



Partnership and Domination Societies **Riane Eisler, President, Center for Partnership Systems**

Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace & Conflict, 3rd Edition, Lester Kurtz, editor, 2021

Partnership and domination societies describe two contrasting social configurations that support either equitable or inequitable relations in all spheres of life. These categories are also known as partnership systems and domination or dominator systems. These new social categories:

- Challenge negative assumptions about human nature and the alleged impossibility of improving the human condition.
- Identify the conditions that support the expression of our human capacities for caring, creativity, and consciousness or, alternately, for insensitivity, cruelty, and destructiveness.
- Take into account findings from neuroscience that show the interaction between how a society structures parent-child and gender relations, on the one hand, and political and economic relations, on the other.
- Provide the basis for a successful agenda for building a more peaceful, equitable, and sustainable future (Eisler, 1987, 2002, 2007, 2016; Eisler and Fry, 2019).

No society is a pure domination or partnership system; it is always a matter of degree, depending on where a society falls on the partnership-domination social scale. Unlike more familiar social categories such as right or left, Eastern or Western, Northern or Southern, and so forth, the partnership and domination configurations reveal interactions between what happens in the so-called private and public spheres of life.

The domination configurations is found in repressive and violent societies – from secular cultures like Adolf Hitler’s rightist Germany, Joseph Stalin’s leftist USSR, and Kim Jong Un’s leftist North Korea to the Taliban, ISIS, and other fundamentalist religious cultures.

Despite their many differences, in all these societies the ideal norm in both family and state is top-down authoritarian rule, a high degree of abuse and violence, and rigid male dominance (Eisler, 1987, 2002, 2007, 2016; Eisler and Fry, 2019).

Societies that orient to the partnership end of the social scale also

transcend familiar categories such as religious/secular, rightist/leftist, Eastern/Western, Northern/Southern, and technologically developed/undeveloped. Contemporary examples include indigenous societies such as the Indonesian Minankabao, the Chinese Mousu, and the Mexican La Paz Zapotec from one side of the technological spectrum and technologically advanced societies such as Sweden, Finland, and Norway. Evidence indicates that this was the direction of human cultural evolution for millennia, from foraging societies to settled agrarian ones such as prehistoric Catal Huyuk (Eisler, 1987, 2007; Eisler and Fry, 2019).

In partnership systems, we again find feedback loops between more egalitarian, nonviolent family, gender, and other intimate relations, on the one hand, and more peace, equity, and democracy, on the other (Eisler, 1987, 2002, 2007, 2016; Eisler and Fry, 2019).

Partnership societies/systems and domination societies/systems are new social categories needed for a successful social, economic, and political agenda, beginning with four cornerstones for an equitable and sustainable partnership system. These cornerstones, which will be described later in this article, are: childhood, gender, economics, and narratives/language (Eisler, 2002; Eisler and Fry, 2019).

The Partnership System and the Domination System

Conventional social categories, such as rightist or leftist, religious or secular, Eastern or Western, Northern or Southern, capitalist or socialist, and ancient or modern, focus on the so-called public sphere of political, economic, religious, and educational institutions from which the majority of humanity – women and children – are barred in rigid domination systems. These categories ignore that our first, and most lasting, lessons about human relations are not learned in the public sphere but in the private sphere, starting with our primary parent-child and gender relations. All these old categories fail to take into account findings from neuroscience showing that what children observe and/or experience in families impacts the neural structures and chemical pathways of their developing brains (Taylor, 2002; Eisler and Fry, 2019). They have therefore made it impossible to see interactive patterns that repeat themselves across different time periods and cultures: the configurations of the partnership system and the domination system.

The four mutually supporting core components of domination systems are:

1. Rigid top-down rankings in the family and state or tribe.
2. Rigid gender stereotypes and the ranking of the male form of humanity over the female form as well as traits and activities

equated with “real masculinity,” such as “manly” conquest and “heroic” violence, over soft or “feminine” ones, such as nonviolence and caregiving.

3. A high degree of culturally accepted abuse and violence, from child-and-wife beating to slavery and warfare, which are needed to maintain the exploitation, repression, injustice, and inequity characteristic of domination systems.
4. Narratives and language making hierarchies of domination seem inevitable and moral, justifying and even idealizing economic inequity, killing and enslaving members of other groups, stoning women to death, standing by while supposedly “inferior” people are put in ovens and gassed, or beating children to impose adult control through force (Eisler 1987, 2002, 2007, 2016; Eisler and Fry 2019).

The four core components of partnership systems are:

1. A democratic and egalitarian structure in both the family and state or tribe, with a focus on linking and hierarchies of actualization.
2. Fluid gender roles, equal partnership between women and men, and high valuing in both women and men of qualities and behaviors such as nonviolence and caregiving that are devalued as “feminine” in domination systems.
3. A low degree of abuse and violence.
4. While cruelty, inequity, and violence are recognized as human possibilities, they are not considered inevitable, let alone moral, with beliefs about human nature supporting empathic and mutually respectful relations in all areas of life, from families to economics and politics (Eisler 1987, 2002, 2007, 2016; Eisler and Fry 2019).

All aspects of society – from parenting, sexuality, and gender roles and relations to education, religion, politics, and economics – are different depending on the degree of orientation to either end of the partnership–domination social scale.

Common Misconceptions

What differentiates partnership systems from domination systems is not cooperation versus competition. People cooperate in domination systems: terrorists and gangs cooperate to maim and kill; businesses collaborate through monopolies; invading armies cooperate to annihilate and destroy. There is also competition in both systems; but in domination systems we tend to see cutthroat “dog-eat-dog” competition, while partnership systems tend to encourage competition as a spur to excellence.

The difference between these two systems is also not that the domination system is hierarchical and the partnership system is hierarchy-free. Both systems need parents, teachers, managers, and leaders, but how power is used in these hierarchies is different. Here too new language is needed: hierarchies of actualization versus hierarchies of domination. Hierarchies of domination are imposed and maintained by fear and force, and the power that is idealized, even sanctified, is the power to control others, inflict pain, and destroy. In partnership systems, power is conceptualized as power to and power with, rather than as power over, and used to empower rather than disempower.

Neither are partnership systems devoid of conflict: there will always be disagreements among people. But here conflict can be resolved through mediation and other nonviolent techniques, whereas conflict is either suppressed by those in power or explodes into violence in domination systems.

Both systems recognize that there are biological differences between males and females. However, in contrast to partnership systems, domination-oriented cultures have rigid gender stereotypes and rank male and "masculine" over female and "feminine." Boys are socialized to "not be like a woman" lest they be despised as sissies or weak sisters. They are taught to suppress "soft" or "feminine" emotions, like caring and empathy, with only "hard" or "masculine" emotions, such as anger and contempt, permissible. Girls are taught that anger and other "masculine" emotions are reserved for those who dominate such as men. And while assertiveness is highly valued in men, in women it is condemned as "unfeminine."

With movement toward the partnership side of the social continuum, rigid gender stereotypes are beginning to wane – as in men adopting "feminine" roles such as feeding, diapering, and caring for babies, and women entering professions once considered male preserves. But domination gender stereotypes and relations persist in many cultures and subcultures, as does abuse and violence against women and children.

Certainly children must be taught to listen to parents and other caregivers in partnership oriented cultures so they do not run into traffic or otherwise hurt themselves. But the aim in partnership cultures is not to teach children that the will of their parents is law, as it is in strict domination cultures where children must be brought up in ways that ensure they will accept rigid top-down social and economic controls.

The Study of Relational Dynamics

The identification of the social configurations of partnership systems and domination systems is the outcome of a new method of analysis: the study of relational dynamics. These relational dynamics are:

1. What kinds of relations – from intimate to international – a particular society encourages or discourages, and
2. How key components of a society interactively relate to shape and maintain its basic character (Eisler, 2007, 2015; Eisler and Fry, 2019).

This new research methodology employs a multidisciplinary approach, It draws from a much larger database than earlier studies of society, recognizing that the whole of a system is more than the sum of its various parts. This database encompasses the whole of humanity: both its female and male components. It includes the whole of our lives: not only the so-called public sectors such as politics and economics, but also our family and other close relations. And it takes into account the whole of our history: not only the approximately 5,000 years of recorded or deciphered written history, but also the many thousands of years of proto- and pre-history.

Sources for the study of relational dynamics range from cross-cultural anthropological surveys; anthropological, sociological, and historical studies of particular societies and periods; and analyses of laws, moral codes, art, and literature (including biographies, autobiographies, and fiction) to findings from psychology, economics, education, political science, philosophy, religious studies, and archeological studies; the study of Western and Eastern myths; and scholarship from more recent fields such as primatology, neuroscience, chaos theory, systems self-organizing theory, non-linear dynamics, gender studies, women's studies, men's studies, and queer studies (Eisler and Fry, 2019).

This larger picture makes it possible to see patterns that had not been seen before: the two contrasting social configurations, or interactions among key elements of social systems, that keep repeating themselves cross-culturally and historically of the domination system and the partnership system.

In contrast to categories such as rightist versus leftist, religious versus secular, Eastern versus Western, and industrial versus pre- or post-industrial, the partnership system and the domination system show that the social construction of the roles and relations of the two basic forms of humanity – male and female – is directly related to a society's beliefs and institutions (from the family, education, and religion to politics and economics). These new social categories make

visible the social importance of the early years of life, confirming scientific findings that what people consider normal or abnormal, moral or immoral, and even possible or impossible in all spheres of life is directly impacted by the kinds of relationships children experience and observe early on. Corroborating findings from neuroscience that what children experience or observe in their early years impacts how our brains develop, these new social categories show that this development is very different depending on the degree a society orients to either end of the partnership domination social scale (Eisler and Fry, 2019).

The Biocultural Partnership-Domination Lens

The partnership system and the domination system also differ from earlier social categories, as well as from earlier studies of human society, in that they take into account bioculturalism: an emerging scientific perspective substantiating the interaction between genes and experiences (Eisler & Fry, 2019).

Many scientific findings, including findings from the field of epigenetics, are demolishing dogmas of genetic determinism, showing that structural cell changes can even occur without genetic mutations. For instance, a pregnant woman's experiences can affect her children's and even grandchildren's health, as happened during World War II in Holland during a famine imposed by a Nazi food embargo (Kaverne, 2014; Eisler & Fry, 2019). Changes in brain structures and behaviors that do not entail gene mutations are also increasingly confirmed in laboratory experiments; for example, a father's experiences can influence his offspring's health, as in a study where male mice who were fed a folate-deficient diet sired offspring with a high number of birth defects (Lambrot et al, 2013; Eisler & Fry, 2019).

In addition, studies by psychologists and neuroscientists show that whether genetic predispositions are expressed, and how much of this expression becomes habitual, heavily depends on an individual's experiences – especially in childhood. These kinds of findings verify the fact that the human brain is especially flexible due to its long postnatal development, and that the first years of life are of critical importance for how our brains develop.

For example, a study of men with a low-activity version of a gene related to a higher propensity for violence (monoamine oxidase A, or MAOA) showed that this gene does not predict who will become violent. Only men who were mistreated as children (rejected by their mothers, physically or sexually abused, or subjected to frequent changes in their primary caregivers) were likely to engage in antisocial behavior, including violent crime. Men with this gene who had loving childhoods

did not grow up to become violent (Caspi et al, 2002).

Yet the focus of these kinds of studies confirming the enormous impact of what children experience and observe on adult feelings, thoughts, and behaviors has been on how the brain develops differently in different family circumstances, especially how people who grow up in harsh families often have disrupted patterns of neurochemical brain activity, leading to depression, irritability, and other problems. For instance, studies show that the brains of people with a family background of abuse and violence tend to have lower levels of serotonin, a calming neurotransmitter, and higher levels of cortisol, a major stress hormone, and that low levels of dopamine, a neurotransmitter associated with positive moods, also seem to be caused by the stress of being deprived of nurturing care early in life (Taylor, 2002).

However, families do not spring up in isolation from the larger cultures or subcultures in which they are embedded. And families are very different in domination or partnership contexts.

The partnership-domination social scale recognizes that families are fashioned by people who have learned what kinds of relations are considered normal and moral in their culture or subculture. This is not to say that all families conform to a culture's family ideal. For instance, highly stressful, authoritarian, punitive families were the norm in Nazi Germany. But, as Pearl and Samuel Oliner document in their study of German helpers of Jews, the Germans who saved Jews from the Holocaust generally came from democratic and caring families – families that did not conform to what was then the German cultural norm (Oliner and Oliner, 1998).

The Political Impact of Childhood and Gender Relations

Just as we need a systems framework that describes the interaction of biology and culture, we need a systems framework that describes the mutually supporting interaction of the major components of societies – including our foundational parent-child and gender relations. Studies show that families in domination systems are typically authoritarian and male-dominated, with stressful and punitive childrearing (Ellison and Bartkovsky, 1997), and, as increasingly documented by child experts, that the “traditional” highly punitive and often violent childrearing typical of domination systems is damaging to people's mental and even physical health. But this damage is also social and directly impacts politics.

What children are taught in a “traditional” highly punitive, male-dominated, authoritarian family is to equate difference –

beginning with the difference in form between male and female – with superiority or inferiority, dominating or being dominated, being served or serving. They learn this lesson before their brains, much less their critical faculties, are formed, internalizing a template for viewing all differences in terms of in-groups versus out-groups. The out-group can be a different religion, as in the anti-Semitism prevalent in Europe for millennia leading to the genocidal policies of Nazi Germany. It can be a different race, as in the racism still found in the United States. It can be based on ethnicity, as in Rwanda in Africa, or on belonging to a different religious sub-sect, as in the persecution of Sunnis by Shias (and vice versa) in parts of the Middle East. So it is not coincidental that out-groups tend to be scapegoated in cultures or subcultures where the ideal norm is a male-dominance (Eisler, 1987, 2002, 2007, 2013, 2016; Eisler and Fry, 2019).

In families typical of domination systems, children also learn another key lesson. Since caring is conflated with coercion, being totally dependent on adults, children learn that they must submit to those in control, and that not submitting will cause a great deal of pain. They further learn that hierarchies of domination are normal, and that it is permissible, even moral, for those on top to use violence or the threat of violence to impose or maintain their control (Eisler, 1987, 2002, 2007, 2013, 2016; Eisler and Fry, 2019).

The above illustrate how authoritarian, male-dominated, punitive families play a major role in perpetuating domination political systems from generation to generation. But these interactions only become visible by using the analytical tool of the biocultural partnership-domination lens, which shows how the cultural construction of politics, economics, and other public institutions is connected with how a society constructs childhood and gender roles and relations.

Using this new lens makes it possible to see that the stresses inherent in domination oriented families tend to lead to a brain neurochemistry that triggers inappropriate fight-or-flight reactions. These stresses also lead to denial and the displacement of negative feelings to out-groups such as racial, religious, or ethnic minorities, the idealization of “strongman” leaders, and the devaluation of women and anything considered “feminine” (Milburn and Conrad, 1996; Eisler & Fry, 2019)

People from these family backgrounds tend to support punitive policies, such as funding for prisons, while not supporting funding for “soft” policies, such as good care and nutrition for children (which, as shown by the low crime rates in Northern European partnership-oriented societies, prevent crime). And they tend to have great difficulty in adapting to, or even recognizing, change – with

serious implications for everyone, as in climate change denial (Eisler and Fry, 2019).

However, this is not the whole story. Although what children experience and observe has a huge impact, our brain continues to develop for a long time after we are born. The prefrontal cortex, which has a critical role in human behavior, does not fully develop until after puberty (Kaverne, 2014), and behavior and values can change in adulthood (Eisler & Fry, 2019).

As a result, although the effects of damage in childhood can usually not be completely erased, they can be reduced by therapy, which makes it possible to reflect on our behavior and change it. Positive experiences should also strengthen neural circuits that represent positive emotions and caring social bonding in adults as well as children. And just as we can develop new ways of thinking and change our emotional reactions, we can change the systems of beliefs and social institutions that compose cultures (Eisler, 1987, 2002, 2007, 2013, 2016; Eisler and Fry, 2019).

An Emerging New Perspective of Human Cultural Evolution

Contradicting the old theory that human societies have always been warlike, archaeology and the study of nomadic forager groups (which is how we humans lived for millions of years) show that warfare is actually a recent development, going back no further than about 10,000 years. Forager specialists Richard Lee and Richard Daly note that foraging groups solved problems largely without authority figures or violence, and anthropologist Karen Endicott describes their gender relations as egalitarian (Lee and Daly, 1999). As anthropologist Douglas Fry, a leading expert on foraging societies, states, “the recurring patterns across nomadic forager ethnographies from around the world suggest that many elements of partnership systems – social equality, gender egalitarianism, personal autonomy, sharing, caring, and an absence of war – were typical of the evolutionary past when humanity lived as mobile foragers” (Eisler & Fry, 2019, page 117).

Some decades earlier, anthropologists Adrienne Zihlman and psychologist Nancy Tanner already challenged the claim that the first social bonds originated with men’s bonding to more effectively hunt and kill. They proposed that the first social bonds were based on sharing and caring: that the bonding between mothers and infants provided the foundation for social bonds later in life. They thereby shifted the focus from “man the hunter” to “woman the gatherer,” citing studies of nomadic forager societies showing that most daily calories are derived from the gathering activities mainly performed by women rather than by men’s hunting activities (Tanner and Zihlman, 1976).

Darwin himself wrote of the “softer” more stereotypically feminine aspects of human evolution, proposing that mutual aid and love are part of the biological basis for morality. As social psychologist David Loye points out, Darwin referred to love 95 times, to moral sensitivity 92 times, and to selfishness only twelve times (and then in negative terms) in *The Descent of Man*, the book where he dealt with human evolution (Loye, 2002).

Evolutionary theorist Frans De Waal also focuses on empathy and caring as key evolutionary developments in nonhuman species as well as humans. “If exploitation of others were all that matters,” de Waal observes, “evolution should never have gotten into the empathy business” (De Waal, 2009, page 43).

Also supporting a more partnership-oriented view of most of our prehistory is that the majority of stone carvings from the European Paleolithic or Stone Age are of female figurines. In addition, the handprints sometimes found on the walls of the famous European cave sanctuaries indicate that the majority were of female hands. As Dean Snow, the archeologist who made this discovery, noted, female and male hands differ, so the handprints indicate that if they are in fact “signatures,” most of the artists were women rather than men, as had been assumed (Snow, 2013).

Female figurines are also ubiquitous in early Neolithic societies that were generally peaceful, egalitarian, and gender balanced. For example, in Catal Huyuk, one of the largest Neolithic sites ever excavated, there are no signs of destruction through warfare for 1,000 years; houses and grave goods show no signs of large inequalities, and as the archeologist Ian Hodder noted, the evidence is that being born male or female made no difference in people’s status or wealth (Hodder, 2004).

But then there was an abrupt change. Female figurines disappear and we find archeological evidence of social inequality, warfare, and the subordination of women (Eisler, 1987).

After this radical cultural shift, in most world regions domination systems replaced partnership-oriented ones. For much of recorded history, kings and nobles were ranked over craftspeople and merchants, feudal lords were ranked over peasants, men were ranked over women, and fathers often had life and death control over their children (Eisler, 1987).

Not only were these hierarchies of domination maintained through force or its threat, but people were also taught that no one should try

to change their station. An individual's fixed place in society was presented as part of a divinely-ordained order that must never be questioned, and those who challenged this order faced torture and often a painful death.

Today, traditions of domination and violence are still deeply entrenched in cultures worldwide. For many people, despotic regimes, authoritarian families, rigid male dominance, violence, hunger, poverty, lack of education, inequitable economic arrangements, and religious and secular teachings about all this being inevitable still prevent meaningful choices.

But over the last centuries, the awareness that we have choices has grown. This new consciousness was largely about individual choices. But progressive social and political movements also proliferated, animated by the consciousness that we have social choices – and that our individual and social choices are intertwined.

Modern History from the Partnership-Domination Perspective

Re-examining modern history from the perspective of the domination-partnership social scale shows patterns that are otherwise invisible. While progressive social movements are generally presented as random and disconnected, they all have a key feature in common: they all challenged traditions of domination.

In the 1700s, the “rights of man” movement challenged the “divinely ordained” right of kings to rule their “subjects.” The feminist movement challenged the “divinely ordained” right of men to rule women and children. The abolitionist, civil rights, and anticolonial movements challenged the “divinely ordained” right of a “superior” race to rule over “inferior” ones. The pacifist and peace movements challenged the use of force to impose rankings of domination. The movements for economic justice and human rights challenged traditions of violence and injustice. The environmental movement challenged our “divinely ordained” right to dominate and conquer nature (Eisler 1987, Eisler and Fry 2019).

But the modern movements challenging traditions of domination have mainly focused on dismantling the top of the domination pyramid: politics and economics as conventionally defined. Far less attention has been paid to domination in childhood and gender relations – leaving the foundations on which domination systems keep rebuilding themselves in place. So we have continued to have regressions to domination in different forms – be they secular or religious, Eastern or Western, Northern or Southern.

Using the biocultural partnership-domination lens we see why regressive and violent regimes or would-be regimes, whether secular and Western like Nazi Germany or religious and Eastern like Khomeini's Iran, ISIS, and the Taliban, make a "traditional family" a top social and political priority. They use "traditional" as a code for a rigidly male-dominated, authoritarian, punitive family that shapes the kinds of relations children first experience and observe. These are the relations that children in domination cultures and subcultures are taught are normal and moral. And they learn this before their brains, including their critical faculties, are developed, so they tend to accept them as adults, not only in families but also in politics and economics (Eisler and Fry, 2019).

The Economics of Domination or Partnership

We are not used to thinking of economics as related to anything connected with gender. But domination economics are guided by a gendered system of values in which anything considered soft or "feminine" is devalued. There always seems to be money for prisons (as in the stereotype of the punitive male head of household) and for weapons and wars (as in the violent hero), but there never seems to be enough money for anything stereotypically considered "soft" or "feminine," like caring for children, people's health, or keeping a clean and healthy environment.

This gendered system of values has caused enormous suffering, negatively affecting most people's quality of life. A statistical study conducted by the Center for Partnership Studies back in 1995 comparing data from 89 nations, found that the status of women is a powerful predictor of a country's quality of life (Eisler, Loye, and Norgaard, 1995). These findings are confirmed by later studies such as the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Reports, its Global Competitiveness reports, and the World Happiness Reports (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2018), documenting that the nations with the lowest gender gaps such as Sweden, Finland, and Norway regularly rank high in the latter two. In other words, the status of women is a major factor in both a nation's economic success and the happiness of its people. Yet this is still not taken into account in conventional economic analyses or theories.

As Einstein said, we cannot solve problems with the same thinking that created them. Meeting the unprecedented environmental and economic challenges we face requires a new way of thinking that goes beyond both capitalism and socialism.

To begin with, capitalism and socialism came out of early industrial times, so on that count alone they would be antiquated in our

postindustrial age, when manufacturing only employs an ever shrinking segment of workers. Even more importantly, neither capitalism nor socialism prevented the despoliation of our natural environment, nor did they bring a generally good standard of living for all. Capitalism did bring a growing middle class, but has been destroying our natural environment, deeply widened the gap between those on top and bottom, and leaving huge numbers of people in poverty worldwide. Socialism did alleviate dire poverty, but its two large-scale applications in the former Soviet Union and China turned into repressive, violent systems, where under Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong millions were killed – regimes with neither freedom nor equality in which those on top live much better than the mass of people. And socialist societies also created horrendous environmental problems, as we still see today in China, where, according to the World Health Organization, in 2016, in one year, more than 1 million Chinese people died from the effects of ambient pollution.

Capitalist and socialist theories were actually attempts to move to a more just economic system. Adam Smith challenged mercantilism, or control of economics from the top by kings and court officials. Karl Marx in turn challenged capitalism and the exploitation of workers and peasants by so-called nobles and the growing bourgeoisie.

But Smith envisioned unlimited economic growth guided by his invisible hand of the market and pure self-interest, and Marx envisioned unlimited industrial expansion controlled by his dictatorship of the proletariat. For both Smith and Marx, nature was just there to be exploited, with no thought of damage to our natural life-support systems or the need to care for them. As for the life-sustaining work in households – caring for children, the elderly, people's health and keeping a clean and healthy home environment – these vital activities were for both Smith and Marx just "reproductive" rather than "productive" work.

This view, which did not assign economic value to the work of caring for people and keeping a clean and healthy home environment (which carries over to the devaluation of caring for our natural environment) came out of the value system of the times when Smith and then Marx developed their theories. Then, as in many cultures and subcultures today, these activities were "just women's work" – to be performed for free in male controlled households. As late as the mid 19th century when Marx wrote about socialism, and even later in many places, women's work in both homes and the market was legally the property of their fathers or husbands – so much so that if a woman was negligently injured, she could not sue for these injuries, only her husband could for loss of her services.

This devaluation of caring is still the economic norm today, as is the focus on the market and government economies and to some extent the illegal economy as the only proper domains of economics. Building an economic system that can effectively meet our mounting challenges requires a new economic system based on an economic map that takes into account the economic contributions of the three life-sustaining sectors, which are absent from all current models: the natural economy, the unpaid community economy, and the household economy.

This new, urgently needed, economic system recognizes that economics are inextricably interconnected with the larger social system in which they are embedded. The exclusion from economics of the value of caring and caregiving work in the three life-sustaining economic sectors of the household, volunteer, and natural economies was the direct result of the social context out of which both capitalist and socialist theory arose in the 18th and 19th centuries.

This social context perpetuated key aspects of domination economics, whether Eastern (as in the old Chinese empire, the Indian caste system, or Middle Eastern chiefdoms) or Western (as in feudal or mercantilist times). Today's neoliberalism and its "trickle down economics" is a continuation of traditions of economic domination, where, as in feudal times, those on the bottom are supposed to content themselves with the scraps dropping from the abundant tables of those on top. And today's mega-corporations are new fiefdoms, on a much larger global scale (Eisler, 2007).

Building a more equitable and sustainable economics requires more than retaining and strengthening the partnership elements in both the market and government economies and leaving the domination elements behind. It requires moving to a caring economics that recognizes that the real wealth of nations is not financial (as we see every day as stock markets seesaw up and down), but consists of the contributions of people and of nature. This new economic system's rules, practices, metrics, and policies give visibility and real value to the most important human work: caring for people, starting in early childhood, and caring for our Mother Earth (Eisler, 2007).

Moving to this technologically adaptive, environmentally sustainable, and humane partnerist economics entails systemic social change. It requires re-examining and leaving behind the old gendered system of values as a key part of shifting values and institutions – from the family and education to politics and economics – to the partnership side of the social scale.

The Point-Counterpoint of Domination and Partnership

The struggle for our future is not between religion and secularism, socialism and capitalism, East and West, North and South, or right and left, but within societies in all these categories. It is between those who cling to old domination norms and those trying to move us to a more equitable and sustainable partnerist world.

We see this struggle today worldwide in all relations – from intimate to international. In 2007, this author wrote an op-ed for *Alternet* titled “The Ignored Issue That Can Get Progressives Elected.” It described how the rightist-fundamentalist alliance that now has so much political power in the United States successfully pushed U.S. politics back by appropriating family, values, and morality. It pointed out that this regressive alliance first came together in the late 1970s to defeat the proposed Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which would have changed the U.S. Constitution by adding a clause protecting women from federal and state government discrimination.

This simple constitutional amendment was defeated through massive efforts appealing to “traditional” gender stereotypes and relations. Countering the movement for gender equality entailed a well-planned and executed long-term campaign to paint women’s rights as a threat to “morality” and “traditional values.” This campaign demonizing a more partnership-oriented family was so successful that it pushed attitudes back to pre feminist days. As reported in the above op-ed, when Americans were asked if the “father of the family is master of the house” in 1992, 42 percent said yes, but by 2004 the percentage had risen to 52 percent.

This regression to domination “family values” was a major factor in bringing about a political regression in the United States. People from authoritarian, male dominated, highly punitive domination families tend to vote for “strong” leaders who brook no dissent. And this tendency is especially pronounced in times of rapid technological, economic, and social change, when many people are frightened and angry and tend to follow demagogic leaders in blaming “out-groups” for their difficulties, as shown by the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

Donald Trump fanned fear and anger in a campaign that presented him as the “strong” leader who alone could solve all of America’s problems. So an important factor in the 2016 U.S. election was the long-term work of pushing attitudes toward women and families back to the domination side of the partnership-domination social scale (Eisler and Fry, 2019). That someone who bullied opponents,

scapegoated minorities, and called women disgusting and untrustworthy was elected President of the United States was made possible by decades of intensive work to reinstate a regressive agenda by people who recognize on a gut level what we today know from neuroscience: the human brain develops in interaction with its environment, especially during our early years, and how parent-child and gender relations are culturally constructed directly impacts people's beliefs, feelings, and actions – including how they vote.

Yet for many people who consider themselves progressive, parent-child and gender relations are “just women's and children's issues.” This is not coincidental, since many of these people are college graduates and, out of over 700 years of modern science, which as the historian of science David Noble notes, came out of a clerical, medieval, generally misogynist “world without women,” women's studies, and then men's and gender studies, only appeared in universities about 50 years ago – and are still not part of mainstream courses. Similarly, despite findings from neuroscience that show the life-long impact of childhood experiences, child development is also marginalized in our academic institutions. When taught at all, it is in relation to families, rather than in economics, political science, or sociology courses where we urgently need to recognize connections that are invisible through the lenses of old social categories and studies.

So while regressives have had an integrated political agenda that gives particular importance to the construction of gender and parent-child relations, progressives have mainly tried to change traditions of domination in politics and economics. Because of this failure to focus on shifting our primary human relations in a partnership direction, the foundations for domination systems remained in place. And dominator economic and political systems have successfully rebuilt themselves in various forms – be they religious or secular, Eastern or Western.

There are, however, important partnership trends, such as the international movements for women's rights and children's rights. The women's movement finally brought attention to the global prevalence of violence against women: the pandemic of domestic violence, rape, female infanticide, girls' genital mutilation, and selective starving of female children (Eisler, 2013). There is also growing awareness and condemnation of violence against children, as in the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Along with the more recent #MeToo movement and the increasing recognition that “traditional” masculinity is unhealthy for men as well as society, there is also greater awareness of the importance of how childhood and gender are socially constructed, and of the prevalence of trauma caused by domination systems. Important examples are studies such as the ACES or Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (Felitti, 2009), the recent

statement by the American Psychological Association against spanking, and the proliferation of nations with laws against the use of physical discipline in families.

But still lacking is a general understanding of the connections we have been examining – which is why the new social categories of the partnership system and the domination system as well as the biocultural partnership–domination lens are vital.

Four Cornerstones for Shifting from Domination to Partnership

To build a future where all children can realize their capacities for consciousness, caring, and creativity – the capacities that make us fully human – we have to construct the foundations for this. Research has identified four cornerstones needed to support partnership rather than domination systems (Eisler and Fry, 2019).

The First Cornerstone: Childhood Relations

Studies show that children of violent parents can become empathic and caring when brought up in empathic and caring family environments. Conversely, if early experiences are violent and if family relations entail discrimination and abuse, they provide mental and emotional models for also condoning violations of basic rights in other relations. Fortunately, some people grow up to reject such family patterns, but many do not. Coercive, inequitable, and violent child rearing therefore is foundational to the imposition and maintenance of a coercive, inequitable, and chronically violent domination social system (Eisler and Fry, 2019).

Tragically, there is still a global pandemic of abuse and violence against children that causes enormous harm and trauma, kills untold numbers of unreported victims, and leaves life-long post-traumatic effects on the survivors. Until very recently, these crimes were given hardly any attention, perpetuating the belief that what happens in families and to children is of little if any real social importance. Even today, traditions of abuse and violence against children, as in the old adage of “spare the rod and spoil the child,” are justified on religious grounds.

However, the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the 2006 special report on children commissioned by the Secretary General of the United Nations emphasize that there can be no compromise in challenging violence against children. But still lacking, and urgently needed, is a global campaign against abuse and violence in childhood. This campaign should include:

- Education in schools and religious institutions providing the

- knowledge and skills necessary for empathic, sensitive, nonviolent, authoritative rather than authoritarian childrearing.
- Expanding the purview of international law, especially Article 7 on Crimes Against Humanity of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, to protect children worldwide in both the private and public spheres by prosecuting government officials responsible for widespread, abhorrent, and systemic violations of children's human rights or for failing to prevent them (Eisler, 2013).

The Second Cornerstone: Gender Relations

The biocultural partnership–domination lens shows why domination–leaning cultures and subcultures where children are taught to equate the difference between the male and female forms with superiority or inferiority, dominating or being dominated, being served or serving are characterized by in–group versus out–group attitudes such as racism and anti–Semitism and by beliefs in violence as the means to resolve conflicts. But scholars, policy makers, and the public still generally fail to recognize that gender is a powerful organizing social principle that shapes institutions and social values.

In some world regions today, there is movement toward parity between women and men, along with a blurring of rigid gender stereotypes. More people are recognizing that stereotypical women's work, such as taking care of children and maintaining a clean and healthy home, can be performed by both sexes. Men are nurturing babies and women are entering positions of economic and political leadership. And gender stereotypes are blurring, thanks to the women's, men's, LGBT, and trans movements.

There is also increasing documentation of the prevalence of crimes against girls and women, from female infanticide, genital mutilation/cutting, withholding food and health care, child marriage, sexual abuse, and sex trafficking to rape, domestic violence, "honor" killings, and other egregious human rights violations (Eisler, 2013). It is unrealistic to think that we can have a more peaceful world as long as violence against girls and women is a global pandemic and is still condoned in some sacred scriptures.

A global campaign for equitable and nonviolent gender relations can be a powerful strategy to bring about the shift to partnership. This campaign should consist of education, law, media, engaging religious and spiritual leaders, and expanding the purview of international law to protect girls and women worldwide, as in the proposal that the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court's Crimes Against Humanity section be interpreted or amended to

include gender as a protected category (Eisler, 2013).

The Third Cornerstone: Economic Relations

The massive technological dislocation of the shift from the industrial to the post industrial era is a crisis. But it is also an opportunity to shift to an economics of partnership that recognizes the enormous value of caring for people, starting in infancy, and caring for nature. Caring policies are essential, not only for human and environmental reasons, but also for economic ones. Both psychology and neuroscience tell us that having the “high quality human capital” that economists say is needed for the postindustrial knowledge-service era largely depends on the quality of care and early education children receive.

As automation, robotics, and artificial intelligence replace more jobs previously performed by people, we must redefine “productive work. An Australian study, using not only replacement value (which is low, as this “women’s work” has been so devalued in the market economy) but also “opportunity cost” (the earnings a caregiver forfeits when s/he does care work in the home) found it would be 50 percent of the reported GDP (Hoenig and Page, 2012). Companies that are regularly listed in *Working Mother* or *Fortune500* as the best firms to work for have a substantially higher return to their investors. As we see in countries such as Sweden, Finland, and Norway, investing in caring policies pays extremely well for nations (Eisler, 2007). Like these nations, all countries need economic policies that support the caregiving work performed in both the market and the household economic sectors.

A first step is changing how economic health is measured. GDP includes activities that harm and take life. For example, selling cigarettes and fast foods high in fat and sugar, and the resulting medical and funeral expenses, are counted as “productive” in GDP. On the other hand, GDP fails to include the economic value of activities in the three life sustaining and enhancing sectors of the household, natural, and community volunteer economies.

The twenty-four Social Wealth Economic Indicators (SWEIs) developed by the Center for Partnership Studies demonstrate the economic value of the work of caring and caregiving – whether performed by women or men in workplaces or homes. Unlike other proposed “GDP alternatives,” SWEIs show the return on investments in this essential work. They not only provide a realistic picture of the present situation in human, environmental, and economic terms (outputs), but also show what government and business investments (inputs) lead to better outcomes.

As of 2020, these new metrics are now being updated and consolidated

into a Social Wealth Index (perhaps to be called Real Wealth Index or Human Wealth Index). Condensing these metrics into one number (like GDP) is urgently needed to guide government and business policy makers so they effectively allocate funding. For example, investing in protecting our natural life support system, as well as in family support such as parenting education, caregiver tax credits, subsidies for childcare and early education, elder care, and care for the disabled, are not only the right thing to do but essential for a successful postindustrial economy. Funding for these policies can be obtained by taxing activities that harm and take life or add no real value to human existence – for example, taxing weapons, cigarettes, and short-term trading in stock markets worldwide.

The Fourth Cornerstone: Narratives and Language

The biocultural partnership–domination lens makes it possible to deconstruct domination narratives and replace them with partnership ones, especially in the socialization of children and in all levels of education. This is a major issue for our future, including the standards that guide the virtual reality already advancing on the technological horizon, as well as biotechnology, bioengineering, and how artificial intelligence is programmed. If guided by an ethos of partnership, these kinds of technological breakthroughs could vastly improve our lives. If guided by an ethos of domination, our own and future generations face grim prospects.

Humans are equipped with a broad range of genetic possibilities, from imposing and maintaining domination systems to developing and flourishing in partnership systems. Our efforts for positive environmental, economic, and social change will only succeed if we provide children and adults worldwide the new knowledge we have today about our past, present, and the possibilities for our future.

The knowledge that partnership-oriented societies were the norm for millennia of human cultural evolution is essential. So also is the whole-systems view provided by the biocultural partnership–domination lens, which enables us to see trends toward partnership, domination resistance, and most importantly, what we can do to build a partnership-oriented society.

To this end, in 2014 the Center for Partnership Studies helped launch the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies*, an online, peer-reviewed, open-access journal housed at the University of Minnesota. Its mission is to share scholarship and create connections for cultural transformation to build a world in which all relationships, institutions, policies and organizations are based on principles of partnership.

The movement toward partnership is growing worldwide, albeit against fierce domination resistance. As we focus attention on shifting the four social cornerstones of childhood, gender, economics, and narratives/language from domination to partnership, we can build the foundations for a more sustainable, peaceful, and equitable partnership future.

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