McKinsey’s analysis of the economic situation in Asia resulted in McKinsey insisting Asia should be a template for other countries to follow:

Take Asia as an example. Slightly more than half of the region’s women work, and those women are paid less than men. Gender norms, barriers to education, and entrenched cultural forces could maintain that status quo, but analysts warn that countries impeding the advancement of women will pay a steep price. The consulting firm McKinsey & Company estimates that the regional economy would gain as much as \$4.5 trillion in annual GDP by 2025 if women were no longer sidelined in the Asian workforce” (Norris).

Though East Asia’s success was in part attributed to women, the McKinsey report raises a red flag when McKinsey insists China’s model should be a template for other countries given that the model entails women being paid less than men. China’s economic boom allowed women to enter paid labor; however, it is important to question whether placing women in marginalized, low-paying jobs advances women or improves their quality of life.

I believe the overview of the economic boom in China reveals more impediments to women’s advancement than improvements. This metric is not one that should be given weight

because it inaccurately equates women's economic participation and national economic advances to women's empowerment. For example, slavery and low pay immigrant labor stimulated the US GDP, but both economic mechanisms neither empowered nor improved slave and immigrant lives. Rather, America reaped benefits at the slave and immigrant's expense. A similar experience could be taking place in China, but instead it is being painted in the light of female empowerment. However, I am not sure that allowing women to enter the economic realm at the lowest level is empowering at all. Though there are some benefits associated with this model, such as higher female education and delayed childbirth, does this model reveal any data to assess whether women are gaining greater autonomy or agency? Although economic rights are one of the necessary factors for women to have a world in an agential way, allowing women to participate in the economy does not guarantee a women's agency at all. Women are entering the economy in China, a system designed by men, and they are entering it at the lowest level. This does not sound like female empowerment to me. I would say this economic metric is not suitable for determining whether women have a country of their own or measuring a women's "progress," advancement, or fulfillment.

In correspondence with my belief that economic metrics are not an adequate method to determine a women's "progress," Jason Hickel, in his essay "The 'girl effect': liberalism, empowerment and the contradictions of development," further critiques this economic metric. He analyzes the assertion that, "the investment in the skills and labour of young women is the key to stimulating economic growth and reducing poverty in the global South." He argues that initiatives designed to empower girls by encouraging their participation in the labor market often ends up placing girls in new forms of subservience as workers wherein conditions are unsafe, and wages are unfair. Hickel argues that many corporations supporting girl empowerment

campaigns, such as Nike, Goldman Sachs, and Coca-Cola, “make very little effort to disguise their interest in expanding the size of the under-waged labour pool in developing countries by drawing in adolescent girls” (Hickel, 2014). Many corporations have historically argued for reduced wages and reduced labor regulations, which they can now do under the façade of female labor empowerment. Hickel raises awareness of the transnational capitalist incentives in the feminization of the labor force: cheap labor. He also emphasizes that Kristoff and WuDunn are longstanding supporters of sweatshops in poor countries along with Leslie Chang, who “continues to be a popular proponent of girls’ participation in sweatshop labour in China on the grounds that it carries liberatory potential” (Hickel, 2014). Although Chang is right that sweatshops could carry “liberatory potential,” sweatshops could also have the potential to further marginalize and repress women. A successful campaign for women cannot rest on “liberatory potential” as there is also potential for countless negative outcomes. Hickel argues, “In this discourse wage work gets taken for granted as liberating, and as a positive means of cultivating the autonomous self.” However, Hickel shows that is not the case as women often fail to receive a living wage, equal pay to their male counterparts, and protection from exploitation by their overseers. He also explains that factory work and sweatshops across the globe tend to be too unstable to substantially improve the quality of their lives. He explains, “increasing women’s participation in the global labour force is not necessarily empowering in the context of a labour market that exerts steady downward pressure on wages and conditions” (Hickel, 2014).

Data from the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report 2020 confirms Hickel’s argument, ranking China 106 out of 153 countries in gender equality (World Economic Forum, 2019). Rather than moving closer to gender parity, China went backwards on the global gender equality list for the eleventh year in a row. As the *South China Morning Post* elaborates,

“China’s ranking was mainly dragged down by its male-dominated political landscape – it ranked 95th on that sub index. Women held only two ministerial positions and made up only one-quarter of the National People’s Congress membership, China’s legislature, last year. Leadership positions in the public and private sectors also largely remained the preserve of men, with one woman for every five men in such roles” (Zhang, 2019). Although women have been allowed to enter the economy, women have entered at the lowest level and poverty remains widespread in China, especially among women. There is ongoing academic debate regarding whether injecting young girls into the workforce and allowing them to earn their own incomes brings girls closer to economic equality or further segregates them by inserting them at the lowest positions available in the economy.

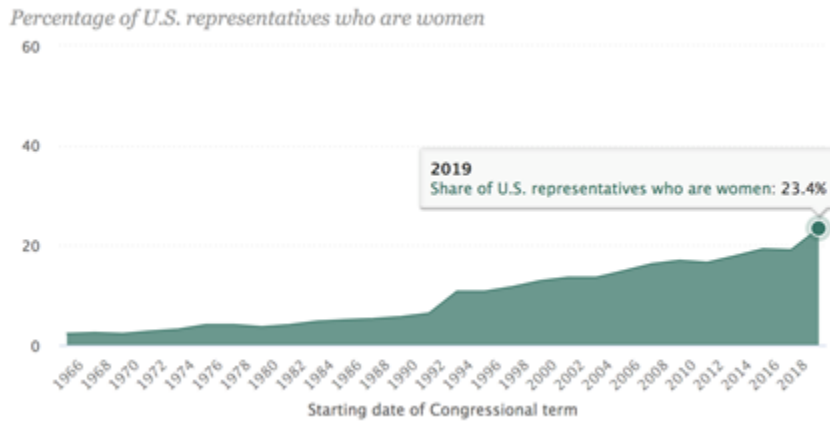
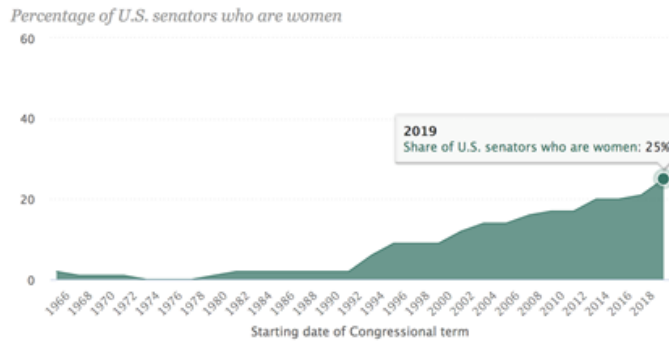
This data reveals that economically analyzing women’s contribution to GDP to determine women’s progress is an inadequate measure. Economic involvement does not ensure greater agency or women’s advancement. As seen in the case of China, women have one of the largest national contributions to GDP, higher than America, yet China still ranks 106th out of 153 on the World Economic Forum’s gender gap report. This further proves that economic metrics do not reveal substantial insight on the quality of life for women. I also would be wary of this metric because it can be more detrimental to women’s progress when women are placed in low-paying, discriminated areas of work to fill an economic void. Women cannot truly have a nation of their own while they are operating as if they are a mechanical part in an economic machine they did not design and that does not reward them.

Chapter II: Women's Political Influence

Women's political influence is another metric used to gauge the advancement of women. This metric looks at the demographics of women in positions of political power, the trend for these women, and the political influence they have had on their countries. Given the breadth of this research, I will narrow it down to women's political influence in the United States and analyze how that has changed and continues to change the experience for women or advanced the status of women in the US.

Many researchers look at women serving in governance roles in the political sphere as an indicator of women's advancement in society. Pew Research Center compiles some of the social and demographic trends for women in leadership positions across federal and state governments and politics in the United States. Based on the Pew research, women have steadily increased their representation in the United States Senate, United States House of Representatives, and as well as in the legislatures of the states. Currently, there are twenty-six (26) women serving in the United States Senate, which represents a historic high of twenty-six percent (26%) of women US senators. In six states, both senators are women and fourteen states are represented by one man and one woman. There are currently 102 women serving as members of the United States House of Representatives in the 116th United States Congress, which is approximately 23.4% of all House members and the largest number in history (Manning, 2020) and for the first time a woman is serving as speaker of the US House. In addition, there are currently six House committees and 39 House subcommittees being chaired by women, again each of these is an historic high for the US Congress (Office of the Historian, 2007). Women also hold 25.5% of state senate seats and 29.7% of state house seats. Thirteen women serve in one of the top leadership positions in state senates, and an additional six are speakers of state houses. As of

2019, Nevada was the first state with a majority-women state legislature (senate and house) at 50.8%. To date, forty-four women have served as governors in 30 states. In 2019, there were nine women serving as governors (The Data on Women Leaders). The Pew Research Center graphs below show the historical trends for women as US Senators and US representatives:



Although the data shows a rising and historic number of women in political positions in the US Congress, is this metric an adequate measurement of women’s progress? A common trend I have noticed among the research analyzing women’s governance in political positions is that reports often use the terminology, “historic high,” “record high,” or “all-time high,” as if women have achieved significant success. However, it is important to note that this rise in women governance has risen from a starting point of virtually zero representation. The first women to serve in the House was Representative Jeannette Rankin of Montana in 1917 and four

years before women were granted the right to vote, so it has taken 103 years to barely reach these “historic highs” (Office of the Historian, 2007). The terminology can be misleading when the “record high” still falls substantially below the male counterparts and still represents only a minority of less than thirty percent of elected positions held by women, even though women represent a slight majority of the US population. During the past 100 years that women have served in Congress, the progress has been slow and not always been a steady progress. Even though there are no formal barriers to women being in governance, social and institutional barriers created by men have made it difficult for women to participate in national and state politics.

Researchers also analyze the historical change of women’s political influence and women’s political rights to understand female progress and where there is still room for progress. Two political rights to analyze are the right to vote in US elections and equal protection. Over the past one hundred years in the US, women have earned the right to vote through the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment and affirmative action was established under the Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution. However, these political advances for women did not always translate into substantial progress for women or grant women protection under the US Constitution, apart from the right to vote. Women have made some significant political improvements with Congress passing laws to extend the equal protection clause of the 14th amendment to address sex discrimination and passing laws to support women’s reproductive rights which have given women greater autonomy over their bodies following *Roe v. Wade*, 1973. However, women remain bound by a political system they did not establish and there are existing gaps among the laws and Supreme Court decisions regarding violence against women, sexual harassment, and equal pay (Chira, 2019).

The 19th Amendment was introduced in 1919 and was only 39 words long, but even in brevity these words were progressive and groundbreaking: “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation” (U.S. Const. amend. XIX). However, nearly 150 years before the House voted on the 19th Amendment, Abigail Adams was fighting for equal rights for women. In 1776, Abigail Adams, the wife of John Adams, wrote a letter to her husband with advice for the founding fathers to “Remember the Ladies” as she urged her husband and revolutionaries for the assurance of rights of women and further stated, “If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion [sic], and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation” (National Archives, n.d.). Nearly 250 years later, U.S. women still lack a constitutional guarantee of equality.

Notably, the failure to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), an amendment to explicitly include sexual equality within the Constitution and prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, speaks volumes about the status of women and attitudes regarding women within the US. Although the ERA was first proposed in 1923 by the National Woman’s political party, it was not until four decades later that the resurgence of feminism in the late 1960s resulted in the ERA’s consideration by Congress (The Equal Rights Amendment: A 97-Year Struggle, 2020). By 1972, Congress approved the ERA and sent it to the states for ratification, but the ERA fell just below the required minimum of thirty-eight state ratifications by the 1982 deadline imposed by Congress to pass (The Equal Rights Amendment: A 97-Year Struggle, 2020). Although it has been almost one hundred years since the initial introduction of the ERA, as of January 2020, Virginia became the thirty-eighth state to ratify the ERA. After the ratification by Virginia, the

attorney generals for the states of Virginia, Illinois and Nevada immediately filed a federal lawsuit on January 30, 2020, to force the adoption of the ERA to the US Constitution. However, given the Congressional deadline for the ERA has long passed, why are states still ratifying this amendment today? One reason may be because of the recognition that sexual discrimination still exists especially in politics and leadership positions and the ERA would guarantee equal rights for women by outlawing sexual discrimination. This amendment to the US Constitution would provide constitutional equality for all women under the law. This would also be important because the US Supreme Court has three levels of scrutiny for judicial review to determine the constitutionality of certain issues and currently uses an intermediate level of scrutiny standard when assessing laws that have a unbalanced impact on women as a class and if there was an amendment to the US Constitution for equal rights such as the ERA, the level of scrutiny is likely to be raised to the strictest level by the US Supreme Court, which is the same level of scrutiny that applies to all race based discrimination (Winston & Strawn LLP, 2020).

In 1969, Shirley Chisholm, the first black woman elected to Congress, gave a speech to the US House of Representatives that is as relevant today as it was fifty years ago explaining the necessity and usefulness of protection by laws. She explained, “laws will not change such deep-seated problems overnight but they can be used to provide protection for those who are most abused, and to begin the process of evolutionary change by compelling the insensitive majority to reexamine its unconscious attitudes” (The Equal Rights Amendment: A 97-Year Struggle, 2020). Chisholm argued the current laws do not secure equal rights for women which is proven by “the concentration of women in lower paying, menial, unrewarding jobs and their incredible scarcity in the upper level jobs” (The Equal Rights Amendment: A 97-Year Struggle, 2020). While women representation has increased in upper level jobs and some legislation has passed in

favor of women since 1969, there is still a large discrepancy among male and female representation at top positions and constitutional protection for women fails to exist, except in regard to voting. In 2017, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg acknowledged the progress that has occurred for women under the 14th Amendment, but that she still believes an amendment has practical and symbolic value: Ginsburg explains, “I would like to be able to take out my pocket Constitution and say that the equal citizenship stature of men and women is a fundamental tenet of our society like free speech” (Chira, 2019). Although women have been granted the ability to participate to a degree in a political system that men created and drafted the rules for many years earlier, women are given few protections that allow for their sex to overcome these discriminatory structures. Women are participating but do not have similar equal rights as men.

Although the passage of the ERA would not equate to gender political equality, it would be a step forward combating the political system designed by men. One counterargument to the passage of the ERA can be illustrated in a 1972 speech by Phyllis Schlafly, a leading anti-ERA activist whose message and platform are still used by anti-ERA activists today. Schlafly argued, “Most women would rather cuddle a baby than a typewriter or factory machine. Most women find that it is easier to get along with a husband than a foreman or office manager... American women do not want to be liberated from husbands and children” (The Equal Rights Amendment: A 97-Year Struggle, 2020). Schlafly argued the ERA is “an attack on the wife and homemaker” (Biography.com Editors, 2020). Although Schlafly’s blanket assertion does not apply to all women, it raises a significant point and another interesting aspect of measuring female progress: a woman’s ability to be pregnant and have any children they desire while also being able to participate in work life as they desire. Whether a woman desires to have as many children as she can have, run for senate, or do both, it is necessary to examine a woman’s ability to do so in the

current political economy. Do women have the protection to pursue whichever familial and career path they desire or are there structural inhabitants that deter women from approaching family life and career choices in the same manner as men?

Chisolm also addresses gender stereotypes and discrimination in her speech to the US House of Representatives in 1969 when she states, “It is obvious that discrimination exists. Women do not have the opportunities that men do. And women that do not conform to the system, who try to break with the accepted patterns, are stigmatized as "odd" and "unfeminine." The fact is that a woman who aspires to be chairman of the board, or a Member of the House, does so for exactly the same reasons as any man. Basically, these are that she thinks she can do the job and she wants to try.” (The Equal Rights Amendment: A 97-Year Struggle, 2020).

Chisolm is raising the point that women face societal and structural consequences when women deviate from their historical prescribed role of motherhood. The system confines women to a domestic role and supports women when they remain in this role and follow their gender stereotype. However, many women aspire to become political and corporate leaders, but they face gendered resistance on the way to the top.

This leads to another barrier inhibiting women from achieving top political positions: there is an uneven distribution of family care responsibilities. Shames’ article, *Barriers and Solutions to Increasing Women’s Political Power*, details how, “Studies repeatedly demonstrate that women pay a ‘motherhood penalty,’ across fields, relating not just to the time, effort, and medical care of pregnancy and childbirth, but to the far greater maternal involvement necessary for breastfeeding, and to the persistent tendency of women to do a larger share of childcare as the child grows” (Shames, 2015). The article illustrates how if anyone is deeply involved in childcare, regardless of sex, they will face difficult time constraints navigating between family

responsibilities and a political position. Unfortunately in the US, work is rarely equally shared, and therefore, women suffer the consequences.

Given the unequal distribution of family care responsibilities, paid parental leave initiatives have become increasingly popular to help women stay in the workforce and not compromise their careers for the unpaid labor of childcare. Research shows that US states that have implemented paid-leave policies experienced a 20% reduction in the number of female employees leaving their jobs in the first year after childbirth and up to a 50% reduction after five years (Miller, 2020). A study conducted by the nonprofit Institute for Women's Policy Research analyzed labor market participation among women in California and New Jersey before and after each state launched a paid family and medical leave system. Researchers found that family paid time off (PTO) nearly closed the gap in workforce participation between mothers with young children and women without minor children over the long term (Miller, 2020). However, the study found this was not the case for women without access to family PTO. Nearly 30 percent of women without access to family PTO dropped out of the workforce within a year after giving birth and one fifth of the women did not return for over a decade (Miller, 2020). The new Federal Employer Paid Leave Act is a step to help women remain in the workforce as women continue to demand more rights and protections by the US government.

When women desire to lead, especially in politics, there are societal, institutional, and systematic discriminatory barriers that can hinder a woman's ability to succeed in the same respect as men. In order for women to achieve political success and rise within the male established political institutions, it will not only require women adjusting to these institutions, but the institutions must adjust to the women, as well. Shames emphasizes the need for institutional change: "as institutionalist scholars point out, we continue to exclude women from

politics by maintaining gendered political institutions that value men and masculinity and devalue women and femininity. 'Inclusion' thus has to mean more than bringing in women and expecting them to conform to male norms within institutions; our ideals of candidates and officeholders need to be 're-gendered' to give women greater incentive to engage" (Shames, 2015). Historically, women have been discriminated against and kept from participating in these systems established by men. Although times are shifting and women are trailblazing into the political realm, political equality will not be achieved if it falls entirely on the women to bootstrap themselves out of their prescribed lesser positions. Whether this means political systems should institute a quota system to help achieve a more balanced representation in leadership or there should be a required number of women to serve as committee chairs, as Shames said, the system needs to be "re-gendered." Political equality will require the outdated political system to change altogether.

The military is also an area that is moving in the direction of becoming "re-gendered." Some researchers examine a women's political influence through the rise in female military participation. As of 2015, the American military, Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter decided to open all positions in the armed forces to women, including combat duty. He explained, "There will be no exceptions...They'll be allowed to drive tanks, fire mortars and lead infantry soldiers into combat. They'll be able to serve as Army Rangers and Green Berets, Navy SEALs, Marine Corps infantry, Air Force parajumpers and everything else that was previously open only to men" (Rosenberg & Philipps, 2015). Although this decision allowed women to have greater military participation, women still remain underrepresented in parts of the military, specifically the highest levels of leadership (CFR.org Editors, 2020). Today, women represent 16% of enlisted forces and 19% of the officer corps, a significant increase from when those numbers

were just 2% and 8% when the draft ended in 1973 (CFR.org Editors, 2020). However, these numbers vary widely by service, but women generally make up one-fifth of the officers in every military service except the marine corps, where they make up about 8% (CFR.org Editors, 2020).

Some men and women feel that equality in the military will not be reached until women are included within the US draft. One active duty service member pointed out that “expanding registration to women would give equal standing to women in any debate over whether to go to war and enact a draft, and thus would likely lead to a more comprehensive conversation over the options available to the United States” (The National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, 2020). Others are in favor of women registering for the draft in order to fully utilize the talent and potential of American citizens. In March 2020, The National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, a bipartisan, 11-member Commission created by Congress recommended extending the Selective Service System registration to include men and women. The Commission noted in the report that “the current disparate treatment of women unacceptably excludes women from a fundamental civic obligation and reinforces gender stereotypes about the role of women, undermining national security” (The National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, 2020). The report also explained, “In the eyes of many, the exclusion of women from Selective Service registration is a form of institutionalized, Government-sponsored prejudice against women that must be corrected” (The National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, 2020). However, this belief is not across the board as anti-ERA activists and many other groups vocally argue against women registering for the draft. Regardless, compulsory military service itself is still debated in the US and there are conflicting stances on whether women should be required to be enlisted in the US draft if

another draft is ever to occur. Currently, women are neither required nor permitted to register for the selective service and register for the draft (Desilver, 2019).

From female participation in the military to women's equal rights to women in political leadership positions, researchers look at women's political influence as a differing metric to determine women's progress. Although these are just a few areas of study regarding women in the political realm, the research shows a continuing disparity between males and females. The political metric shows barriers to women's political influence are institutional, social, cultural, and psychological, which are also similar barriers in other metrics discussed herein. This metric gives insight onto women's demographics in the political realm and barriers women face, but does this metric tell us anything about real progress for women? This political metric shows that women have been able to rise within this male-created political system, but at what cost? I believe progress for women in the political realm will only be obtained once there is gender awareness which will lay a path for gender equality and in order to fully understand a woman's progress, a good place to start would be to question whether women have complete agency in both their career and family decisions.

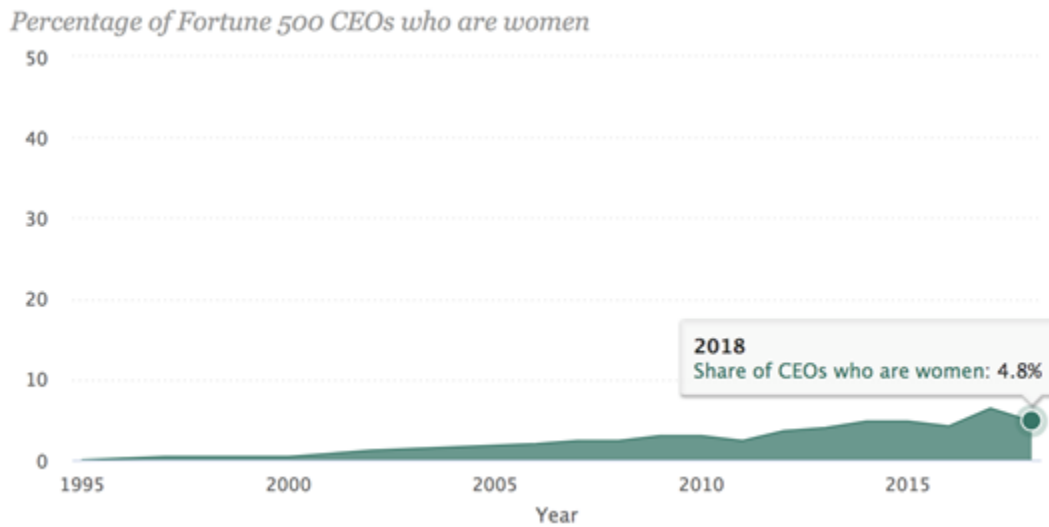
Chapter III: Women's Corporate Influence

Another metric for determining women's advancement is women's progress in the corporate realm. From examining gender pay gaps to corporate leadership positions, researchers commonly look at women's progress in the corporate world to reflect women's progress overall. To determine whether this is an appropriate metric, we need to examine what data is being produced, reviewed, and what this data means. To narrow down all the data that is being produced, we will specifically look at the United States to determine whether measuring women's corporate influence is reflective of women's advancement in the United States.

Research indicates that the US gender gap in pay has been narrowing since 1980. The Census Bureau found that in 2017 full-time, year-round working women earned 80% of what their male counterparts earned, and that has remained relatively stable over the past 15 years or so (Garf, Brown, & Patten, 2019). Although I am looking at the US, it is important to note that across the globe, women are generally paid lower wages for the same work as their male counterparts. The average wages of men surpass women's wages in both rural and urban areas, even though rural women typically work longer hours than men due to reproductive and domestic responsibilities (Facts and Figures, 2012). The International Monetary Fund elaborates on the current employment disparity: "Not only is female labor force participation lower, but women who are paid for their work are disproportionately employed in the informal sector—especially in developing economies—where employers are subject to fewer regulations, leaving workers more vulnerable to lower wages and job losses" (Dabla-Norris & Kochhar, 2019). IMF explains this phenomenon is not distinct to the informal sector, but in the formal sector, women still earn less than their male counterparts. In other countries, such as Benin and Tanzania, women work on an average 17.4 and 14 hours, respectively, more than men per week, yet their

pay does not reflect the longer hours. Women will do the same work as men for less, and in many cases, they will work longer hours for less.

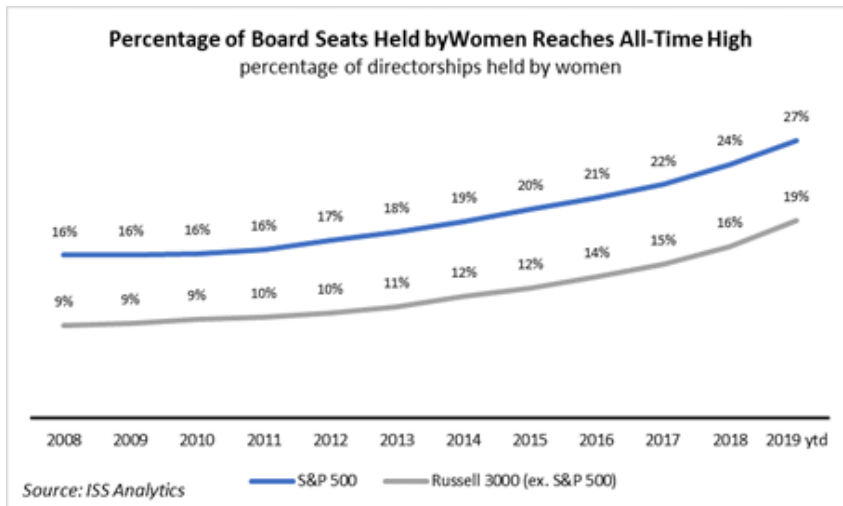
Not only is the gender pay gap still prevalent in the US, but there is also a large discrepancy among women in leadership positions in the corporate realm. Although data indicates women's leadership is reaching an all-time high for women in the corporate world, high is a relative term given women in corporate leadership positions still fall substantially behind males. It is important to note this all-time high has risen from the base point of zero female leadership positions in the US. The share of female CEOs of Fortune 500 companies peaked in 2017 at 6.4%, with thirty-two women heading major firms. Pew Research shows that the number of women serving as leaders in Fortune 500 companies fell to 4.8% in 2018 (The Data on Women Leaders). The Pew Research data also shows that there were no female CEOs on the Fortune 500 list as recently as 1995.



However, the share of women sitting on the boards of Fortune 500 companies increased from 9.6% in 1995 to 22.2% in 2017 (The Data on Women Leaders).



A Harvard report on “U.S. Board Diversity Trends in 2019” reveals that women directorship positions have been growing for the Russell 3000 and S&P 500 companies in the past ten years. The report shows that 19% of all Russell 3000 board seats and 24% of S&P 500 board seats were held by women in 2018. The Harvard report reveals, “As of July 2019, each company in the S&P 500 has at least one woman on its board” (Mishra). The graph below shows the increase in women representation in boardrooms:



The data reveals the smallest growth in Fortune 500 female CEOs, which coincides with the fact, that by 2020 there has yet to be a female president or vice-president of the US. What this data could be telling us is that America is fine with placing women in leadership roles when

they are not the sole-decision maker as an executive of a company versus sitting on a board.

Maybe this is because historically in America women have been excluded from the political and corporate realm. Although this is changing, women still face resistance as men have shaped the image of a leader to align with masculine stereotypes that contradict societal female values. The corporate institutional framework was originally designed by males to promote males.

Nonetheless, women are overcoming systematic hurdles to reach top positions. However, just because women are groundbreaking into the historically male glorified position of CEO, is this a good measure to determine women's advancement or quality of life within society? Also, do women rising to these positions tell us anything at all? Are there external motives, besides a woman's desire, to promote women to top-tier leadership positions? "U.S. Board Diversity Trends in 2019" analyzes factors contributing to the rise in women directorships, such as investor demand and policies promoting gender diversity. This report explains that many large investors are becoming more vocal about gender diverse boardrooms and shareholder proxy advisors are starting to make adverse recommendations at all-male boards starting in 2020 to nominate more female board members to be presented before their shareholders or investors (Mishra). The report, however, fails to mention an unfortunate and recent phenomenon that has started to occur in the boardroom: tokenism. Tokenism refers to the practice of corporate boards adding a single woman to appear to have gender diversity rather than adding a woman based on her merits. Though the "U.S. Board Diversity Trends in 2019" report mentions that every company in the S&P 500 has at least one woman on their boards, the report does not distinguish whether some of the companies are exercising tokenism to appease their investors or if they are truly making changes to have greater women representations on their boards to add value. Although tokenism is problematic in determining the change in corporate culture regarding

women, there are no metrics currently in place to recognize whether tokenism is occurring in boardrooms and why women are being nominated to serve of corporate boards.

Unfortunately, recent data now indicates a stagnation of women representation in boardrooms and in other leadership positions. Although women representation has increased from historically zero representation in boardrooms, the degree at which women are entering these positions is flattening. Harvard Business Review's article on corporate governance explains this phenomenon:

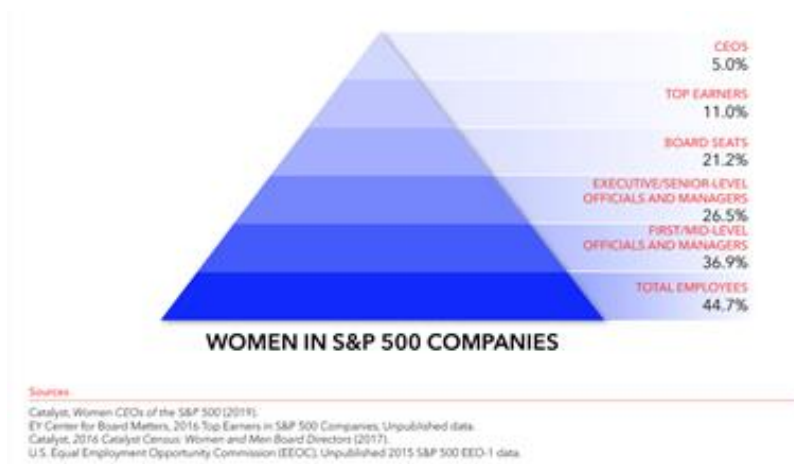
And yet the progress remains slow. Women hold just 24% of S&P 500 board seats, up only 3 percentage points since 2012, despite constituting 47% of the US workforce and driving 70% to 80% of consumer spending everything from food and electronics to healthcare and financial services. We're also seeing signs of "diversity fatigue": 52% of the directors in our survey say they think diversity efforts are motivated by political correctness, and 48% believe shareholders are too preoccupied with diversity. (Loop and DeNicola)

PwC's 2019 Annual Corporate Directors Survey elaborates on this "diversity fatigue" and the dwindling support for women directors despite the fact, "large majorities say that it [gender diversity] brings unique perspectives, enhances board performance, improves relationships with investors and even enhances company performance" (PwC's 2019 Annual Corporate Directors Survey). The survey proves director support for diverse boardrooms is falling as it lists the following statistics: "Only 38% of directors say that gender diversity is very important to their boards, down from 46% in 2018... 63% of directors say investors devote too much attention to board gender diversity, up from 35% last year" (PwC's 2019 Annual Corporate Directors Survey).

PwC's survey and the Harvard Business Review article are among the many articles expressing the fact that some managers acknowledge the benefits associated with a diverse boardroom and then fail to take action to receive these benefits. With institutional stakeholders and lawmakers demanding gender diversity, along with a director consensus that board diversity reaps benefits, it is interesting that gender diversity is stagnating. I think this data points to the fact there is widespread sexism in the corporate realm. Rather the sexism is deeply ingrained or merely within the subconscious, there is some degree of resistance to female leadership despite proven benefits. That is not to say the sexism originates from men alone, but the historical systematic exclusion of women has undoubtedly shaped individuals outlook on women leadership today. From this data, one could infer that the sharp rise and then plateau in women directorships could have been a direct reflection of widespread tokenism. It is hard to determine whether corporations view women as value-adding assets or a "token" to represent diversity.

Though reports display growth of women representation on boards, women hold relatively few seats of the total directorship positions available. The number of women holding board seats is not reflective of the number of women in the labor force or women in management positions. *Catalyst* research shows that women make up 46.9% of the total labor force in the United States. For the US graduating class of 2016-2017, women earned more than half of bachelor's degrees (57.3%), master's degrees (59.4%), and doctorate degrees (53.3%). In the same year, women also earned 50.7% of all professional degrees, including: 49.6% of degrees in law (LLB or JD) and 47.4% of degrees in medicine (MD). Women have consistently earned more bachelor's degrees than men since 1982, more master's degrees than men since 1987, and more doctorate degrees than men since 2006 (*Women in the Workforce – United States: Quick Take*). Women also held 51.5% of all management, professional, and related occupations in

2018. However, as shown in the following graph women are less represented as job tiers get higher:



A specific question appears repeatedly in the research: why do so few women hold board seats despite considerable research and growing literature indicating the potential benefits of gender diversity in the boardroom? Is this telling about the current experience for women in America? Research consistently shows evidence that a corporation profits when it takes advantage of gender diversity, specifically in decision-making positions. Not only does gender diversity in boardrooms lead to evidence of stronger financial performance, but a gender diverse board greater reflects a company’s consumer base. Additionally, research shows, “companies with at least one female director are 38% less likely to have to restate their financial-performance figures in order to correct errors than companies with all-male boards are” (Andrews, Luo and Vamsi).

In their article “Continuing the conversation: questioning the who, what and when of leaning in,” Arnold and Loughlin acknowledge gender stereotypes that “form subtle systematic barriers to the advancement of significant numbers of women” to senior leadership roles (Arnold and Loughlin, 2019). According to Arnold and Loughlin, “stereotypes of gender and leadership have been identified in the literature, tend to be consistent across time, and are resistant to

change. This ‘stickiness’ comes from both the ‘rigidity of people’s belief systems’ and the slow pace of change in terms of the positions that women occupy in society” (Arnold and Loughlin, 2019). Resistance to change is a major problem for women who desire to rise to leadership positions given their historical domestic, inferior role in society. Reviewing the literature, these gender stereotypes are “think manager—think male,” the glass cliff, and childcare.

“Think manager—think male” refers to how feminine gender stereotypes and leadership stereotypes do not necessarily align, creating barriers for women seeking senior leadership positions. Women are stereotyped as “communal” and men are stereotyped as “agentic,” a trait more commonly associated with leadership. Arnold and Loughlin explain, “gender stereotypes are problematic not only because they are descriptive but also because they are prescriptive: representing expectations on how men and women *should be*” (Arnold and Loughlin, 2019).

When men and women fail to act in accordance with their social stereotypes, they can experience “backlash” effects and employment discrimination. Not only do social stereotypes inhibit women from reaching senior leadership positions, but the divergence from expectations associated with gendered behavior can “influence how performance is evaluated and rewarded.” Arnold and Loughlin further elaborate on the negative effects of gender stereotypes: “Consequently, the prediction is that women will experience greater challenges the higher they rise in an organizational hierarchy—a prediction that would appear to be supported, given the very low percentage of CEOs of S&P 500 companies who are women...female employees are perceived as less likable when successful in a traditionally male role” (Arnold and Loughlin, 2019).

The glass cliff theory, developed in 2004 by two British professors, Michelle K. Ryan and Alexander Haslam of the University of Exeter, is the phenomenon that women are more likely to be promoted in times of crisis or when there is a high likelihood of failure. Examining

data from the London Stock Exchange, these professors found that companies were more likely to appoint women to their boards when they were performing poorly (Arnold and Loughlin, 2019). Consistently, the “glass cliff” phenomenon has been exemplified as companies promote female leadership in times of crisis. Research shows that women are more likely than men to be chosen for “roles that are risky and come with a high probability of failure” (Arnold and Loughlin, 2019). I think there are a couple probable reasons for the glass cliff phenomenon. Due to the fact, women face greater systematic hurdles due to their sex and the stereotypes generally associated with their sex, women who desire to lead a company are more likely to take on a leadership role in a precarious time as it might be their only opportunity to lead. Another reason could be that people believe women have stereotypical traits that would make them better at navigating a company during trying times, such as communication skills and ethical behavior.

Lastly, their article explains that women are viewed as caregivers: “think caregiver—think female.” Countless times, women are passed up for promotions due to the expectation that women will be missing more work than their male counterparts due to childbirth. This theory speaks to a lot of underlying issues for women within the corporate world. For instance, since corporate institutions were designed by men, the design intrinsically hurts, punishes, women for their role in childbirth. The system does not allow for women to succeed because it does not account for women’s biological needs. Although women are rising within this corporate sphere and cultural perceptions are slowly changing, the corporate institutions are not changing with it.

Due to the obstacles women face on their way to top leadership positions and the underrepresentation of women serving in governing roles, US states and other countries have begun to enact laws requiring gender quotas in politics and on corporate boards. In 2018, California passed legislation requiring public companies headquartered in California to have at

least one woman on their boards beginning in 2019, and at least three women board members by 2021 for boards with six or more members (Mishra). This law was the first of its kind in the US to require a certain quota of women board members, and most directors (83%) have expressed with opposition as they “don’t believe forcing diversity through laws is the best way to actually make their boards diverse” (PwC’s 2019 Annual Corporate Directors Survey). Equally it has been noted that this opposition is not specific to males since approximately 54% of female directors do not agree that there should be a legal quota (PwC’s 2019 Annual Corporate Directors Survey). Other states may follow suit as Massachusetts, New Jersey and Illinois are working on laws similar to California’s mandatory quota (Mishra). However, these mandates may be struck down by the courts. Prior to U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg becoming a justice, she stated in the 1970s that laws that purportedly “help” one gender might inadvertently reinforce anticipated stereotypes about that group. Do women need help to get these positions assuming they are often unable to obtain such positions based on their own merit? Although some women are proving their success in boardrooms, the current corporate structure does not reward merit. As seen above, there are systematic hurdles that inhibit women advancing to top positions on merit alone. If the system, which historically rewarded men based on merit, does not do the same for women, then changes to the system must be made either legally or internally within the corporate and political spheres.

This research begs the question: is the rise in women’s corporate influence truly changing the experience for American women? Is measuring a woman’s corporate influence indicative of women’s overall advancement? Is this a good scale to monitor women’s progress given that this corporate structure is a byproduct of men? If women created the corporate system from the ground up, I am sure this data and the way researchers analyzed women’s experience in this

realm would look significantly different. For example, women might measure corporate success by a woman's ability to have both the family size and career path of her choosing without having to sacrifice one or the other. In the current system, women are not rewarded on merit. Based on this data, one could make the argument that women are automatically disenfranchised from the systems preventing absolute parity because women did not create these systems. The necessity to enact legislative quotas proves that the current systems and structures in place naturally deter women from participating. The analysis of US corporate structures further supports Hickel's critique cited earlier in this thesis regarding the "girl effect" project with the goal to empower women and achieve equality. Hickel argues that the "girl effect" project ignores structural and institutional drivers that exclude women. Measuring women's corporate influence will never be an appropriate measure of women's advancement until the corporate systems are redefined altogether, rather than just rise through the ranks of the male-developed corporate institutions.

Arnold and Loughlin's research reveals history's effect on the development of corporate roles today. Though women are becoming corporate leaders, the historical identities imposed on women and the historical male-designed structures hinder women from truly and naturally progressing as men have been able to do. The corporate system must be broken down and rebuilt in order for data relating to women's corporate influence to be meaningful. It needs to be a system that does not only reward men based on merit but redefines gender values and ideals as well.

Chapter IV: Educational Advancement

Across the globe, the education level of a woman is a common metric to analyze a woman's experience and progress. Researchers use this information as an indicator of women's quality of life or advancement especially in undeveloped nations. Although this thesis looks at US data for other metrics, I think it is important to look at the research that examines education levels in countries where compulsory education is not enforced. I am specifically looking at countries with larger educational disparities because in these countries, lack of access to education adversely affects girls. That is not to say some of the same issues do not persist in America, because they do. However, I am going to examine what this research looks like in places where girls and boys face the greatest educational disparities, see what this research tells us, and analyze the appropriateness of this metric.

Women make up 50% of the human population, yet due to gender violence, absence of legal rights and security, social disparity, political underrepresentation, and countless other factors, women are often unable to receive an education (Kristof, 2009). Researchers report that refusing girls an education is a common method to repress women in today's world. Around the globe, girls face greater barriers to education than their male counterparts. Whether sons are chosen over daughters to receive an education due to limited financial means or girls are tasked with performing the unpaid labor and domestic duties in their families, girls have unequal access to education. According to UNESCO estimates, "130 million girls between the ages of 6 and 17 are out of school and 15 million girls of primary school age, half of them in sub-Saharan Africa, will never enter a classroom" (Part 1: Debates and Questions Last Week House of Commons: Girls' Education, 2018). Though women make up two-thirds of the world's illiterate people, the illiteracy rate in some countries, including in Sub-Saharan Africa, runs as high as 60 to 80

percent. Researchers have found that countries that do not prioritize the education of girls generally prevent women from entering the workforce. Education is instrumental in determining one's future employment opportunities because it provides basic academic skills that are requirements for many jobs, such as reading, writing, and arithmetic. Education allows one to have more optionality in career paths as it provides a larger set of skills. If countries' political and corporate institutions and structures were different and money was guaranteed, maybe education would not be a key factor to a healthy and productive life. Not only is education influential in shaping one's future, but "data from 68 countries indicates that a woman's education is a key factor in determining a child's survival...Children of mothers with no education in the Latin American and Caribbean region are 3.1 times more likely to die than those with mothers who have secondary or tertiary education, and 1.6 more likely to die than those whose mothers have primary-level education" (Facts and Figures, 2012). I believe this is because education is empowering to women and men. Without access to education, women do not have complete agency to choose their own path and make their own choices. Without education, employment is harder to obtain, and therefore, feeding and caring for a child is harder to manage financially. I believe these two factors are just a couple of the many reasons why education correlates directly to the health and survival of children.

Another reason that researchers look to education as a metric to gauge a women's experience is because education directly relates to lower child marriages and lower teen pregnancies. Researchers have found child marriage and maternal mortality are two common factors that deter women from receiving an education. Today, more than 700 million women alive were married before the age of eighteen. One in three of these women were married before the age of 15 (UNICEF, 2014). When girls are uneducated, they tend to marry earlier, with or

without consent, and have more children, adversely enhancing their health risks. Adolescent pregnancies are increasingly common: “every year, an estimated 21 million girls aged 15-19 years in developing regions become pregnant and approximately 12 million of them give birth,” which is not including the large percentage of girls who become pregnant and give birth under the age of 15 (Adolescent pregnancy, 2020). Adolescent pregnancies and child marriages fuel the leading cause of death for adolescent girls in the world today as “complications during pregnancy are the leading cause of death for 15-19-year-old girls globally” (Adolescent pregnancy, 2020). Younger mothers are also at higher risks for complications during pregnancies: “Adolescent mothers (Ages 10-19 years) face higher risks of eclampsia, puerperal endometritis, and systemic infections than women aged 20-24 years, and babies of adolescent mothers face higher risks of low birth weight, preterm delivery and severe neonatal conditions” (Adolescent pregnancy, 2020). Most cases of maternal mortality are completely preventable with the right knowledge and resources. That is why 94% of all maternal deaths occur in low and lower middle-income countries because higher-income countries have the resources to combat this problem. Education counteracts teen pregnancies: “In developing countries, increased schooling for girls is the top reason why teen childbearing has dropped in the last 20 to 30 years...According to AGI, long-term efforts to promote education for girls have paid dividends... The higher a woman’s level of education, the more likely she’ll delay marriage and parenthood” (Feldmann, L., 1997). UNICEF reiterates this theme: “Empowered and educated girls are better able to nourish and care for their children, leading to healthier, smaller families” (UNICEF, 2014).

Researchers analyze female educational to gauge the quality of women’s lives because often when women cannot receive an education, it is due to gender violence, gendercide, or

human trafficking. Across the globe, girls face unheartening circumstances that result in forced abandonment from their homes, families, and potential education. For example, girls are kidnapped and trafficked into brothels or are raped and killed for merely being a girl. Research reveals there is an unknown number of missing women in the world today due to girls falling victim to human trafficking or gendercide: “demographers have shown there are currently anywhere between sixty to one-hundred million missing females in the current population” (Kristof, 2009). Amartya Sen, a Nobel Prize-winning economist and Professor of Economics and Philosophy at Harvard University, estimates that there are more than 100 million women missing: “Professor Sen found, is that about 107 million females are missing from the globe today” (Kristof, 2009). In addition, experts expect, “every year, at least another 2 million girls worldwide disappear because of gender discrimination” (Kristof, 2009). From sex-trafficking to murder, there is no excuse for why girls are disappearing at such an expedited rate. One root cause of all the missing women is gendercide: genocide against a particular gender, women and girls. In the last half century alone, experts believe, “more girls were discriminated to death, than all the people killed in all the battlefields in the 20th century” (Chermayeff, 2012). Kristof and WuDunn assert, “It appears that more girls have been killed in the last fifty years, precisely because they were girls, than men were killed in all the wars of the twentieth century. More girls are killed in this routine ‘gendercide’ in any one decade than people were slaughtered in all the genocides of the twentieth century.” In India alone, for every 914 girls there are 1000 boys and every 1 in 4 girls in India does not live past puberty: “All told, girls in India from one to five years of age are 50 percent more likely to die than boys the same age. The best estimate is that a little Indian girl dies from discrimination every four minutes” (Kristof, 2009). Another shocking statistic Kristof and WuDunn assert is “girls and women aged 15-44 are more likely to be killed

or maimed at the hands of men than die from cancer, malaria, and war combined” (Kristof, 2009). When girls do not have access to education, they are more likely to become victims of human trafficking, gender-based violence, or death.

Another leading cause preventing the education of women is that women remain the sole carriers of the burden to perform the unpaid labor in the world. Girls cannot attend school when they are tasked with the duty of collecting water for their family, a time-consuming, labor-intensive task. The UN reports, “Women in sub-Saharan Africa collectively spend about 40 billion hours a year collecting water. Per week, women in Guinea collect water for 5.7 hours, compared to 2.3 hours for men; in Sierra Leone women spend 7.3 compared to 4.5 hours for men; and in Malawi this figure is 9.1 compared to 1.1 hours. This significantly impacts women's employment opportunities” (Facts and Figures, 2012). Though women and girls are often imposed with the task to collect water or perform other domestic chores, this unpaid labor simultaneously takes away from the time and energy that could go towards education or paid labor. Although some girls have managed to perform the unpaid labor and maintain their education, more often, girls are unable to fulfil both roles. Although unpaid labor is an entirely unique reason that prevents girls from receiving an education, requiring girls to perform the unpaid labor overlaps with the presiding issues mentioned above—girls across the globe experience extreme hatred and reap the consequences. It begs the question: what is behind this hatred of women? There is no other explanation besides an underlying disdain for women given that the main commonality among the reasons girls cannot receive education is linked to experiences of their sex—things that disproportionately happen more to girls: sex trafficking, child marriage, sex discrimination, and unpaid labor, to name a few. However, this prevailing

gender disparity is not limited to developing countries, but gender disparity and an uneven distribution of family care responsibilities persists in every region of the world.

Examining educational factors is a metric commonly used to determine women's advancement in underdeveloped nations. However, though education is important, it does not encompass other institutional factors inhibiting women's progress. Education is essential, but as a metric determining women's advancement, the research does not answer the main questions regarding women's fulfillment and true progress within society. Education level does not equate to a women's true state within it a country. That is not to discount educational research, as it is very important, but it does not comprise all the elements that contribute to women's progress. However, out of all the metrics, I would argue education is at least the one that comes closest to measuring the progress of women. Education is essential to the empowerment and advancement of women. However, this educational metric cannot be analyzing numbers and statistics, but it also needs to examine what is being taught. If the structures and systems are ever going to change, it is going to involve educating the newest generations differently.

Conclusion

After analyzing four commonly used metrics—economic affluence, political influence, corporate influence, and educational attainment—to determine how much progress women have made for themselves in society, we, women, need to ask the question, are these adequate metrics? Is what we are trying to measure even measurable? How can we measure the progress women have made when the metrics we use are male-centric metrics? If we are examining women through a male's lens, using male metrics, are we ever going to produce the results we want?

Throughout this thesis, data shows women have room for improvement in economic, political, corporate, and educational areas of research, but will improving this data, raising the statistics, or having women reach desired benchmarks change anything materially for women? All this research is good in the sense that it gives some insight into the experience of women, but at some point, we must look at what the purpose of this research is.

I am fully aware there is problem trying to analyze in any general way how women stand. The measurements currently being used to gauge the progress of women's lives are inadequate because they cannot encompass all the factors that contribute to being a woman: our history, our unreal loyalties, and the million other factors that make women, women. The current measurements still analyze women as if they are a binary thing. How, then, are we going to change materially the status of women if our current measurements are futile?

To adequately regulate the state of women, it must be done in very different ways than we regulate men. We can no longer use all the measures produced by this masculine political economy that value progress and success by male standards. We not only need new terminology and new metrics that do not measure success and progress in the masculine sense of the words,

but we must establish new systems, new rules, new scales to truly capture whether women have a world of their own.

First and foremost, we need to restructure education; nothing is going to be changed unless it is first changed at the base. Kids are raised and taught to tolerate the old structures and young girls are encouraged to progress and rise in these outdated systems, but there needs to be new systems and new histories written. I think an important issue for women's progress is the absence of education we receive about women's role in shaping the world we live in. Often, women's influence is lost to the mists of time because we are not taught about it in history classes and people do not write books about it either. In 1805, Mercy Otis Warren was the first American woman to have her account of history published, *History of the American Revolution*, but John Adams, a former US president, wrote to a friend regarding her work, "History is not the province of ladies" and this reflects a belief shared by many time and time again as women have been almost entirely removed from history accounts (Zagarri, 1995). This is not distinct to the US, but across the globe, history has been written by men and the role of women has been nearly absent from the texts. How are women to have a nation if they are absent from literature encompassing the history of their nation? The fact is, throughout history, women were not absent at all. Yet, educational systems and male political systems have removed women from the dialogues and accounts. Education is a key factor to changing gender stereotypes, but not just any education, but an educational system that challenges the current systems and institutions.

I acknowledge this thesis is filled with questions, and many of these questions are unanswerable. However, that is the point. This is a questioning thesis and I would argue that there are no answers because that is how the system is currently designed. The hundreds of year-old structures do not allow for answers. Rather, the purpose of this thesis is to ask tough

questions about what is going on in the world and to question what we are doing by using these measurements to gauge the quality of women's lives. Though these questions do not have answers, there is value in raising them.

If I were looking at this from, say, my own experience growing up in a matrilineal home, I would go a very different route and look at entirely different metrics than what people use today. I was raised by a household of five women spanning four generations, so I would not start counting quotas or measuring the percentage of women in certain positions. I would look at ways to measure fulfillment rather than achievement. I would look at how much control a woman has over her own body, specifically how much reproductive autonomy she has. I would look at a woman's ability to pursue her desires despite gender stereotypes. I would look at whether women have agency in their decisions. I have never liked any of the approaches described in this thesis. They are byproducts of propaganda, of historical ways to determine progress and success. Rather than looking at facts and figures, I would attempt to measure a woman's ability to feel at home in the world she lives in. I would look at the full scope of her life, her choices, her freedom. I would look at her sufficiency and security in self-activity, not how many degrees she has or how much money she has earned.

To determine if women have a world in an agential way, we must look at whether women feel as if they have a home in the world and agency in their decisions. Rather than requiring women to mold themselves to fit the role within these masculine institutions, the institutional framework needs to change altogether. However, that is not to say the structures have not begun to shift. There is a question as to whether one can measure the impact increased participation of women in the economic or political sphere has had not on women themselves, but on the structures and systems that determine how we all live and measure progress.

I acknowledge this thesis requires a post-human phase of thinking because the categories we are currently using do not work. We can no longer look at the problem as a binary, man-woman issue, because this will no longer work. The data itself is the problem, and until we get away from this deeply ingrained gendered, sexist political economy, the questions will remain unanswered. This is what I am calling to attention.

As a twenty-two-year-old college graduate who has just finished two degrees, I can confidently say my education was just as traditional as ever, and this is why I am writing. Except for a couple of classes, my education did not challenge the ways our current structures, institutions, and systems function, but rather further upholstered it. In my four years of higher-level education, few teachers asked questions about the systems in place or the way the world works. I had a few extraordinary teachers who challenged me to question the world I live in and analyze who I am as a woman, but most of my peers did not have the same experience. More often than not, I learned about women in terms of statistics and numbers where I was hardly prodded with questions regarding whether women have a home within this world. Though, as a woman, I was encouraged to trailblaze into male-dominated careers, few teachers encouraged me to question the male-establishments and structures we operate in. However, those few teachers who did encourage me to question the way the world operates taught me more than I could ever learn in a subject class alone.

Moving forward into the world, I am going to take the questions raised within this thesis and continue to seek answers and ask more questions. I am going to start looking at new metrics to determine success and progress because it is apparent the old methods are not working and are bound by unreal loyalties. I am going to engage in tough conversations about women's place within this world and at least get the ball rolling in individual's minds. I am going to release

myself from the unreal loyalties that provide unreal goals and benchmarks for women across the globe. I am going to be one of the many women working to change these measures because eventually these measures will change as they do not capture our experiences as women. I have no doubt that one day, when women get significant influence, women will successfully create new structures and new metrics that will adequately answer the question: do women have a world in an agential way?

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Biography

Elizabeth Owen is from Memphis, Tennessee and graduated from The University of Texas at Austin in May 2020. She received her Bachelor of Business Administration in May 2020 and will be receiving her Bachelor of Arts in August 2020. In college, Elizabeth double majored in Business Finance and Plan II Honors. Elizabeth has been inspired by her unique upbringing as she was raised exclusively by five women spanning four generations. The strong women in her life instilled in Elizabeth a passion for women empowerment which she will carry with her into every job and future endeavor. In August 2020, Elizabeth will be taking her talents to Barclays Capital Inc. where she will be starting full-time as Investment Banking Analyst in Houston, Texas.