

Incorporating Men into Vietnamese Gender Studies¹

Dr. Jack D. Harris

Hobart and William Smith Colleges

This paper introduces a men's studies approach to Vietnamese gender studies. It explains the value of incorporating studies of men's lives and experiences into gender and women's studies. It argues that the study of gendered conflict and power is necessary to understanding Vietnamese gender relations. This understanding must be contextualized within the social processes of negotiation, cooperation, and reconciliation that are so essential to the cultural fabric of Vietnamese social life. This approach, which integrates women and men's studies, can have effective theoretical and practical consequences for changing men's relationships to men and women in both private and public spheres. It integrates men as partners in a movement for social change that seeks expanded roles for women in all sectors of the society, expanded roles for men in family life, and includes men as critical participants in solving current gender and social problems.

Vietnam is now deep into the first phase of "renovation" in which it is moving to a market economy under socialist principles. Gender equality as a concept and a reality has had some attention by the State, through laws and by the work of the Women's Union, which is tied to State and Party apparatus. An additional source of change has been economic forces, even more than women's political or social movements. The process has resulted in both positive and encouraging changes in gender relations of work, family and public participation, but the Vietnamese recognize that there are also negative aspects that are a great cause for concern. From the Vietnamese feminist point-of-view, positive features of change include expanded roles for women in household economies (mainly shops attached to the home), artistic, scientific, and management activities and roles, and a more genuine recognition of the importance of the social roles of women, especially as women negotiate family and work life. Yet Vietnamese feminists have also noted several negative consequences of "renovation" include the "marketizing" of the family, the strain of interrelationships between family members, specifically between the two genders, and between generations. In many cases, women and children have fared poorly in spite of claims to social progress -- domestic abuse, poor working conditions, and secondary status in relation to males to name several -- have created significant social stress. There is a purposeful awareness that there is no returning to the past and that, moreover, Vietnamese women did not fare well in the traditional structures. Le Thi Nam Tuyet shares an example of this dilemma when she writes that:

Today in Vietnam, the power structure of man as head of household related to private property or means of production no longer exists. In the process of development and progress of new family relationships, all strict ranking and orders and concepts of respect for men and none for women have been disappearing....

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It can possibly be said that it was a weakness of strategy, resulting in a conflicting change between developing changes of family structure and functions and adverse reactions. More realistically, the society has not created material structures necessary to help the family and women.

Another situation of interest is that the principal relationship of the family -- the marriage relationship -- is becoming loose; contradictions between husband and wife have increasingly developed and so had the divorce rate....

.... Broken marriage always carries with it unhappiness for all the members of the family, as well as an immediate series of negative attitudes towards society. And that situation is against the tendency of building up a new family model, a family with everlasting happiness for each individual. (Le Thi Nam Tuyet, 1989)

Vietnamese gender studies has tended to take the approach that the transformation of gender relations will occur naturally in a social ecology, in which Confucian values of the maintenance of cultural equilibrium, unity, harmony, balance, compromise and solidarity comprise the primary ethic of social integration. The other source for this view is Marxist socialism, which invokes an evolutionary claim to revolutionary activity. In this view, the final results of communistic and socialistic revolutionary struggle can be nothing less than social arrangements that provide for the fair and equitable distribution of society's opportunities and rewards to all citizens, regardless of gender. An example of such optimism is expressed in what I call "eco-socialism:"

We have found that there is a **CENTRAL THEME** in the odyssey of Vietnamese women: official moral rules might have been advocated and state laws might have been promulgated to impose inequality on women, but **THE REAL POPULAR CUSTOMS**, nourished by the reality-imposed functions of women, **HAVE CONSISTENTLY SUPPORTED AN EQUAL ROLE FOR VIETNAMESE WOMEN, THUS DEFEATING THE MAN-INSPIRED STEREOTYPES, AND THE LAW EVENTUALLY HAS ALSO TO ADAPT TO THIS EGALITARIAN DRIVE AND GRANTED EQUAL STATUS TO WOMEN** (Tai Van Ta, 1997, her emphases).

As a result of these meta-theoretical assumptions, Vietnamese women's studies have tended to focus on the social problems women face as women. Authentic challenges to understanding patriarchy, men and masculinity, and male resistances to change all but disappear as a sociological issue.² This eco-socialism of harmony stands in opposition to the more Western notion of identity politics, within which groups realize their collective aims in a world of power relations. While there have been many studies of women's lives and family activity, Vietnamese men, their attitudes and behavior, and the practical relation of Vietnamese men's lives and identity in relation to women's lives and identity has disappeared from the data except as allusions or abstractions. There is actually very little documentation about the world of

² Certainly, there are articles that identify patriarchy as a source of gender patterns, but with rare exception they do not examine how patriarchy shapes the world of women *and* men. Nor do they focus on the systemic causes embedded in gender relations themselves rather than the symptoms.

Vietnamese men, their relationships with their families, and their relationships to men and women in both private and public spheres. Quite simply, scholars of gender need to know much more about Vietnamese men as gendered actors than is currently the case.

There is a significant and glaring duality in the scholarship on gender produced by Vietnamese scholars of gender. On the one hand, these scholars have continued to support the immutable centrality and importance of the female in “family happiness,” while on the other hand, they have also argued that women have the duty to play a significant role in the larger public social, economic and political sectors. This complex perspective has created a theoretical and practical tension: It has resulted in the uncritical acceptance and support of Vietnamese women’s “double burden,” and concentrated on women’s rights and women’s welfare, without pointedly examining the dynamics of gender relations of family and work life that would require ***attitudinal and behavioral changes by men***. While wisely rejecting strict application of identity politics and conflict theory, Vietnamese gender scholars have assiduously avoided studying men as gendered beings. Thus, there is no companion volume to Kathleen Barry’s excellent Vietnam’s Women in Transition (Barry, 1996) that explores men and masculinity.

Almost universally, the human life-world has existed as forms of patriarchy,³ in which social structure and organization, more or less, force social activities and social relationships to be male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered (Johnson, 1995). Patriarchy is *male-dominated* insofar that it creates power differences between men and women based on gender alone. Men shape the culture to their own collective interests, such as laws that favor men’s rights over women’s rights. Patriarchy allows men to assert their superiority over women, which results in men claiming that it is legitimate that they occupy favored social positions and that women occupy subordinate ones. For example, as Sieglinde Gassman, recent Director of Catholic Relief Services Vietnam reports, it remains the case that:

Savings and credit as being implemented in Vietnam does not give women strategic power. They gain confidence, learn how to manage scarce resources and plan for the future. However, their role in decision-making and resources remains at the household level (Gassman, 1998).

Patriarchy is *male-identified* insofar that it creates the ideas that core cultural ideals about what is good, desirable and preferable are embedded in the masculine and not the feminine (Johnson, 1995). It is not surprising that the birth of boys remains preferred over girls in Vietnam, or that wives are expected to be subordinate to their husbands.

Patriarchy is *male-centered* insofar that the focus of attention is primarily on men and their activities (Johnson, 1995). It is not surprising that in Vietnam, as in America, male work is rewarded more than female work, and that it is seen as more valued. It is not surprising that men tend to dominate conversations in public and are the focus when entertaining family guests. Thus, Vietnamese patriarchy is one in which men maintain power and privilege, and claim these

³ This is not to say that all social worlds are patriarchal. Interestingly, matriarchy (sometimes matrilineal, sometimes matrilineal, and sometimes both) has been identified as the structure of several ethnic tribal groups residing in Vietnam such as the Cham, Chu Ru, E de, Gia Rai, Mnong, and Raglai (Vietnam News Agency, Vietnam: Image of the Community of 54 Ethnic Groups, The Ethnic Cultures Publishing House, Hanoi, 1996).

as rights because they provide production, protection, and “responsibility.” Ironically, in the public sphere, male activity can range from leading other men to the most de-based subordination by other men. But as heads of families, the role of the Vietnamese man has been that of a king.

Females have routinely submitted to the task of what Kenneth Boulding has termed “integrity” (Boulding, 1980). Women create female networks and support systems that provide, out of love or duty, services to the entire community that are integrative, centripetal, stabilizing and conserving. Often these activities are about protection from harm, or loss, or grief and so on. Someone had to take care of infants and children, and the task has been almost universally assigned to women. A considerable portion of females -- mothers, grandmothers, sisters, aunts and cousins -- are engaged in feeding, cleaning, teaching, amusing, healing, protecting, quieting and disciplining of small infants and children. In addition, women take care of men. What irony it is that women have been traditionally socialized to be and act dependent, even helpless in so many world cultures, and yet once married, she must cater to the dependency of the man to whom she has been committed, or to whom she has committed herself. Surely women have been and still are more economically dependent than men, institutional arrangements having forced them to be so. Nevertheless, as Jessie Bernard has pointed out in her book, The Future of Marriage (Bernard, 1982), men are more often psychologically dependent on the wife and it is men who benefit from being married, becoming quite dependent on their spouse’s physical and emotional care for their well being. The wife, reared to expect her dependency to be rewarded, finds herself in a position where she must fulfill the dependency needs of her husband, but often enough, finds her own needs unmet. Finally, as is the case in Vietnam, women often work outside of households. Perhaps, in some ancient time, there was an authentic honoring of women and women’s work. But women’s household economies have since been rendered invisible. Since industrialization, productive activities are not considered by the powers that be to be work unless they are paid. And while women are a valuable and crucial pool to the free market economy, they are under-valued as laborers. So working women take all the burdens -- they sacrifice at home, and they sacrifice at work.

Almost all third-world national movements, including Vietnam’s, have had important feminist components, ones that shared an anti-colonial impetus while embracing the false freedom of missionary Christianity and French libertarianism, and modern capitalism or socialism. These early feminists embraced democracy and equal rights (both of which too frequently they have still failed to win), but also critical feminisms about family, childcare and work. Imagine the surprise that the successful male nationalists must have experienced upon assuming power: it was easy to see the oppression of women when it was the result of colonial governments, employers and colonial men -- these were the same institutions and persons who oppressed them. But what happened when women took these revolutionary men to task, claiming that they too were oppressors of women? After the revolution, where did all of the women go?

There has been no renovated soul of man under socialism, or under Western capitalism either. Do not look toward the west for resolution. As R.W. Connell points out, “on a global scale, the most profound change is the export of the European/American gender order to the colonized world.” There have been no studies of how French colonialism in Indochina, or how the

behavior of American soldiers during the American war affected the image of masculinity and changed the behavior of Vietnamese men, *as men* (Connell, 1995, p. 199).

Male-dominated, male-centered, and male-interested colonialism, and later modern economic and industrial development, both capitalist and socialist, has disrupted the lives of men and women. These have often sundered the traditional world of men and women, usually a world of agricultural production, and of family integration. The basic reforms that involved freeing women from pre-colonial and pre-capitalist social constraints, mainly giving them more freedom of mobility, bringing them out of seclusion and facilitating their work outside the home and land, were in keeping with modern forms of economic production. Owners needed workers, on the plantations, in the textile mills and in other forms of light manufacturing. In their work places the structures of control were male-dominated and replicated the domestic situation. At the end of the workday, women returned to their homes, bound by the darkness of night, and bound by the traditional ideologies of male domination. Arlie Hochschild, an American feminist sociologist, has documented the North American version of women's liberation: more often than not, after a hard day of work outside of the home, the woman worker returns to her family to begin her "second shift," (Hochschild, 1990) taking care of her husband, children, and the household work. The husband enjoys his male privileges. Is it not the same in Vietnam?

Modern mass economic and political developments, both capitalist and socialist, have shaped the mobile nuclear family, have taken women first from their homes and villages and placed them in cities and factories, only to be followed later by male factory labor. These forces changed the conditions of men and women from status to contract, from obligation to wage earner. These forces have driven men and women to be consumed by and consumers of the cash-nexus. In her book, Cynthia Enloe (1994) argues that sexism is re-colonizing women. For example, sexism, articulated through male-dominated governments and tourist bureaus sells sex, through female (adult and child) sex workers, to eager businessmen, honored guests who bring investment capital to the hungry economy (note the sex trade in Thailand, and the Vietnamese mail-order brides being sent to Taiwan). Says Enloe, "Sex Tourism is not an anomaly; it is one strand of the gendered tourism industry.... Policy makers in many third-world countries have been encouraged by international advisors to develop service sectors before manufacturing industries mature. Bar hostesses before auto workers, not after." Enloe points out that the male elite of developing countries want to satisfy the male western businessman while capturing his valuable tourist and investment dollars. Capitalism and the free market have no difficulty with either sexual or racial divisions of labor, as long as it is clear who is to be on top, and who is to be on the bottom.

The western paradigm of wage labor and free markets has not trickled down and emancipated the majority of women in the United States or in any other country. Rather, women have been co-opted into a male system in which female labor is understood to be unskilled labor, or second income labor, or part-time without benefits labor, and higher paying jobs are reserved for men. For example, international garment company managers have drawn on several patriarchal assumptions to help them keep wages and benefits low in factories. First, sewing has been defined as something that naturally and traditionally comes to girls and women, therefore it is not a "skill." Second, skilled jobs are reserved for men, such as cutting and pressing, and the running of specialized machines in garment factories. Managers rationalize this sexual division of labor by thinking that these tasks require physical strength only men have. They ignore the

physical demands made on women by housework and farming, and that many of the men are, in fact, weaker than the women. Third, managers imagine women workers are secondary wage earners for their families, assuming that men, fathers and then husbands, are the breadwinners. The case of Vietnam is no different:

Men get access to material/economic advantages from industrial development before women and that produces a gendered time-lag between a rise in men's as compared to women's standards of living. The gendered time-lag sharpens sex stratification of the labor force and it intensifies female subordination in public as well as private (Barry, 1996, p. 9).

The feminist insight that economic exploitation in the free market economy has a gender component is an important one. Just as important is the contemporary feminist realization that Western models of female liberation may not match the female world in other parts of our earth. Women of the Mid East, or women of South East Asia may not find integration into the wage labor force the issue, precisely because they do not envision this entry will significantly change the hierarchical structures which are often significantly rooted in the life of family and village. Indeed, the pressing challenge for feminism is to articulate different objectives and strategies so that such changes that would provide real advantages for the majority of women, and men, and not just male elites.

The free market economy will not by itself address gender issues without self-conscious mobilization on the part of women and men. Female activists have delineated several issues, including the right to self-determination, including access to education, to politics, and to meaningful work and fair pay; but also control over their own bodies including the right to abortion, protection against rape in or out of marriage, protection against domestic violence; and other international issues including property rights, *pardah* (seclusion), *sati* (the practice of burning Hindu widows on the funeral pyres of their husband), dowry death and widow remarriage, resource allocation for women's health, and especially effective child care systems, to name several. In addition, feminists seek liberation from male bias in male attitudes and feelings toward women, and the male bias in human knowledge that has resulted in the denigration of female experience and of the female perspective. Finally, feminists want autonomy and partnership, what sociologist Jesse Bernard's calls "equitable integration" (Bernard, 1987). This means equal access to participation in fundamental social institutions. It means that the boundaries of our gendered worlds will have to be re-defined. It means that we will need to reevaluate the sequence of work, of childbearing and caretaking, for both women and men.

The West provides a model of gender conflict and male *obstruction* to change, a view that is resisted in the current eco-socialist model proffered by Vietnamese feminists and women's studies scholars. There are strong cultural currents that suggest that a full-blown conflict model would not accurately describe Vietnamese gender relations. A persuasive argument has been made that "two structurally opposing male-oriented ('patrilineal') and non-male oriented ('bilateral') models of Vietnamese kinship still persist as the fundamental parameters of household formation and gender relations throughout twentieth-century Vietnam...." (Hy Van Luong, 1989). However, Hy indicates that:

...the data on the structure of kinship and gender relations in twentieth-century northern Vietnam points to a remarkable continuity in the structural parameters of Vietnamese kinship, despite significant achievements of women in the public domain and the weakening of the corporate patrilineage (Hy Van Luong, 1989).

Scholars can point to some progress: In the cities families are practicing family planning. Today, “the number of men sharing the burden of housework with their wives has increased, particularly when women are busy with their work to earn incomes for the families” (Le Thi in Le Thi and Do Thi Binh, 1997, p. 334). The Research Centre for Gender, Family and Environment in Development (CGFED) in Hanoi has implemented its first curriculum on gender for teachers and practitioners of change under the guidance of Professor Le Thi Nam Tuyet. The new Vietnamese “good husband” shares in the responsibility for “family happiness:” He is a good citizen with a good reputation, he provides economic and social care for his wife and children, *and* supports the social and economic life of his wife, demonstrated by his showing confidence in her abilities and taking some of the domestic burden. The task is to nurture equality and equity in gender relations while embracing male-female difference.

Given the ambitious projects of women scholars, the Women’s Union and the State, it makes sense to find out how men will react and act toward significant proposals that can change the face of gender relations in Vietnam. ***What does it mean to be a Vietnamese man?*** Do men perceive “benefit” from changing gender roles? How have changing women’s roles affected men? Do men experience pressure to change, and what are the sources of resistance to change? For example, what is it about *male experience* that accounts for the systematic sexism by men toward women, resulting in “80% of female laborers [having] low or no professional skills...,” or the increase in the illiteracy rate for women “to 17.69% in 1992 as against 8.6% for men,” or the low level of female participation in People’s Councils and Peoples Committees of less than 15% (Le Thi in Le Thi and Do Thi Binh, 1997, p. 325-336). Why have women been “left behind in education, training, science and technology as ... post-graduate education, the proportion of women decreased significantly within the last 10 years (1984-1995) although the quantity increased from 3-4 times?” (Dang Thanh Le, 1997). What is it about *male experience* that accounts for the pervasiveness of men’s violence against women? Rendered invisible, even as it was legitimated in the traditional extended rural family, Barry reports from Le Thi Quy’s research that “there is considerable silence regarding sexual and physical exploitation and abuse in the family” (Barry, 1996, p. 12) and that “women are increasingly in the public domain. With this change violence against women is becoming increasingly a *public* reality... less acknowledged, yet increasingly evident is the increase in the public incidence of rape, a widespread diffusion of pornography and an industrialization of prostitution” (Barry, 1996, p. 7-8). Moreover, as Le Thi Quy states, “violence caused by the husband’s drinking, gambling, adultery and jealousy has increased at an alarming rate (Le Thi Quy in Barry, 1996, p. 269). Marr was optimistic when he reported that in Vietnam, while the domestic domain is still primarily occupied by women, the ideological, legal, and political barriers to equal male-female access to the public domain have been largely eliminated (Marr, 1981). Perhaps we need to study how the public is connected, and disconnected, from the private world of women and men.

Masculinity and femininity become authoritarian constructions of a form of “gender-tyranny” in which men and women become trapped. As subjects to patriarchy’s arbitrary power that is supported by the fear of going against its tacitly enveloped ideology, women *and* men have become locked into roles; roles that have very narrow bandwidth. Through the policy and practice of maintaining male-dominant ideology, patriarchy holds that its premise of male supremacy is “*sufficient to explain everything...and that no experience can teach anything because everything is comprehended in this consistent process of logical deduction.*” (Arendt, 1951, p. 470) This ideology of hegemonic masculinity, and its denial of the feminine and unpatriarchal, becomes supported through a ubiquitous propaganda that “serves to emancipate thought from experience and reality,” while injecting secret meanings into “every public, tangible event and...suspect[ing] a secret intent behind every public political act.” (Arendt, 1951, p. 471)

Men’s over-socialization to a patriarchal ideology that includes male domination, sexism and the subordination of women, the exclusive use of violence, and heterosexism and discrimination against homosexuals, has distorted men’s images of themselves and women. This distorted masculinity has created a problematic discourse between the sexes that has, in effect, defined women as inferior to a male norm as well as subjecting both men and women to “ideologies [and] -isms which to the satisfaction of their adherents can explain everything and every occurrence by deducing it from a single premise” (Arendt, 1951, p. 468). Through the utilization of this ideology, the male defense of “the way things are” has developed innumerable rationalizations and denials.

Take the case of cigarette smoking by Vietnamese men. In a recent study of cigarette consumption, "Vietnam: A Tobacco Epidemic in the Making" (Pham, Do, Truong and Jenkins, 1995), the authors warn that cigarette smoking by Vietnamese men has grown to critical proportions and constitutes a significant health risk. The authors comment that:

The age groups in which the smoking rates are highest among men are those during which men often enjoy more social privilege and position, have more disposable income, entertain guests both during their work and at home, are invited to social functions where smoking is the norm, and may be offered cigarettes as bribery in return for favors. (p. 9)

While it locates the site of smoking, and shows an awareness of social position, the study actually ignores the *gendered* nature of such consumption, that is, that men perceive smoking as “manly” and that cigarettes are an important artifact of gender as well as social and economic exchange among men. It creates a bond of recognition between men “as men,” and signifies status. Men sustain high smoking rates by reinforcing each other that smoking is masculine and confirms social power and position. Note the authors' suggested interventions:

These smoking rates can only be lowered if the government firmly forbids the offering of cigarettes and bans smoking during meetings at all levels. Health education should emphasize the health effects of smoking on smokers and others. *Women also bear a responsibility for men's smoking.* There is a need to raise their capacity and empower them to participate in the education of men about the

health hazards of smoking. *Women now see the image of man smoking as normal. We must change that image.* (p. 9) *Italics mine.*

The authors want to blame women for male smoking behavior as if the men smoke to impress the women. But the opposite is true: men smoke to impress other men that they are masculine.

Male smoking behavior is also intertwined with alcohol consumption, especially for young Vietnamese men. Alcohol consumption is a staple at social events where men offer each other drinks and are considered weak if they do not accept. As the Vietnamese saying goes: "A man without alcohol is like a flag without wind."

Or take the case of the homosexual community in Hanoi. The activists tell the following story:

Many visitors leave behind everything they know about safe sex when they come to Viet Nam. Unfortunately, we have learned that one third of Vietnamese men who have sex with foreigners do not use a condom, and may have never used a condom before. The Vietnamese government has few resources, which leaves the responsibility to a grassroots organization like ours.

Free condom distribution in Vietnam is still rare, and we have pioneered this work.... Condoms are distributed in many public places (including coffee houses, karaoke clubs, swimming pools and brothels) where men meet other men for sex. Volunteer teams cruise the "dark streets" at night, to distribute condoms and our simple safe sex leaflets to men looking for sex. We could give away 5000 a week if we had them. Usually we have none. (Nguyen Friendship Society, 1998)

Homosexuality is condemned in Vietnam, and yet it flourishes. To the untrained eye, homosexuality is rendered invisible and is not addressed in sociological research. While AIDS has received some attention, most of the warning signs are about the dangers of intravenous drug use, and the social illegitimacy of homosexuality makes it difficult to address the subject of this *male sexual activity*.

Finally, take the case of family planning. Recently, the Quaker Service has worked with the Population Council on a study, "Male Attitudes Towards Family Planning." This study of two rural communes in northern Vietnam shows that it is men who make the decisions regarding family planning. However, most of the family planning materials are and have been directed towards women. This awareness of the role that men play in family reproductive decisions can benefit from a men's studies approach. Such an approach would inquire as to how these reproductive decisions are sustained in the social definition of "masculinity," and how it is sustained in family interaction and relationships. A men's studies approach would survey the countervailing forces that might come in to play that would allow men to release the "power" and "identity" held so dear in this family drama. Are there other aspects of male identity and identification that might be drawn upon that supercede the signifier of manhood that is sexual

potency and baby making? How may this personal and social display of power find other private and public outlets that promote a strong sense of "manliness" while having more positive social consequences for the family?

The socialization to the belief system of patriarchy, which is rooted in an ideology of male domination, sustains a system of gender norms that act as a mechanism for the social control of women and men. This unequal status has been supported by the reality that in patriarchal society "being female carries a stigma in and of itself" (Laws, 1979). Through their individual and group identification as "female" or "feminine," women become "deviant by definition" within a patriarchal culture. What is important is to realize that these differences are not sex differences, but rather power differences. But there is a fateful irony.

Joseph Pleck has made it clear that there is a "paradox of power" in which, at one level, men's social identity is defined by the power they have over women and the power they can compete for against other men. But at another level, most men have very little power over their own lives (Pleck, 1981, p.428). Utilizing the paradox of power as a model of how men experience their masculinity, women's studies scholars can begin to understand how men have also been disenfranchised by a hegemonic masculinity. It is apparent, in any cursory observation that men in Vietnam are afraid of being ashamed, humiliated, or dominated by other men, just as their American counterparts are. It appears that as a group, men in patriarchies are trapped by the constant fear that "other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men. We are afraid to let other men see that fear. Fear makes us ashamed, because the recognition of fear in ourselves is proof that we are not as manly as we pretend...our fear is the fear of humiliation" (Kimmel, p. 131). Asian and American men, whether in face-saving or ego-protecting cultures, shame cultures or guilt cultures, reflect the paradox of power.

The adherence to patriarchal ideology is maintained through consistent and unrelenting propaganda, and the concomitant threat of terror against non-conforming men and women. Therefore, if gender activists are to begin breaking down this gender tyranny, they must remain cognizant of the reality that the essence of hegemonic masculinity exists to condemn variation. Moreover, men are expected to show loyalty by defending the distortions about women used to deny men's powerlessness in the face of other men. Fortunately, through fields like women's studies and men's studies, gender scholars have gained more ground in the deconstruction of authoritarian "gender laws." More importantly, they have become even more aware of the problems presented by these "laws" and how essential it has become for the future of gender relations to change them.

Men's dependence on an unequal power structure has created a "discontinuity between the social and the psychological." This has caused the efforts made by the women's movement, both in Vietnam and America, to fall on deaf male ears. When confronted with the analysis that men have all the power, many men act incredulously: "What do you mean, men have all the power?" they ask. "What are you talking about? My wife bosses me around. My kids boss me around. My boss bosses me around. I have no power! I'm completely powerless!" (Kimmel, p. 136). In their studies of men and masculinity, feminist theorists assume a "symmetry between the public and the private that does not conform to men's experiences" (Kimmel, p. 136). What has been missing from these analyses is a men's studies' perspective that seeks to understand *how men in*

Vietnam understand and experience themselves as part of “having to be a man” in Vietnamese society. This would encourage a critical exchange between men and women, and men might realize how patriarchy has been a negative experience for both women and men.

There needs to be significant in-depth, inter-disciplinary research on gender in Vietnam that includes men. This should involve documenting and analyzing the nature and direction of men’s attitudes and behavior in the context of rapid economic development and social change. Human beings express themselves within the four pillars of human social activity: kinship, place, work and spirit. Vietnamese gender studies must explore how gender relations are sustained within each of these areas of activity, within personal relationships, institutional forms, and the Vietnamese cultural fabric. Vietnamese feminist and women’s studies scholars would add this to their current body of valuable work completed and in process. This could lead to insights that could help men to be more receptive to change in personal relationships at home, structural and organizational arrangements at work, and gender norms and values that are part of the larger cultural matrix.

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