

I am going to start today's lecture differently from last time. In fact, a screaming difference between today and the previous talk will stem from emotional and controversial subject matter, and while I embrace empathy, I would hate to see this lecture sullied with the detritus of bigotry, calloused words, or ill-thought statements. Another difference would be my desire to see today be an active discussion instead of a lecture, and this is why I caution the class to retain emotion without speaking solely from it. Intelligent discussion does not require erudite claims, but proper academic conversation necessitates some ounce of rationale. So, I would truly appreciate empathetic intellectual exchange without pronounced bias.

Disobedience. Specifically, "perceived disobedience"¹. This is what grants the right to a family—in the face of the acrid smell of kerosene fumes pouring off their fuel-drenched daughter-in-law—to ignite this subhuman being without a large enough dowry. I can imagine that irritating smell of kerosene is quickly replaced with odors of burning hair and flesh amongst a roar of flames and voice. What I cannot seem to imagine are both the will to do such an act and what is to be done with the human remains afterwards.

These bride-burnings number in the thousands in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, Pakistan alone; they are said to take "place approximately once every two hours, but these rarely constitute news."² These outcomes of complete objectification—nothing can quite come close to equating a human being with tinder—result from a desire "to punish a woman for an inadequate dowry or to eliminate her so a man can remarry"³. Keep in mind the abhorrent behavior but also reflect on potential rationalizations for such atrocities, for it is these rationalizations provided by a society that allow the behavior to be embraced, ignored, or continued through the generations.

Total objectification extends beyond the borders of the South Asia into Africa and the absolute depravity that occurs—the barbarous acts committed against women there. The sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (eastern Congo especially) is said to be "the worst in the world," according to John Holmes, the UN undersecretary for Humanitarian Affairs, with some "twenty-seven thousand sexual assaults in 2006"⁴. Holmes elucidates that rape has become nearly cultural⁵. Its purpose is to serve as "the most cost-effective way to terrorize civilian populations"⁶ without the risk of a firefight. Perhaps one of the most chilling and infuriating statements in Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl Wudunn's book, *Half the Sky*, which forms the basis for much of this lecture, is as follows:

Frequently the Congolese militias rape women with sticks or knives or bayonets, or else they fire their guns into the women's vaginas. In one instance, soldiers raped a three-year-old girl and then fired their guns into her. When surgeons saw her, there was no tissue left to repair. The little girl's grief-stricken father then committed suicide.

Truly, mass rape is a weapon of terror utilized wherever in the world chastity is a valued commodity (yet another form of alienation of women—and boys when they too are raped—from their humanity). It serves as a "tool of war in conservative societies precisely because female sexuality is so sacred." It is these codes of sexual honor that "ostensibly protect women, but in fact they create an environment in which women are systemically dishonored"⁷. Separating women from their reproductive rights diminishes independence and power, and it is this separation that so greatly neuters prosperity by limiting economic options.

Again, these methods of objectification do not have to take on such bestial forms; there can be much more insidious—yet not less damning—ways of transforming an entire gender into refuse fit for removal, and it is specious to think that men are solely responsible. Again, I hate to bombard this

lecture with so many quotes, but Kristof and Wudunn truly encapsulate much of this argument succinctly and eloquently:

In talking about misogyny and gender-based violence, it would be easy to slip into the conceit that men are the villains. But it's not true. Granted, men are often brutal to women. Yet it is women who routinely manage brothels in poor countries, who ensure that their daughters' genitals are cut, who feed sons before daughters, who take their sons but not their daughters to clinics for vaccination...In short, women themselves absorb and transmit misogynistic values, just as men do. This is not a tidy world of tyrannical men and victimized women, but a messier realm of oppressive social customs adhered to by men and women alike.

This is the crux of my lecture today: that certain cultural and societal norms have allowed the dehumanization of an entire gender and that this reduction of half of our species may not only be morally abhorrent but is certainly retarding the development of entire nations and peoples, thus institutionalizing stagnation and actively obstructing one of the key methods of combating poverty: equality between men and women and access to education for both.

I do not simply want to focus on the morally decrepit attitude that accepts such things as bride-burnings and honor killings, though. These lectures are very much about what sort of institutional changes can be elicited to aid in the development of a nation or, in this case, a gender. I highlight the atrocities that can occur, but I will now target what can be argued as more damaging to a nation and people: missing women.

The previous lecture referenced Esther Duflo, an Abdul Latif Jameel Professor of Poverty Alleviation and Development Economics at MIT, and she has encapsulated the topic of missing women nicely in her essay, "Gender Equality in Development". The neologism of missing women was coined by Amartya Sen in 1990 "to describe the observation that the proportion of women is lower than what would be expected if women, in the developing world, were given equal medical care and food"⁸.

Essentially, this translates into 60 to 100 million women absent from these developing countries. These are not women who are actively eliminated. Rather, they are passively weeded out of society due to cultural canon favoring one gender, male, over another, female, and pressing life without stability favors the favorable. Wudunn and Kristof emphasize this in the following excerpt from *Half the Sky*:

In India...mothers are less likely to take their daughters to be vaccinated than their sons—that alone accounts for one fifth of India's missing females—while studies have found that, on average, girls are brought to the hospital only when they are sicker than boys taken to the hospital. All told, girls in India from one to five years of age are 50 percent more likely to die than boys the same age.

While this behavior is certainly deplorable, it is also enforcing stagnation. There is an increasingly accepted consensus—certainly in the developed world—that there "is a reciprocal and intimate relationship between women's empowerment and economic development" and that "empowerment can...accelerate development"⁹. It is not ridiculous to think that the means of empowerment discussed previously can be applied to women to improve their condition (reason enough) and subsequently that of their village, province, or nation to break a malevolent cycle of

poverty. Countless proponents of the principles of female empowerment pronounce their support publically. Lawrence Summers of the World Bank urges that “investment in girls’ education may well be the highest-return investment in the developing world”; Bernard Kouchner, the founder of Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders), espouses that “progress is achieved through women; Goldman Sachs believes that “gender inequality hurts economic growth” and has pledged \$100 million to a “10,000 Women” campaign “meant to give that many women a business education”¹⁰. The Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, argues for gender equality as a means of achieving several of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) for 2015, such as “eliminating poverty, reducing infant mortality, achieving universal education, and eliminating the gender gap in education”¹¹.

These are all wonderful statements made by powerful institutions and those employed by them, and it cannot be denied that even without economic development gender equality should be an inherent right allotted to women. Still, what sort of evidence exists that confirms or denies such sweeping statements? Has there been actual alleviation of poverty or stimulation of development through the empowerment of women? Duflo, Kristof, and Wudunn compile such evidence, and I will present some of the major examples to illustrate the efficacy of such an approach towards stimulating development. Let it be enough to say that I believe gender equality is sufficient for pursuit of such a goal and that the criticism provided is for the case of economic development not the moral permissibility of gender equality. In other words, arguments against the empowerment of women are of an economic bent and not misogynistic.

It is no secret that China has seen startling economic growth in the past decade alone. While it would fallacious to imply that this astounding development was the sole result of the empowerment of women, it would be equally as erroneous to deny it a major role. Economists have noticed that East Asia has taken advantage of women “who contributed negligibly to gross national product (GNP) and injected them into the formal economy”¹². As it stands, women make up eighty percent of assembly line workers in China (China is the “world leader in gross value of industrial output”¹³) and seventy percent in East Asia. It was not simply enough to provide job opportunities for these women, but it was necessary to follow a basic formula:

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...women meanwhile financed the education of younger relatives, and saved enough of their pay to boost national savings rates.¹⁴

This massive stimulus towards the development of East Asia using the empowerment of women is termed the “girl effect”, and this example is exactly how Mr. Summers of the World Bank came to his conclusion regarding investment in girl’s education.

Providing economic utility to the household indicates a way to combat the missing women phenomenon. Again in China, a ten percent increase in a woman’s income “translates into 1 percentage point increase in the survival rate for girls”¹⁵. This can directly contribute towards correcting the missing women demographic. It is important to note that many of the empowerment methods, including embracing the girl effect, contribute to a positive feedback loop, in which initial empowerment provides increased prosperity to a woman who is then granted additional power through her heightened financial status. She can continue to improve herself through education or pursuit of a business and again contribute to her per capita influence.

Still, the gender disparities in China have significantly worsened since 1970—even amongst the rampant development—with the percentage of reported male births shifting upwards from 53 to 57

percent in the 1990s alone. These numbers are thought to reflect increasingly cheaper sex determination technologies for gender selection of children. Businesses advertise being able to avoid dowries through abortion of expected daughters (as seen in Mumbai, India), but the increasing financial worth of women counters this criticism based on dowry (as long as dowry is defined as a crude bribe for accepting a woman into the family). This is a tenuous claim implied by Duflo. There seems a perpetuating “persisting bias against women.”¹⁶ Political representation illustrates such ingrained bias (15.9 percent global parliamentary positions filled by women) as well as stereotypes, “shared by both men and women, associating men with career and the sciences and women with family and liberal arts”¹⁷. These stereotypes, which are farcical, hinder both empowerment of women and development of a nation because of assumed roles that sideline women to low-to-no-paying jobs devoid of the respect of breadwinner. The persevering notion that women do not make strong leaders keeps them from political representation, and their absence only maintains this stereotype. Again, I am sure it is obvious the vicious cycles that can be instituted by such practices of ignorance.

Correcting these stereotypes and providing equal access to education and jobs provide the means of empowerment necessary to create a more egalitarian village, province, region, or nation. Just as there was a negative cycle established out of misogyny the empowerment of women can provide an equally powerful positive cycle. Women who find their voices, have support, and are able to stand up against those who seek to enforce tried stereotypes grow stronger in their fight for equality. Notice, support is a requirement. It is not enough to merely use legislation and hope for the best. Active reinforcement is vital to the establishment of this positive cycle. It took the Civil Rights Movement to enforce the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, and it will take equally wide-ranging change in a society filled with devalued women. It is difficult work—and plenty devote their lives to such ventures—but the value that is attained through these ventures has spoken for itself in the progress seen recently in East Asia.

How does a nation go about empowering women, though? Just as my previous lecture emphasized an avoidance of an illusory panacea for poverty there cannot be the idea that there is one single and true method of female empowerment. Even so, there is one tool that drives others into shadow: education.

Whether through charitable donation of time and money, political support and resource allocation, and/or direct acceptance of women in school, the boon of female education is near dogma in the empowerment of women and the alleviation of poverty, and, often, the two are correlated directly. It is thought to stave off maternal mortality through reduction of children born per mother as shown by Una Osili of Indiana University and Bridget Long of Harvard University. These women studied the effects of expansive educational reform in Nigeria began in 1976, and “they concluded that each additional year of primary education leads a girl to have .26 fewer children”¹⁸. Additionally, and perhaps most obviously, the provision of education unlocks job opportunity and increases the depth of savings and potential for familial development that extends upwards through local to national routes. James Wolfensohn, a former World Bank President, as quoted by Duflo, summarizes and expands these beliefs nicely:

Education for girls has a catalytic effect on every dimension of development: lower child and maternal mortality rates; increased educational attainment by daughters and sons; higher productivity; and improved environmental management. Together, these can mean faster economic growth and, equally important, wider distribution of the fruits of growth... More education for girls will also enable more and more women to attain leadership positions at all levels of society: from health clinics in the

villages to parliaments in the capitals. This, in turn, will change the way societies will deal with problems and raise the quality of global decision making.

I very much doubt that this is surprising to anyone reading this, but an abstract idea of providing more education and actually accomplishing this feat logistically are two very different things (particularly stark with the Central Asia Institute and Greg Mortenson). How does one institute sweeping change for a nation in regards to its educational system? It's no surprise that massive political maneuvering could be imagined here, but there are a handful of examples throughout the developing world of countries that enacted such change. Duflo and coauthor Lucia Brejerova published a 2002 study supporting the Nigerian example of reducing birth rates through education. They examined Indonesia, which vastly bolstered its school attendance between 1973 and 1978, and saw the same correlation¹⁹.

Additionally, broad reforms of education are not always necessary—or even the most efficacious. Increasing school attendance through deworming initiatives had been seen to work in the American South and provides Kenya the same dramatic results. Truancy could be reduced by a quarter with such measures. This particularly affects women because girls are so strongly affected by parasitic infections during menstruation, which provides yet another relatively simple way to assist female absenteeism: the allocation of cheap sanitary pads to girls to avoid embarrassment of leaks and stains or render obsolete the societal shame of menstruation in some nations²⁰. Both of these offer cost-effective mechanisms to magnify education without relying on large-scale reforms in potentially politically unstable or unfriendly environments. Both provide means of charity, and there are groups that fight for these causes ([Half the Sky Movement](#) provides an excellent listing of various groups and charities involved with many of the topics covered throughout this lecture and in the book).

Duflo cautions her reader to avoid favoritism of women at the expense of men, though. It does a nation no help to do so as the point of educational reform is both gender equality and structural development. Scholarships that target girls in areas with high enrollment merely inflate tuition such that male admission is lowered to accommodate a budget that accepts more girls²¹. Again, this buttresses the consistent theme throughout the lectures and course: concerted effort and thought about decisions of reform, whether through empowerment or charity, are integral towards healthy development that looks to the long-term while adapting policy for the short-term. Just as I hope intelligent discussion can forward this class the same idea can be expanded to the methods used for development examined in this lecture.

I will leave this discourse with a criticism of the empowerment of women through education. Does an educated woman bring increased economic and social value compared to an equally educated man? Commonly, proponents of the belief that women will provide more socioeconomic value than men draw upon the boost in child welfare seen in mothers with higher education and earnings to answer this question. Duflo advises that this correlation is not guaranteed to be causative. The overwhelming bias against downtrodden women can muddy critical thinking, and there are often ignored considerations regarding the men who women of higher education associate themselves with.

Essentially, this criticism reinforces a repeated theme throughout my lectures: too much of one solution has been shown to fail. Supporting only women will establish inequality, and it is the inequality that develops resentment leading to prejudice and desperation. In other words, the criticism of the empowerment of women is to not lose sight of the goal: the alleviation of poverty and economic development of the population in question. There must be a price, but we should do our best to avoid marginalizing one gender for the advancement of the other.

This is an appropriate ending that obfuscates what many peg to be obvious to the point of hilarity. Yes, I do not doubt the power of education and the empowerment that it brings women, but I recognize the complexity of an issue that has plagued many societies and nations—just as poverty has, which is intimately involved with this issue—for centuries. One must think that if education is to be provided that jobs must be created along with increased enrollment rates. This is an acute problem even in the developed world of the United States; students are entering a workforce that is ill-equipped to accept them. East Asia was able to accommodate newly educated women with the assembly line jobs of a rapidly developing part of the world. Still, women continue to remain in a tumultuous relationship of inequality and great economic value. These all indicate that concerted efforts to press for development in many theaters must be maintained even in the face of flawed humans. I hope that I have instilled a new way of thinking or reinforced what was already suspected or known about these global issues.

¹Kristof, Nicholas and Wudunn, Sheryl. *Half the Sky*. Random House Digital, Inc. 2009.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵McCrummen, Stephanie. “Prevalence of Rape in E. Congo Described as Worst in World”. Washington Post. September 9, 2007.

⁶*Half the Sky*

⁷Ibid.

⁸Duflo, Esther. “Gender Equality in Development”. <http://econ-www.mit.edu/files/799>.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰*Half the Sky*

¹¹Duflo, Esther. “Gender Equality in Development”. <http://econ-www.mit.edu/files/799>.

¹²*Half the Sky*

¹³CIA World Factbook: China. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html>.

¹⁴*Half the Sky*

¹⁵Duflo, Esther. “Gender Equality in Development”. <http://econ-www.mit.edu/files/799>.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Duflo in reference to Greenwald, et al. (2002), “A Unified Theory of Implicit Attitudes, Stereotypes, Self-Esteem, and Self-Concept,” *Psychological Review* 109: 3–25.

¹⁸*Half the Sky*

¹⁹Duflo and Brejerova. “The Impact of Education on Fertility and Child Mortality: Do Fathers Really Matter Less Than Mothers” March 2002

²⁰*Half the Sky*

²¹Duflo, Esther. “Gender Equality in Development”. <http://econ-www.mit.edu/files/799>.

Resources:

Half the Sky’s fantastic amalgamation of credible and myriad opportunities to [get involved](#) can be found through the included link.

Goldman Sachs [10,000 Women](#) program found here.