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# A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE ON GENDER INEQUALITY IN THE MOVIE *NORTH COUNTRY*

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## Abstract

Gender inequality refers to the unequal treatment experienced by individuals based on their gender, typically favoring men and disadvantaging women. This research aims to examine the gender inequality experienced by female characters in the movie *North Country*, and the factors that maintain this gender inequality. The research identifies patriarchal structures and the factors of gender inequality, as performed by the characters Josey and all female characters in the movie. The researcher selected, highlighted, and screen captured scenes featuring dialogue and action, then analyzed them using the Creswell analysis model. The research employs Walby's (1990) patriarchal theory to examine the structures of patriarchy and the theory from Bourdieu (1986) to identify the factors maintaining gender inequality. The findings of this research indicate six patriarchal structures: paid employment, household production, culture, sexuality, violence, and the state. Violence is identified as the dominant structure, while paid employment and sexuality are the least. The research also finds that Economic Capital, Cultural Capital, and Social Capital are key factors in maintaining gender inequality, with Economic Capital being the most used.

*Keywords: gender, gender inequality, north country, patriarchy*

## Introduction

Nowadays, gender inequality between men and women remains an unsolved issue, continuing to be a topic of significant debate, because this phenomenon still occurs in society. Women are still often viewed as having a lower status compared to men (Okan, 2024:763). From a sociological standpoint, as Kane (1998) cited in Amin and Sabermahani (2017:9) explains, gender inequality involves the unequal distribution of wealth, power, and advantages between men and women.

Archaeologists have portrayed men in ancient societies as powerful, aggressive, dominant, and active, whereas women were seen as weak, passive, and reliant (Brumfiel and Robin, 2008:2). While some progress has been made over time, the struggle against gender inequality persists. Modern feminism arose as an organized movement in the nineteenth century in Europe, America, and Japan, addressing the substantial inequalities in the legal rights of women and men citizens (Lorber, 2010:1).

Gender inequality persists in America due to factors such as wage gaps, underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, discrimination in employment, entrenched gender norms, and lack of policy support for balancing work and family. According to Grey (2023:126), gender-based discrimination has influenced the lives of many Americans,

especially women, for centuries. Apart from that, gender inequality is often rooted in patriarchal societies, including in the U.S. (Semali and Shakespeare, 2014:48). Patriarchy is a social system in which men hold dominant power, while women occupy subordinate positions, with restricted access to power, resources and opportunities. In contemporary American society, gender inequality intersects with racial and class-based oppressions. Different forms of inequality among social groups are interconnected within a patriarchal culture (Becker, 1999:25).

Many movies that highlight the differences in treatment and opportunities between men and women, which lead to gender inequality. One of those movie is *North Country* (2005), directed by Niki Caro. The movie released on October 21, 2005, tells the story of a woman named Josey Aimes, who works in a male-dominated mine and experiences sexual harassment. She later files a class-action lawsuit against her superiors for failing to protect her and other female employees.

The researcher identified several previous studies relevant to the current research. The first research was conducted by Caroline et al. (2022), with the title <sup>1</sup> *Gender Discrimination Toward Josey Aimes as the Main Character in North Country Film*". Caroline et al. (2022), analyzed the kinds of gender discrimination toward Josey Aimes, and <sup>1</sup> Josey's responses against gender discrimination as depicted in the film *North Country*. The second previous study, researched by Wulandari et al. (2022), under the title <sup>5</sup> *The Portrayal of Women Empowerment Through the Main Character in North Country Movie*". Wulandari et al. (2022), analyzed <sup>5</sup> the kinds of women empowerment dimension portrayed in the movie through Josey as the main female character.

The latest research was conducted by Salman et al. (2023), entitled <sup>7</sup> *Language, Society and Gender: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Linguistic Variation in the Language of Men and Women in the Movie North Country*". Salman et al. (2023), investigated the language that female used, which is show that females are marginalized, powerless, and weak in society, by analysis their language.

This research differs from previous studies in both focus and the theoretical framework. While the previous studies mainly discussed the gender discrimination experienced by the female characters. Unlike earlier studies, this research applies patriarchal theory from Walby (1990) to identify structures of patriarchy contribute to gender inequality. By combining Bourdieu (1986) theory to examines the factors maintain gender inequality in the movie. Seeing the serious impact on gender inequality in society. This research specifically aims to provide a more comprehensive analysis of why the female characters in the movie *North*

*Country* (2005) are unable to fight gender inequality and what factors maintain these inequalities.

## **Literature Review**

Feminism represents the beliefs and ideas that drive the social and political movement for greater equality for women (Ariz, 1994:413). In just one generation, feminism emerged on the western politics, advocating for education, property rights, suffrage, and much more (Freedman, 2003:45-46). Walby (2011:1), argues that feminism is still alive; this is not a postfeminist era. Although significant progress has been made, and feminism has seen many successes, gender inequality still exists from ancient times to the present.

The term “gender inequality” or “discrimination” is commonly linked to women, as they are often viewed as the most inferior and weaker section of our society (Shastri, 2014:27). Apart from that, patriarchy contributes to the rise of gender inequality. In America, patriarchy has been shaped by European social structures that give superiority to men in the family and societal roles. According to Ruggles (2017:1), before the nineteenth century, most American families were ruled by a patriarchal system.

The concept of from Walby’s (1990) patriarchal theory is very important for understanding and addressing gender inequality both in terms of class and ethnicity. According to (Walby, 1990:2) understanding the theories of patriarchy, helps explain the subordination of women by examining how male dominance, particularly in the workforce, allows men to hold more power in paid employment and positions them as heads of households. This dominance can lead to violence or oppression. Walby (1990:1) also identifies six main structures that from the patriarchal theories: <sup>13</sup> Paid Employment, Household Production, Culture, Sexuality, Violence, and The State.

### **a. Paid Employment**

Walby (1990:29) states, men dominate wage work because they are perceived to have more energy and focus for their jobs. Women are paid less than men due to having fewer skills, experience, and fewer qualifications. This theory argues that women’s caregiving duties, prevents them from gaining qualifications and work experience as men.

### **b. Household Production**

Men are tasked with orienting themselves to the outside world, while women are responsible for fulfilling the internal needs of the family. The family is viewed as central to women’s lives and pivotal in shaping gender inequality (Walby, 1990:61). Women are burdened with duties, limiting their time for public sector involvement due to childcare and managing household chores.

### c. Culture

Patriarchal structure in cultural institutions reflect the societal ideas of masculinity and femininity, passed down through generations. Patriarchal culture influences various aspects of life, including philosophy, education, religion, and traditional norms, portraying women as subordinate and men as dominant. The concept of masculinity and femininity shape social relations, reinforcing patriarchal structures (Walby, 1990:90).

### d. Sexuality

In patriarchal sexual structures, men are typically more dominant than women. Walby (1990:110) argues that heterosexuality is part of the patriarchal structure. Men viewed women who were sexually active as immoral and those who were not were considered dull. Men who had many sexual conquests were admired, while women were judged negatively.

### e. Violence

Walby (1990:128), views violence against women as a form of male dominance over women. Violence is categorized into two structures, namely, psychological violence and sexual violence.

#### 1. Psychological Violence

Psychological violence includes using verbal and non-verbal communication to inflict mental harm or control women. This can involve harsh language, insults, yelling, threats, constantly watching or following, property damage, belittling to intimidate, and harassment to create fear.

#### 2. Sexual Violence

Sexual violence refers to forcing in sexual activities without the victim's consent. Sexual violence can include actions like kissing, touching, groping, stalking, relationship rape, rape by strangers, and other unwanted sexual behaviors.

### e. State

Walby (1990:151), argues that the relationship between the state and gender theory lies in women's limited access to paid employment. Women are rarely part of the formal political elite. In government leadership, men significantly outnumber women, because women are deemed unfit to lead a government and subordinate to men.

In *North Country* movie, the female characters do not resist the gender discrimination they face, leading to the persistence of inequality in the mining industry. In this regard, the researcher applies Bourdieu's (1986) theory, particularly focusing on the concept of Capital, to analyze the factors that maintain gender inequality in Minnesota. Capital refers to the resources individuals or groups use to achieve their goals and establish their social position.

According to Bourdieu<sup>8</sup> in *The Forms of Capital*, there are three forms of Capital: Economic Capital, Cultural Capital, and Social Capital. The dominant individuals, hold certain forms of Capital that help explain their superior position in American society.

### **a. Economic Capital**

Economic Capital refers to wealth that the individual has, which determines their social position. According to Bourdieu (1986:241), Economic Capital can easily be transformed into money and formalized as property rights. Economic assets increases an individual's capacity, mobility, and influence within society.

### **b. Cultural Capital**

Cultural Capital is an individual's abilities, such as intelligence, skills, knowledge, and social behaviors, which influence social status. Bourdieu (1986:244), notes that Cultural Capital is connected to the body and requires embodiment.

### **c. Social Capital**

Social Capital refers to the resources available through a stable network of relationships, where members support and recognize each other. Alternatively, it involves belonging to a group that provides access to shared resources and recognition in various aspects (Bourdieu, 1986 :248-249). For Bourdieu, Social Capital is an asset for those in a privileged positions, helping them maintain their superiority.

## **Methodology**

To complete this research using a qualitative descriptive method, several steps are undertaken to collect data. First, understanding the movie *North Country* by watching it repeatedly. The second is the researcher selected, highlighted, and screen captured all scenes in the movie that contain dialogue and action related to patriarchal structures and factors that maintain gender inequality in the movie. The theory by Walby (1990) was used to identify the patriarchal structures contribute to gender inequality, while the theory from Bourdieu (1986) was used to analyze the factors that maintain these inequalities. Then, the researcher employed Creswell's (2023) model as the technique of data analysis.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **A. Patriarchal structures contribution to gender inequality**

#### **a. Paid Employment**

**S1D8: 00:17:07-00:17:15**

Pavic:<sup>4</sup> **You'll be hauling, lifting, driving and all sorts of other things a woman shouldn't be doing, if you ask me, but supreme court didn't ask me, did they?"**

Pavic informed the female employees about the tough nature of mining work, stating that it was not suitable for women and should be done by men. However, the supreme court did not listen and instead allowed every woman to work in the mines.

This scene reflects **Paid Employment**, because men are more dominant as paid employees than women. The phrase “**a woman shouldn’t be doing**” means that women are seen as having less energy and time for their work, being expected to prioritize family duties. Women who choose to work in mining often do so for higher wages, but during recessions, they tend to leave their jobs to return to family care. This makes it harder for women to gain acceptance in the mining industry.

### b. Household Production

#### S2D21: 01:05:33

1 Sammy: “**Just most people’s mother cook and clean, they don’t work at the mine**”.

Sammy often heard from his grandfather and his mother’s friends that mining was a job meant for men. Sammy asked his mother, Josey, to quit because he believed the mine was not a suitable place for a woman. Sammy hoped Josey would be a typical housewife, whose only job is to cook, wash, look after the children and take care of the house.

From Sammy’s perspective, this scene is a **Household Production** structure. Sammy does not allow his mother to work in the mines, implying that women should not engage in work outside the home. 16 in a patriarchal society, women are seen as the center of the family, expected to handle household duties, while men dominate. Sammy said that “**just most people’s mother cook and clean**”, this statement highlights the patriarchal expectations placed on women.

### c. Culture

#### S3D7: 00:16:21-00:16:46

3 Glory: “Okay, now, what are ya? a cowboy or a cowgirl?”

Josey: “I’am a cowgirl.”

15 Glory: “No, not up there, you’re not. **Gotta get your cowboy on.** You know they don’t want us up there, right?”

Glory asked Josey, what her role was at the mine. Josey responded by saying she was a cowgirl since she’s a girl. However, Glory rejected this and asked her to become a Cowboy while working in the mines. To fit in, both Josey and Glory have to present themselves as a men. The point of being a man is that Josey cannot complaints and must be prepared to tough and demanding tasks.

Based on Walby’s theory, this is **Culture** structure. This is evident from Josey and Glory’s experiences, which reflect societal labels of masculinity and femininity. Men who are

labeled masculine tend to be more accepted in mining, while women, viewed as feminine, are overlooked. In a patriarchal culture, masculinity has the right to dominate. The phrase **“Gotta get your cowboy on”** implies that women in mining must adopt masculine behaviors to fit in.

#### **d. Sexuality**

**S4D2: 00:06:48**

Colline: <sup>3</sup> is that because **you’ve had so many sexual partners?**”

Colline asked Josey about Sammy’s father to find her weak spot. When Josey said she didn’t know, Colline insulted her, by saying that Josey had many sexual partners. In truth, Josey didn’t want to reveal that Sammy’s father was her rapist, a teacher, because she doesn’t want to reopen the old wound.

This relates to the patriarchal structure of **Sexuality**, because the scene describes how sexual norms and stigma are used to discredit women. The attorney’s questions aimed to humiliate Josey by focusing on her sexual history. Colline points out that women with multiple sexual partners are viewed as immoral or worthless. The phrase **“You’ve had so many sexual partners”** reflects the double standard, as Colline’s accusations highlight that women are punished for actions often accepted in men.

#### **e. Violence**

##### **1. Psychological Violence**

**S5D28: 01:32:43**

Earl: “Hey Josey, **show us your tits!**”

Josey stood before the male workers at the miner’s gathering, preparing to speak out about the mistreatment she endured while working at the mine. Josey needs several witnesses and other victims to testify, in order to win her class action lawsuit. However, instead of backing Josey, her co-workers mocked her with humiliating comments.

Earl’s statement can be categorized under the structure of **Psychological Violence**, as he uses verbal abuse to reinforce male dominance and gender inequality at work. Earl’s statement, **“show us your tits!”** was a form of verbal violence with the aim of humiliating and controlling Josey, highlighting men’s power over women in mining. Earl’s statements also serve to discriminate, control and oppress women through threats and sexual harassment.



## 2. Sexual Violence

S5D12: 00:29:49



Figure 4.3 Scene 00:29:49

6 Josey: “What’s this gotta do with Earl, **laying hands on Sherry like that?**”

Josey reported to Pavic that Earl had been fondling Sherry’s breasts, but Pavic dismissed Josey’s complaints and even blamed Josey for choosing to work in mining. Pavic suggested that mining jobs are better suited for men, who hold more power in mining industry. Women, in contrast, lack legal protection against sexual harassment and degrading behavior.

Josey is pursuing justice against Peterson for Earl’s actions, which are part of **Sexual Violence**. Josey’s statement highlights gender injustice, as Sherry experienced sexual harassment in a place where she should have felt safe. The term “**laying hands on Sherry**” describes sexual harassment in mining, which is one form of gender-based violence that is often ignored. Earl’s behavior had a negative impact on Sherry and the overall mining environment.

### A. Factors maintain gender inequality

#### a. Economic Capital

F1D17: 00:58:38-00:58:46

9 Peg: “Hey, you could quit tomorrow, Go sell your face cream, **I need my job**”.

Sherry: “**I need this job just as much as you**”

Josey insisted on asking all her friends to report gender discrimination in mining to the authorities, Josey needs their support as witnesses. However, Peg refused to help, because Peg didn’t want to put up any resistance that would threaten her job. Peg suggested Sherry join Josey, but Sherry declined, as she also needed to keep her job.

Peg’s statement can be categorized in Bourdieu’s theory of **Economic Capital**, highlighting dependence on economic resources. Peg suggests that Sherry could stop working at the mine and sell face cream, Peg assumes that Sherry has other sources of income and

could support Josey's lawsuit against the mine owner. However, Sherry insists that **she needs her mining job** just as much as Peg does, demonstrating her reliance on that income for survival. Both Peg and Sherry are hesitant to fight against gender injustice due to fear of losing their jobs.

## **b. Social Capital**

**F2D19: 01:02:17**

Peterson: <sup>6</sup> **I asked some of my colleagues to sit in, if you don't mind".**

Josey scheduled a meeting with Peterson, but when she arrived, she found him with several colleagues who were not supportive. Instead of helping to solve Josey's problem, they advised her to resign to stop her complaints and provoking all her female colleagues.

This situation illustrates the role of **Social Capital** in maintaining gender inequality, as it involves **a network** of men who hold more power and share similar views about female workers. Peterson benefits from this Social Capital, which reinforces his dominant position in workplace. The support that Peterson received from his colleagues made him firmly reject Josey's complaints about gender inequality in mining.

## **Discussions**

The movie *North Country* depicts gender inequality in family and work environment. According to Wani and Dastidar (2018:385) gender inequality remains widespread globally, in terms of disparities wages, poverty, job participation, and household duties. Walby's patriarchal theory explains these inequalities through six structures: <sup>17</sup> **Employment, Household Production, Culture, Sexuality, Violence, and The State.** This research also identifies Economic, Social, and Cultural factors that maintain these inequalities, though some structures and factors may not appear in the movie.

The research indicates that violence is the most dominant structure of gender discrimination in the movie. This violence includes psychological and sexual harm, used by male employees to control female workers. The next is, Household Production and Culture. The movie depicts women as responsible for household duties, as shown by Alice and Sammy's expectations of Josey and the focus on childcare. Furthermore, cultural structure, such as those from Glory and Pavic, push Josey to adopt more masculine behaviors, while Peterson views mining as a male-only domain.

The research found limited data of Sexuality and Paid Employment in *North Country* movie, highlighting that non-heterosexual topics are still taboo in Minnesota. Josey's sexual history is exploited by Colline's attorneys to intimidate her in her lawsuit against Peterson. Additionally, Paid employment Shows minimal data, because between 1890 and 1980,

women's U.S. labor force participation grew from 19.6% to 59.9%, and their earnings relative to men's increased (Engerman and Gallman, 2013). In the movie, Josey and her female colleagues secure mining jobs in the 1980s but still face discrimination, hostile environments, and gender stereotypes.

The researcher focused on five of Walby's six patriarchal structures, as no data was found for the State structure, which involves how government policies uphold gender inequality. In *North Country* movie, state policy allows women to enter the workforce and supports Josey Aimes in her sexual harassment lawsuit, reflecting progress in laws and policies for women's rights.

The analysis identifies Economic, Social, and Cultural Capital as factors maintaining gender inequality in mining, with Economic Capital being the most dominant. Economic Capital refers to the material and financial resources that individuals possess (Bourdieu, 1986:243). Men's superior access to economic resources reinforces their social position. In the movie, Josey and her co-workers conform to the stereotype that women should not work in mining to avoid jeopardizing their income. Social Capital, which is the second factor, involves trust and shared values from social networks (Bourdieu, 1986:249). As seen when Peterson and his colleagues pressure Josey to resign for continuing her complaints about discrimination.

This research, based on Bourdieu's Capital theories, focuses on Economic and Social Capital, as no data on Cultural Capital was found. Cultural Capital refers to educational attainment (Pinxten and Lievens, 2014:1098). However, *North Country* movie emphasizes Josey Aimes's struggle against workplace sexual harassment and gender discrimination. The movie centers on violence, inequality, and exploitation, rather than education, highlighting the legal battle and the solidarity among Josey and her co-workers.

The researcher examined the results in relation to previous research discussed in Introduction. Caroline et al. (2022) analyzes gender discrimination using Sheila McLean's theory (1988) and examines Josey's responses to discrimination in *North Country* through Feagin and Sikes's theory. Caroline et al. (2022) identifies five types of gender discrimination: subordination, marginalization, stereotypes, violence, and double burden. The study also outlines four responses to gender discrimination: withdrawal, resigned acceptance, verbal confrontation, and physical confrontation.

This research aligns with previous studies on *North Country* movie by examining gender discrimination faced by Josey Aimes in a male-dominated society. While earlier studies used McLean's theory and Feagin and Sikes, this research employs Walby's

patriarchal theory and focuses on all female characters. Caroline et al. (2002) identified four types of gender discrimination such as subordination, marginalization, stereotypes, and violence that prompted Josey to respond in various ways. A key difference is that previous studies featured women capable of resisting inequality, whereas this research shows characters unable to fight back due to male dominance and Economic Capital power.

Wulandari, Surya, and Asanti (2022) studied women's empowerment in *North Country* movie through Josey, emphasizing personal, relational, and collective dimensions that enhance women's power. While both studies portray Josey as facing gender discrimination, Wulandari et al. (2022) used Jo Rowland's theory to focus on empowerment and the quest for equal treatment. In contrast, this research examines patriarchal structures and factors that maintain gender inequality.

Salman et al. (2023) analyzed linguistic variations in movie *North Country*, revealing gender-biased power dynamics through male and female use of tag questions, hedging, and intensifiers. Their study focused on the marginalization and powerlessness of characters like Josey, Glory, and Alice. In contrast, this research explores how patriarchal structures and Bourdieu's theory maintain gender inequality through scenes of discrimination in the movie.

Previous studies by Caroline et al. (2022), Wulandari et al. (2022), and Salman et al. (2023) show that gender discrimination still leads to gender inequality for women, placing them in subordinate roles. While these studies highlight the struggle for equality, the factors maintaining men's power, as explained by Bourdieu (1986), remain insufficiently addressed, underscoring the need to understand these factors to achieve gender equality.

### **Conclusion and Suggestion**

The analysis of *North Country* movie reveals that gender discrimination against female characters highlights the dominance of Economic Capital, illustrating men's superior access to paid employment and income, which reinforces gender inequality. Stereotypes and cultural norms within the male-dominated mining environment further contribute to this inequality, leading to perceptions that Josey and her colleagues are inappropriate for such roles. Additionally, they often face sexual harassment from male workers. Despite progress in gender equality today, the film serves as a reminder that significant issues remain, underscoring the ongoing work needed to achieve true gender equality.

Several suggestions for further research include a more detailed analysis of the state's role, education, and individual abilities in understanding gender inequality and achieving equal rights with men. Future studies could also conduct comparative analyses with other characters or movies featuring similar gender inequality structures, incorporating

Bourdieu's power relations to explore how discriminated characters gain power. Lastly, developing new theories or applying relevant theories to analyze patriarchal structures and resistance in films could significantly enhance future research. These efforts aim to provide a deeper understanding of gender inequality and its sustaining factors.

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