

HANDOUT: The Parts, People, and Interactions of the Patriarchal System in Edwardian England



A system is a set of interconnected things or parts that interact with one another in some way. Systems have many components. For example, the parts of a bus transport system would include the buses, the tickets to get on the buses, the timetable, the roads, and so on. We can think about social systems in the same way. Social systems are invisible structures that are linked to certain values or purposes, that possess certain characteristics, and that often organise people into different groups. This sheet outlines some of the parts, people and interactions of the patriarchal social system in Edwardian England. In this system, men held the power in society, and women, who were expected to be subservient, were treated as second-class citizens.

Parts

Voting laws
Property laws
Parenting laws
Etiquette handouts
Etiquette rules
Dress codes
Gender distinctions
Gender stereotypes
Gender-coded toys
Literature/books
Scientific beliefs
Religious laws
Access to education
Job opportunities
Finances
Social communities
Class

People

Government officials
Lawmakers
Leaders
Religious leaders
Children
Masculine/feminine men
Masculine/feminine women
Trans/non-binary individuals
Female workers
Housewives
Sex workers
Husbands
Maids
Servants
Uneducated women/men
Industrial workers
Educated women/men

How do the people in the system interact with each other and with the parts of the system?

- Government officials can vote on laws that dictate the gender dynamics (e.g. in Edwardian society, women could not vote);
- Educated women who do not have to work may protest against the voting laws;
- Etiquette handouts outline how women should behave, applying social pressure;
- Children are given gender-coded toys and books, which shape their view of gender;
- Parenting laws give husbands power on how children are raised;
- Uneducated women might enter the world of sex work to earn money;
- Women are not allowed to be religious leaders;
- Masculine women, feminine men, and trans and non-binary individuals might rebel against dress codes or be excluded from social communities.

How does a change in one element of the system affect the various parts and people connected to the system?

- Change in voting laws giving women the votes would allow them to outline better protections for female workers;
- Change in property laws could make women financially independent;
- Decline in the popularity of religion may help women divorce their husbands;
- Better access to education could allow women to secure better jobs.