

“Visions of inequality” by Branko Milanovic

Comments by Eva Fodor



Happy international women's day!

Gender inequality is missing from these visions of inequality

Two assumptions

- Classes are disembodied slots
- Households rather than individuals are the unit of analysis. Only households.

“**Inequality is created and reproduced at the level of the household, not at the level of individual wage earner.** It is total household income, adjusted for the number of individuals, that makes families rich, poor, or middle class, and causes them to embrace **corresponding social values**. The socialization is done within households, not within individual wage earners....It is through the processes of mating, household formation and through combining of multiple sources of income that rich and poor households, and social classes, are created -- and that, most importantly, **opportunities are differentiated** at birth, allowing for the reproduction of social inequalities.”
(p. 277)

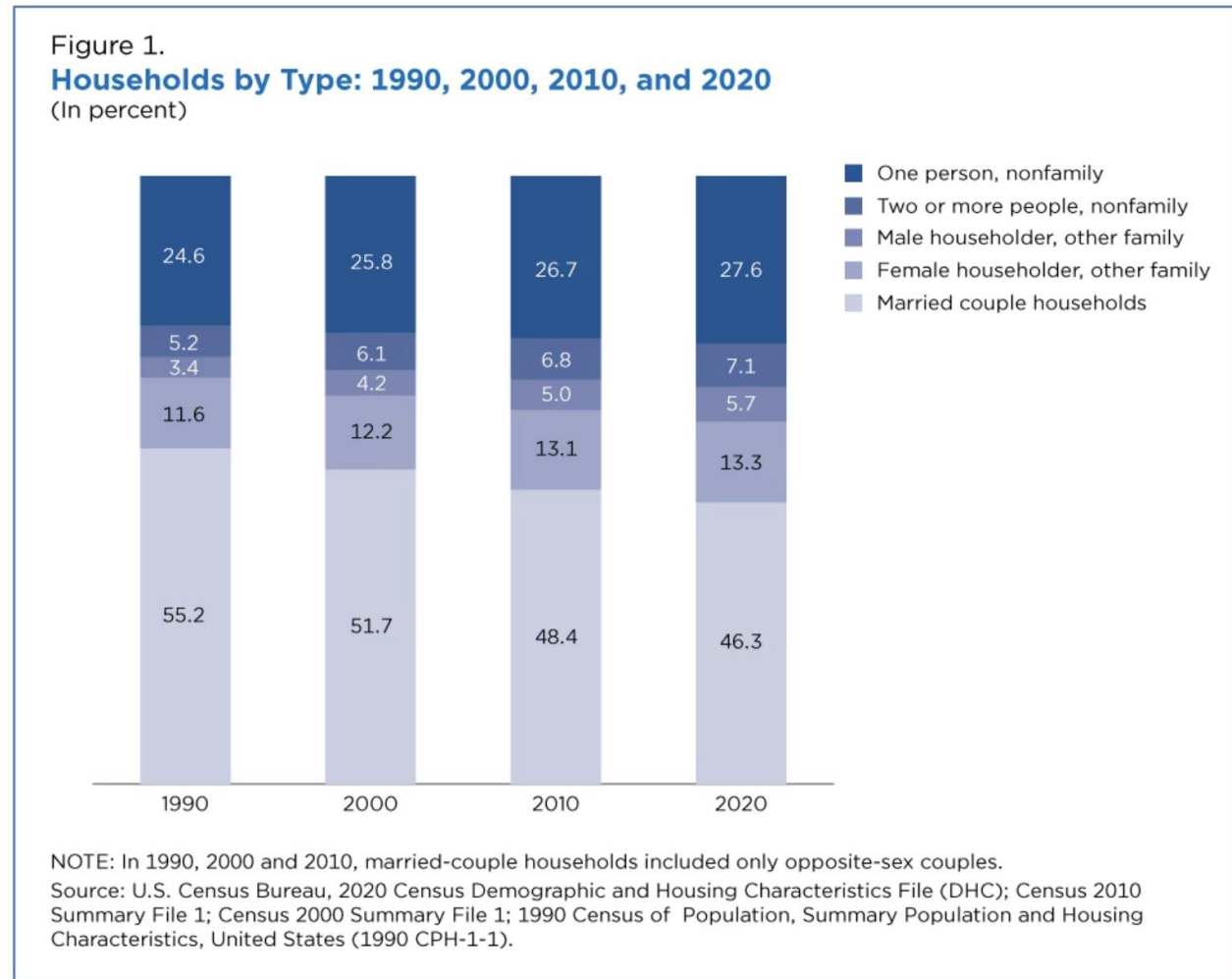
If we eliminate these assumptions, we get a more precise vision of the shape of social inequalities and can include gender differences in the story.

Why are these assumptions leading us astray?

1. Increasing number of single person households
2. Who fills slots matters: women's and men's life chances may be utterly different in same class household
3. The value women produce crosses households- so the concept of "household" becomes problematic

1. Half of all households consist of a single adult in many developed countries.

If women-only households tend to cluster at the bottom of the class distribution, we need to explain that.



2. Do they really belong to the same class? What does “class” mean then?

Wanted to but had no opportunity to study beyond secondary education

Spouse introduced through family

Had no income of her own, got pocket money and household expenses

Had little impact on major family decisions

Adjusted to husband’s daily work routine

Little chance of remarriage or self sufficiency after divorce. Worked as an assistant nurse.



My grandparents, 1924 in the “process of mating, household formation.”

Older than spouse, highly educated

Worked as a doctor with private practice- good but somewhat fluctuating income

Made all major decisions re money, controlled household income

The family’s social life consisted of his friends and colleagues, had free time away from household

Expected hot meal on the table whenever his last patient left

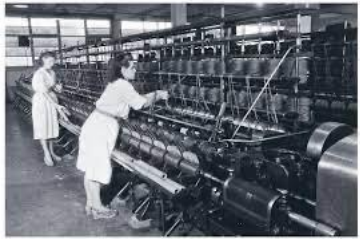
After divorce, remarried within 3 years, continued decent middle class life

3. The value of women's work may materialize in the class status of other households

- Women do an enormous amount of unpaid care work- raise children, look after the elderly, organize local community, etc.
- This work often materializes as income in households other than their own.
- So we need to complicate the assumption of independent households, which questions the usefulness of the concept of household itself.

Two suggestions to include gender inequality in our description of class structure

- Add "multidimensionality" to three promising new trends in inequality research. Class status is a function of multiple forces. Household experience matters, individual experience does too.
- Use new tools to get data on "opportunities" rather than simply deduce from wages



Thank you!

